

# Mission Expectations

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all. We are continuing in our series in the book of Mark. Last week, we saw Jesus in his ministry on earth, experiencing rejection from his hometown as he sought to live out God's calling on him.

And we reflected on how God's calling to the church, to us as God's people, to make known the good news of the kingdom of God coming through Jesus might also include, for us, opposition and rejection.

What I want to talk about this morning is what ought we to expect as we live out this mission of the church. In order to get to where my real concern is this morning, let me tell you a little bit of my own story.

I was a new Christian back in the 1980s, and I was brought into a movement that would be called Evangelical Christianity back then.

It doesn't necessarily mean the same thing today, but let me tell you what it meant for me back then and what I think it still means for lots of people with lots of caveats about politics and culture war.

[ 1 : 15 ] Here's what it meant to me. It meant that the Bible was God's word. It meant that the centrality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and particularly his death on the cross for our salvation, was the centerpiece of the Christian message.

And that people had to respond personally and individually to that message with faith in order for them to gain salvation. And that because of Jesus' love, we are called to love the world and to engage in it by sharing this message and by caring for the world as we may.

And that's what it meant to me. The church that I was brought into had held those values. And this was in contrast to some other movements. If you study in 20th century Protestant history, you'll see that there was in the early 20th century a movement called modernism that thought that the Bible and the cross were antiquated and a rational religion that needed to be reinterpreted, that rationalism had brought us out of an adherence to these things, and that Jesus' mission was to do good to others as well as we knew as human beings.

In response to the modernist movement, there was a movement, again, within Protestant Christianity called fundamentalism. We know this word much more broadly today as it's used for religious movements.

But in the early 20th century, it was those who believed in the fundamentals of historic Christianity. And they responded to modernism by retreating into their own church, defending truths of things like the Bible is the word of God and the cross is central.

[ 3 : 09 ] They said things like the virgin birth and the deity of Christ and the resurrection are really important, and we need to hold to those things as Christians. But they also separated from the world in a desire to escape from the confusion of modernism.

They wanted to protect church doctrine and purity while critiquing the culture without much meaningful engagement. And from the context of this fundamentalist, modernist divide, evangelicalism, technically it's neo-evangelicalism.

If you're a historian, evangelicalism is an older movement. But neo-evangelicalism and American Protestantism emerged after the World War II as a movement of people who believed the things that I was brought into and held to the things that I was brought into.

And here's the thing, right? As this project has gone on, how do we hold to these truths and yet engage in the world in loving, compassionate way?

I have a concern that has been growing in my heart for the last, well, 20 years probably. But today we're going to talk about it.

[ 4 : 32 ] And here's the concern. Let me try to say this as clearly as possible because this is what's going to shape what we look at this morning. In our desire to love our neighbor and our world in order to share Christ with them and to engage the world with compassion and care, we have bought into an implicit promise that if we love well enough, if we explain the gospel clearly enough and winsomely enough, if we care with enough compassion, then the world we live in will accept us and embrace us and value us as a good part of community and the world that we live in.

That's the promise that I think has crept into this movement of Christianity that we belong to. And is this promise true?

I believe that our passage in Mark 6 will illuminate this. I believe that Mark is going to help us think through this a little bit. So if you want to turn to Mark 6, we're starting in verse 14.

It's on page 790 in your pew Bibles. And as we turn there, we're going to look at... Oh, a very interesting passage.

So let me go ahead and read it for us, and then we'll pray, and then we will jump in. Mark 6, verse 14.

[ 6 : 06 ] King Herod heard of it, and it means the growing popularity and effect of Jesus and his disciples in their ministry in Galilee. King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known, and some said, John the Baptist has been raised from the dead.

That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him. But others said, He is Elijah. And others said, He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old. But when Herod heard of it, he said, John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.

For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother's Philip's wife, because he had married her.

For John had been saying to Herod, it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death, but she could not.

For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe.

When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

[ 7 : 13 ] But an opportunity came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests.

And the king said to the girl, Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you. And he vowed to her, Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom. And she went out and said to her mother, For what should I ask?

And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head.

He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on the platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

[ 8 : 27 ] Let's pray. Lord, help us this morning to know, Lord, the value of your word. Lord, for we look at this passage, and it is a strange one, and we need your help to understand what it is that you are saying to us through it, and Lord, how it might, Lord, shape us, Lord, your people this morning.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're going to look at this in two steps. First, we're going to look at what this particular passage tells us, and then we're going to pan out a little bit and look and talk a little bit more broadly about what the New Testament tells us about how we live out our mission.

So let's look at this passage together. First of all, this passage tells us about following Jesus, and you might be thinking, why does it tell us that? Well, because Mark has given us one of his sandwiches.

