

# FOLLOW ME

## LESSON EIGHT: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 6:1-29



### FAST FACTS

- Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth, where He taught in the synagogue (read Luke 4:16-21 to see what He taught).
- The Nazarenes were jealous of Jesus' wisdom and power, and Jesus did not work many miracles there.
- Jesus gave the twelve Disciples power over demons, and commissioned them to preach and heal.
- St. John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas for publicly condemning Herod's marriage to Hero'di-as, the wife of his brother Philip.
- To fulfill an oath made to his daughter, Herod beheaded St. John the Baptist.

### MAP



## MARK 6:1-6

Jesus and the Disciples returned to Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, about 20 miles from Capernaum. We would think that the people of Nazareth — a town so insignificant that St. Nathan'a-el asked when he first heard of Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" — would be thrilled that one of their people had "made good," and was empowered by God to teach and work miracles.

Instead, the Nazarenes distrusted Jesus precisely because of His background (the Greek word translated "offense" in verse three is *eskandalizonto*, which means that a person is caused to distrust that which he should follow). The people essentially said, "We know Jesus' family, and they're a bunch of nobodies! How did a simple carpenter like *Him* become so smart and powerful? Something isn't right!" They were jealous: they couldn't accept Jesus' power and authority because they resented the fact that someone they knew had this power, but they did not.

Unfortunately for the Nazarenes, their distrust prevented Jesus from working the same sorts of miracles that He worked elsewhere. Jesus *could* have healed the

## LOOK AT YOURSELF

Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (vs. 4). We see that Jesus did not receive honor from the people with whom He grew up in Nazareth.

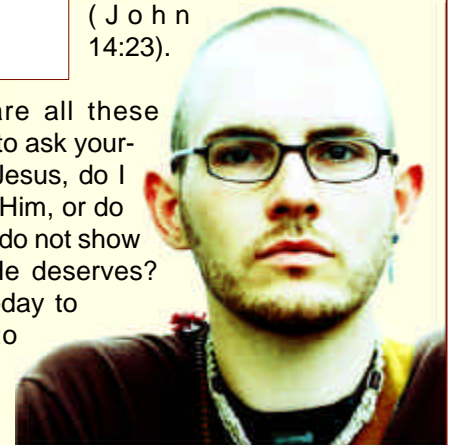
Do you honor Christ? We saw in Mark 2 that the Church, and therefore you as a Christian, is the bride of Christ (2:19-20). You are also a son or daughter of God (2 Corinthians 6:18, quoting 2 Samuel 7:14). Furthermore, Jesus promises to make His home in every person who loves Him (John 14:23).

## IT'S IN THE BIBLE...

The Holy Prophet Isaiah prophesied that many people would respond to Jesus in the way that the Nazarenes did:

*He grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (53:2-3)*

Since you are all these things, you need to ask yourself: Do I honor Jesus, do I love and respect Him, or do I live in ways that do not show Him the honor He deserves? What can I do today to bring honor to Jesus?



sick Nazarenes — as God, He could heal them regardless of whether they wanted to be healed— but He wouldn't force His healing upon them when they refused to accept Him as the healer. According to Abba Chaermeon, one of the Desert Fathers, "The bounty of God is actually curtailed temporarily according to the receptivity of our faith."

## MARK 6:7-13

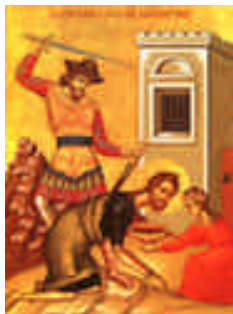
The Gospel accounts of Jesus sending the twelve Disciples out to evangelize and heal (Matthew 10:5-11:1; Luke 9:1-6) give different descriptions of what the Disciples were allowed to take with them, but they all have one thing in common: the Disciples were to "travel light," taking neither money nor food with them. St. John

Chrysostom, in his commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, explains that Jesus didn't simply mean, "Take them not with you," but, "Even if you can obtain them from another, flee the evil disease [of greed, engaging in God's work only to make money]." And you see that hereby He was answering many good purposes; first setting His disciples above suspicion; secondly, freeing them from all care, so that they might give all their leisure to the word; thirdly, teaching them His own power."

Notice what Jesus commissioned and empowered the Disciples to do: exorcise demons (vs. 7), preach the Kingdom of God so that people would repent (vs. 12; see 1:14-15), and heal the sick (vs. 13). This is the same ministry in which they saw Christ engage: a ministry of restoring humanity to God.

## MARK 6:14-29

When we look at the circumstances of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, we are shocked by the disgusting details: a fearless prophet is killed by a vicious ruler to fulfill the promise he made to his shameless daughter (in Jewish culture, only a woman with low morals would have danced to entertain partygoers) at the request of his wife (whom he stole from his brother). It is easy for us to read this story and ask, "Where is God in this injustice?"



St. John Chrysostom answers this question: "Do not say, 'Why was John allowed to die?' For what occurred was not a death, but a crown, not an end, but the beginning of a greater life. Learn to think and live like a Christian. You will not only remain unharmed by these events, but will reap the greatest benefits."

On August 29<sup>th</sup> the Church celebrates the Beheading of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John. Orthodox Christians fast on this day to remind us that our lifestyle is different than that of Herod. Many Orthodox Christians also do not use plates on this day (because St. John's head was served on a platter), or eat food cut with a knife (because a sharp instrument was used to behead him).

## TIME TRAVEL

Herod the Great, who attempted to kill Jesus after His birth (Matthew 2:16), divided his kingdom among his three sons: Herod Archelaus (who governed Judea and Samaria), Herod Philip (who governed the north-eastern territories), and Herod Antipas (who governed Galilee and Perea, and is described by Jesus in Luke 13:32 as "that fox").

After killing St. John the Baptist, Herod Antipas requested that Caesar Augustus make him King. This angered Augustus, who exiled Antipas in 39 AD.

St. Mark calls Herod Antipas "king," not because he was unaware that Antipas was merely a tetrarch, but as an ironic statement that pokes fun at Antipas' ambitions and showed that neither his position or behavior were those of a good king.

## OUR FAITH TEACHES

Kontakion for the Feast of the Beheading of St. John:

*The memory of the righteous is celebrated with songs of praise, but the Lord's testimony is sufficient for you, O Forerunner. You were shown indeed to be the most honorable of the prophets, for in the waters you baptize the one whom you preached. After suffering with joy on behalf of the truth, you proclaimed even to those in hell the God who appeared in the flesh, Who takes away the sin of the world, and grants us great mercy.*

## WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?



- Do I live my life in a way that brings honor to Jesus? Do I honor Him by both worshipping at church, and praying to Him at home?
- Even though I have not been empowered by God to miraculously heal the sick and exorcise demons, what can I do to restore others to God?
- Holy martyrs like St. John the Baptist can teach me a lot about treasuring my relationship with God above everything else - even my life. Are there things that are more important to me than this relationship?