We've talked about this before. Mark likes to make narrative sandwiches where he starts a story and then he tells another story in the middle and then he brings it around back to the story at the end. And the story here is the sending out of the apostles.

That's what happens in verses 7 through 13. Jesus sends out his apostles. And then if you look at the very end, in verse 30, the apostles come back to Jesus.

[9:47] So this is the meat of the sandwich about the apostles following Jesus on his mission to make good news, make the good news of the coming of the kingdom to the world.

Right? And the message is sobering when you look at what this meat says. Because I think the point of this story, what Mark wants us to know, is that faithful participation in Jesus' mission means suffering and even death because we live in a world that is opposed to Jesus and his kingdom. And it teaches us that through the example of John the Baptist. Right? So this story begins in verse 14 with Jesus becoming known to Herod and people speculating.

Now, before we go on about that speculation, we have to make sure we know who is Herod because there are three Herods in the Bible. Right? There are actually a lot more Herods in the first century. There are three Herods in the Bible.

There's Herod the Great or King Herod who was the Herod of Jesus' birth period. So in Matthew 1. Right? There is Herod Antipas or Herod the Tetrarch who is Herod during Jesus' life and death.

[11:03] And this is the Herod that we're dealing with today. There is then Herod Agrippa who shows up in the book of Acts starting in Acts 12 and going on from there.

So those are the three Herods in the Bible and we just want to know this is the middle one. Okay? And this he was the king over the Jewish ruler over the region of Galilee where Jesus was doing ministry and as Jesus' ministry was gaining popularity he heard of him and people were speculating what is this?

Maybe it's the return of Elijah who was taken up into heaven. Maybe it's another one of the prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel or maybe it's John the Baptist come back from the dead or maybe that doesn't really mean that they thought he was resurrected but just it's the second coming of John the Baptist it's the next one in a line of people who are going to cause me trouble and this occasions in Herod's mind what happened with John the Baptist and this is the story that is the centerpiece of it today right?

Because Herod remembered what happened to John right? So starting in verse 17 Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist why?

Because John the Baptist walked into the best Jerry Springer movement in the New Testament okay? This is a crazy story we're going to put a slide up here I think you might be able to see it Herod Antipas had stolen his half brother's wife who happened to also be his niece to be his wife okay?

[12:45] Herod the Great had 10 wives lots of children this shows only some of them Philip is one of them Herod Antipas is another one Aristobulus is a third one Aristobulus had a daughter named Herodias Herodias is the centerpiece of this because John the Baptist came and said to Herod Antipas you can't have her because she's your brother's wife Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 20 says that is not lawful and Herod Antipas in fear of John's righteous claim against him imprisoned John the Baptist and in fear of his wife too it seemed that he was he felt stuck and he's like oh I want to do something but interestingly when you notice it right Herod was conflicted because he put him in jail but he didn't kill him even though his wife wanted him to kill him he said there's something about this guy well one he seems to be a righteous and holy man and it might be bad business to kill him but also there was something about him verse 20 says he was greatly perplexed and he gladly listened to him there was something about John the Baptist's life that Herod found intriguing even as he feared and hated the message that he was hearing and so

John the Baptist is in prison being protected by the man who put him in prison from the man's wife who wanted him killed okay this is a great this is a great soap opera right and so then the second scene is and then the opportunity came right it is almost unbelievable in its ugliness at a state birthday party with all the people gathered Herodias' daughter who we know from other places is named Salome she dances for the assembled people they please or she pleases the king so much that the king makes this rash promise I'll give you anything you want now look it's not clear what kind of dance this woman danced there's no need for us to assume that it was particularly erotic or sexual she might have been a really young girl she might have been just a 12 year old so we don't need to over imagine but whatever the pleasing was it arouses response from the king of I'll give you anything and the girl goes to her mother and says what should I ask for and Herodias the vengeful self-justifying woman who wanted so much to clear her name and to get rid of this gadfly who kept messing with her life said I want his head on a platter and Herod shows his moral

fiber by agreeing he's like I'm really sorry I kind of didn't want to do this but I don't want to break my promise in front of my guests and my wife really wants me to do this okay we'll just kill herod was not a particularly admirable man he listened to the voices of those around him and sought to please them and Herodias' fear Herodias' fear of shame and exposure and her rejection of the truth that John the Baptist spoke resulted in his death why did

Mark put this story in here it's a reminiscence there's no historical this isn't even a historical narrative this is why did he put it in here he put it in here so that we as readers as we're watching the apostles go out as we're thinking about what it means to follow Jesus can reflect on the life of John the Baptist and to recognize that faithful witness in serving Jesus may result in suffering and death because the world is opposed to Jesus and his kingdom look friends we need to recognize that this is true today as well a follower of Jesus is often perplexing in our world I remember when I was coming to faith I had two friends I've told you about them before I'm going to keep telling you about them because God used them in my life Bill and Becky and I made fun of them right because I rejected the message that they were talking about and I felt judged by their lives because they were pursuing righteousness in a way that I didn't want to and yet

I was drawn to them by their love by the light that was in their life that I saw and that I wanted so there's this dynamic today of this perplexity and yet also this opposition this opposition that happens in lots of different times when I studied Christian history or when I studied for my senior thesis at Princeton I did I looked at early 20th century history of Princeton and there used to be a statue on the Princeton campus called the Christian man and it was a you know strapping young man with a Bible in one hand and a football in the other and it was the vision of the complete scholar athlete moral man but you know what happened in the early 1920s a bunch of drunken students on one Friday night they dragged the statue off of its pedestal in rejection of all of the ideals that it stood for so in case you think it's bad on campus today it's always been bad on campuses it's been true throughout history

[18:50] I've studied the history of Hudson Taylor in 1868 they had moved into the inland to do missionary work among the Chinese people they set up a hospital to welcome abandoned children so they could be cared for and yet the people rose up against them accusations of and this is a quote they scooped out the eyes of the dying and opened foundling hospitals in order that they might eat the children a mob was formed the mission compound was burned the missionaries barely escaped with their lives and it's not just something that happened in history in 1999 you know this story probably the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons were killed by a militant

Hindu mob who set the van that the family was sleeping in on fire I saw this account I found this account online the question was asked why would anyone want to kill a missionary who dedicated his life to rehabilitating lepers and eradicating such diseases as polio and tuberculosis we are mystified said a senior police officer Staines was a much loved and respected person his wife Gladys who is now left with no other members of her family except her 13 year old daughter Esther said Staines did not have one enemy in the world and that's what makes this mind numbing deed all the more surprising a local Hindu activist is not surprised he says Staines was murdered because he was engaged in converting the substantial tribal people in Orissa people could have killed him in a fit of rage he reckons friends this is what

Mark wants us to hear the opposition of the world to Jesus and his kingdom is real and at times it is bad and look we don't need to live in a black and white world where all we do is identify the enemies and throw our verbal grenades at them but we need to recognize that as we fulfill this mission of going out into the world to love and share with Jesus there will always be this dynamic spiritually and at times it will show itself in violent and irrational and terrible ways and we need to not believe the lie that if we're just winsome enough or just caring enough or just compassionate enough that we will be accepted so how do we go about this mission what are some of the principles that we need to have as we live this out

I asked Kate to throw together a slide last minute it's going to be up on the board because we're going to run through a bunch of scriptures five things that the Bible tells us about how we carry ourselves as we enter into this mission in a world that's going to be at times in opposition to us so here we go first of all don't be surprised the scripture tells us over and over and over again that we should expect this kind of opposition so John 15 18 if the world hates you this is Jesus speaking to his disciples if the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you if you were of the

world the world would love you as its own but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you remember the word that I said to you a neighbor is not a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will persecute you also so Jesus reminded us of this the early church knew this

Paul and Silas were traveling through the churches strengthening the souls of the disciples in Acts 14:22 encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God the apostle Paul in Philippians 1 reminds us that it has been granted to us the church that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but to suffer for his sake and the apostle Peter as he suffered himself and ministering to a suffering church at Rome said beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though it were something strange happening to you but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed now look friends let us not be hated or resisted for being stupid or for being hateful or for being disrespectful okay the aroma of Christ does not condemn others with megaphones on street corners and it does not advocate for righteousness with epithets rage and violence but as we live out our calling let us not be surprised when we live rightly for God and are not accepted by our neighbors for this is the consistent so first do not be surprised secondly as we engage in this oppositional context we are called to love our enemies don't give in to hatred don't make relationships a power dynamic don't allow vengeance to eat your heart as we go in not being surprised we might respond by falling into this desire to hate back and a desire to punish those who resist us but Jesus says you've heard it that you've heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven for he makes his son rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust for if you love those who love you what reward do you have do not even the tax collectors do the same and if you greet only your brothers what more are you doing than others do not even the Gentiles do the same as we face the rejection of the world Jesus reminds us that to represent him it must always smell and taste like the kingdom of God it must always be seasoned with grace with endurance and patient love towards those who oppose us thirdly we are to love our neighbors this may be inherent in what we've already said so much but I wanted to say it again we are to engage in the world not retreat out of fear so Jesus says in Matthew 22 teacher what is the greatest commandment in the law and

[ 26 : 48 ] Jesus says to them you should love the Lord to God with all your heart and soul and all your mind this is the greatest in the first commandment and the second is like it you shall love your neighbor as yourself so we must continue to engage and not retreat or to hide or protect ourselves how might we do this so many different ways we might do so through politics to help shape the laws of our land so that they would be a blessing to human flourishing we might engage in social justice to end the work of sex trafficking in the world we might engage in social service becoming a mentor or serving in a soup kitchen we might engage in the intellectual life making kingdom economic strategies and philosophies and thinking about how we use biotechnology for healing and for wholeness we might engage in the creative life making art and loving nature and stewarding animal life and doing all sorts of creative and wonderful things so that we might taste the aroma of Christ and if you're not in any of these fields in our everyday life how do we serve those who we live next to in our apartment building in our dormitory on the block that we live in our workplace the person in the cubicle next to us or the person that we never see in person anymore because we all work remotely but the person that we have to interact with over zoom how do we love them and serve them how do we raise our families to love the world that we live in in the name of Jesus and as we're doing all of these good things to care let us remember that the the very first priority of God's people is to bear witness to

Jesus to tell the world about what God has done for us an undeserving sinful fallen world in the work of Jesus Christ in his life and death and resurrection for our salvation to tell the world about his love for sinners like us and for you so we're not to be surprised by the opposition we're to love our enemies we're to love our neighbors fourth we are to live our lives for God and not for the approval or acceptance of others friends you know Nick talked about this more last week but I wanted to reiterate it it's so easy isn't it when you know that your friend is going to reject you if you start saying I go to church or to talk about your faith it's so easy to be silent isn't it and it's so easy to when you go out for you know go out for dinner after after work together with your co-workers it's so easy to

somehow leave your Christian values behind and just go with the flow and be with your people it's easy to blend in with the crowd friends John the Baptist gives us an example here he cared more about God's favor than he did about

Herod's even though it led to his imprisonment and ultimately his death so the apostle Peter urges us first Peter to beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul keep your conduct among the Gentiles that is people who know who don't know God honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation do you hear that perplexity that we saw in John the Baptist this is what God calls us to we will never be like those around us who don't know God if we are faithfully following Christ we are meant to be distinct not in self-righteousness not in holier than thou not in look at how great I am and golly your problems must be because you really stink but in humility knowing that by God's grace he has saved us out of sin and that as we pursue him we live lives that have a kind of life from God that is distinctive and it has boundaries and it has borders and it has commands for us to follow and we are called to be distinct in how we live that out living for the approval of our Savior not those around us and friends you may feel like this is too much this is a high calling this is a hard calling but the fifth thing that I want to tell you is where we go to find the ability to do this and you know what it's not rock science friends we look to Jesus we look to Jesus who has gone before and walked this very path for us he suffered while on earth he was despised and rejected by humanity he was like a sheep silent before its shearers before his executioners he was unjustly arrested imprisoned and executed dying in shame upon a cross and all that suffering and injustice all that evil and the crazy rejection and accusation God was working for us our redemption our salvation when we look to Jesus when we see him he is our model he is our example and he is our salvation and so Peter writes in first Peter 2 20 if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God for to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but now have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls and friends what John the Baptist knew and what the early apostles and the early church knew and what the saints throughout history through across the world have come to see is that as we walk in this path as we pursue God's mission in the face of opposition even unto death in a world that rejects Jesus not only by our words but by our suffering we proclaim Jesus Christ and in our proclamation of him we have fellowship with him and this is the great hope that we have in our that as we do this we know that not only will we have fellowship with him in his suffering being made like him in his death but as the apostle says we will also then be raised with him to a new and indestructible and eternal life with him that outweighs all of it and this is what God has called us to do and so my prayer is that the best of what evangelicalism has meant to me and to us will continue to be the heartbeat of who we are as Christians that we would hold to God's Bible that we would see the centrality of the cross that we would love our neighbors for the sake of Jesus in word and deed and engage in this world until he takes us home knowing that it will cause opposition not believing that we will be accepted but knowing that it is good and right to walk in Jesus' footsteps in these ways let's pray Lord Jesus we are sobered by this message and yet also Lord there's a part of us that is thrilled by it because Lord you call us to something that is beyond us and yet it is good and it is great to walk in your footsteps to follow you to hear your call and to respond by living for you in this world Lord knowing that it may cost us many things but knowing that you are of greater worth than any of those oh Lord Jesus I pray for my brothers and sisters as I pray for myself Lord that we would have courage that we would have humility that we would have grace that we would have strength to endure to press on in this calling that you've called us to for your glory in this world we pray in Jesus' name

[ 37 : 11 ] Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen