

The Cost of Following Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 October 2021

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] All right, so I have this passage, Mark 6, open. And before we look at what it says, I want us to consider the society we live in today. And I think it's fair to say that the society we live in today is very different to what it was a generation ago.

I mean, societies change, but there's some alarming changes and some concerning changes in our society. Especially one that I'm thinking about is how increasingly intolerant people are of being offended.

Have you noticed that? I mean, I think of, you know, growing up as a kid. And when I got insulted on the playground, you know, I had to deal with it.

I went home and cried to my mom and my mom would say, don't worry, you're not a snott face. Like people are telling you, just, you know, get over it. And I learned how to deal with offense. But today, you find that people don't have to learn how to deal with offense.

Because there's increasing laws against saying anything that anybody could find offensive. And it's quite dangerous for a society to be in that position. Not least of all because it threatens freedom of speech.

[1 : 0 8] But also, it doesn't train us in how to deal with offense. And so, our society is one that is increasingly, as people put it, a snowflake society.

Where there are laws to prosecute even perceived offense, even if it's not offense. So, just criticism, legitimate criticism, or things that are not even meant to be offensive can now be perceived as offensive and can be prosecuted.

And so, today, we find ourselves in a world where you've got to be more and more careful about what you say and how you say it on social media and to people in the public eye.

Well, as we open Mark 6 and we understand and read these stories of what's happening here, we're going to learn a very uncomfortable truth this morning. And it's even more uncomfortable given the society we live in.

And that uncomfortable truth is that no matter how careful we are in what we say and how we say it, if we want to communicate the truth of who Jesus is to the world, we are going to offend people.

[2 : 2 2] And we can't avoid that. But we also learn in these stories why, despite the pressure to keep quiet and not say anything that is offensive in our world, we can't afford, and the world can't afford us, to be silent about Jesus.

And that's really the themes that come out of these stories that mark strings together. I mean, if I had to entitle my sermon anything, it would be the cost of discipleship.

That's really the theme that we're going to be looking at. What does it cost to follow Jesus? What does it mean in how society will perceive us and what society will do?

And so here we see three stories, and they're all connected with this common theme of the cost of discipleship. And they're connected to show us, first of all, the offense of the gospel, why the gospel is offensive, and how it offends people across the spectrum of society.

It starts with Jesus in his hometown in Nazareth, a rural town in the backwaters of Galilee. People are offended there. And the third story in the series is Herod.

[3 : 31] In the palace of Herod, right at the top of government, there's offense by the message about Jesus. And so we see across the spectrum of society in these stories how the gospel offends.

First, have a look in your Bibles at the first few verses of chapter 6. Jesus is in Nazareth, his hometown. He's gone to visit there on a preaching tour.

And we read from verse 2 what happened and how he was received. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. Where did this man get these things?

They said, what is this wisdom that he has been given to him? And how are these miracles performed at his hands? Isn't this the carpenter? The son of Mary and the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon?

And aren't his sisters here with us? So they were, notice this, offended at him. They were offended. They took offense there in verse 3.

[4 : 33] Why? I mean, this is one of their own, coming back to Nazareth. He's quite a sensation. They should have, you know, had posters up. And they should have been looking forward to hearing from Jesus of Nazareth, who's put their town on the map.

Why are they offended at him? Well, Jesus explains in the next verse. Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his households.

So this was a common piece of wisdom, and prophets in the Old Testament certainly had experienced it, in that the people who were closer to them were more resistant to their message.

It's a strange concept. But the reason that these people were offended by Jesus is because they knew him already, and they had already put him in a box, I think.

They had already decided who he is. They had already categorized him. But now he's bringing new things to challenge their concept of who he is.

[5 : 39] And so they're offended by that. They're offended that he's breaking their categories that they've already placed him in. Do you see what's going on here? That's why the closer you were to Jesus, the harder it was to accept the message that bursts the boundaries of how you want to neatly define him.

Lots of people, I think, in our society want to put Jesus in a box. They want to say, well, he was a great teacher, or he was a wise man, and that's how I'm going to deal with him. That's who I'm going to consider Jesus to be.

But then when the gospel comes and breaks those boundaries and challenges people in who they think Jesus is, that's when it gets uncomfortable. I mean, it would have been fine if Jesus had gone to his hometown and given these people just religious advice.

If he had just been a wise teacher, it would have been fine. I mean, who doesn't like having a professional in their family, say a doctor in your family?

It's great having a trained doctor in your family. You can get free medical advice. Isn't that great? You've got a sore, your pain, you don't know what it is, you don't want to spend money on the doctor, you don't have medical aid, you phone up your brother-in-law, he's a doctor, and he'll tell you what's going on.

[6 : 53] Or if you've got someone in the family who's an IT specialist, and your computer's broken, you phone them up. It's great having someone in your family who can give you good advice in a particular topic, a professional.

They're not offensive. But the reason Jesus was offensive to his family was that he wasn't just bringing advice. He wasn't just bringing religious advice on how to live better.

His message, we already know the summary of his message back in Mark 1.15. Remember that? If you forget it, you can turn back to Mark 1.15. Mark lays out in the first chapter what the heart of the message of Jesus was.

He says that this is Jesus talking, That's not just advice. That's not just advice on how to live better.

That's a proclamation of who's in charge. It's a proclamation of authority that demands a response, and that's why people are so put out by it when they hear the gospel properly.

[7 : 58] And that also means, of course, if you're not put out by the gospel, if it doesn't make you uncomfortable and challenge you, then you're not hearing it right.

If you see this Bible and the message of it and the message of Jesus, if you see this just as good advice for how to live better, how to be a better person, advice that you can choose to follow or not, I feel like coming to church this Sunday to get some input, but next Sunday, no, I'm too busy.

I don't really feel like coming to church. That's okay. If you think this is just advice, coming here is just getting spiritual advice that you can choose or not to follow, then you haven't heard the gospel yet. You don't get it yet.

If you think this is just advice. And Christians, if the gospel we're communicating doesn't upset people, doesn't make people uncomfortable, you're probably not telling it right.

Because this gospel, by its very nature, is offensive. And we see this throughout these stories, not only in Jesus' hometown, but this message continues to offend.

[9 : 16] The story we see later is on the opposite side of the social spectrum, in the palace of Herod, who was the ruler of that region of Galilee, of course, under the Roman rule, but he was kind of a puppet king.

And we pick that up from verse 14 onwards. So what had happened is that John the Baptist, who was proclaiming the same message of this king that is coming, the true king of heaven and earth, and all authority is his, the Messiah who had been prophesied for centuries to come, whose kingdom will cover all the earth.

You know, John was telling this proclamation of authority, and of course that was politically incorrect, and so he was arrested by Herod, who was the main politician of the region, which reminds us, of course, the gospel is a political statement.

The gospel is not just a spiritual advice on how to have a religion, how to be spiritual. The gospel is a statement about the power of this world, and who's in charge of it, and who's in charge of countries, and nations, and politics.

So John was arrested because he's politically incorrect, but interestingly, did you notice Herod still enjoyed listening to him? Did you see that? Look at verse 20 again. Herod feared John and protected him, knowing he was a righteous and holy man.

[10 : 39] When Herod heard him, he would be very perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. Herod? Now this is, now the Herods were pretty nasty.

It was a nasty family, if you look into the politics. This was the son of the father who had ordered all the babies to be slaughtered in Bethlehem. Remember that? Christmas time, this was 30 years later, the son of him, same name.

There were a number of Herods, and they were nasty pieces of work. But yeah, there's just the spark of truth that he's recognizing something about John's message that he's attracted to.

And so he hears this, and he enjoys listening to it, but he arrested John, we told in verse 17, not because he wanted to, but for the sake of Herodias, his manipulative wife, who he was in an immoral relationship with, and John had been telling him that, because the message of authority, the message of the gospel, points out where our lives are not in line with what God wants.

And so this woman, Herodias, did not like John pointing out her sin, and so she maneuvered her, obviously impressionable husband, not just to arrest John, but eventually put him in a position where he had no choice, he thought, but to execute John.

[12 : 08] So you know the story, you heard the grisly account earlier, of him having a party with all the people he's wanting to impress, and Herodias plans through her daughter and her dance and stuff to get Herod to the position where he makes a promise that he can't back down from.

And so, because of the pressure from all the people around him, he gives in. And he shuts off his only line of communication to what is true.

And the only spark that he realized that he has a chance to hear what is true, he cut it off because of the pressure of people around him. Don't you see that today as well? You see, all of these reasons that we see in these stories for the offense of the gospel are the same reasons that the gospel causes offense today.

It's nothing new. So just like the people in Nazareth, in Jesus' hometown, people today are happy to hear the gospel if it's just advice on, you know, how to live a good life and how to prepare for the next life.

Many think that that is the extent of the gospel, just advice on how to get to heaven, advice on how to live in a proper way. And that's okay.

[13 : 23] If it's just advice, it's not offensive. But when people hear a message that proclaims truth about who's in charge and it calls people to respond by turning around, then there are issues.

Other people tolerate the gospel until the point that it actually gets personal and points out their sin, like Herodias. You know, the moment the gospel gets too personal, the moment the preacher actually meets with you and points out something in your life that is not consistent with a message that you claim to believe, well then, you get angry at the pastor and you stop going to church.

It's happened many times in this church as well. When the gospel gets too personal, when it starts to expose areas of our life we don't want anybody to see, then there are issues.

Other people may not actually personally have a problem with the gospel. You get many people who actually like, they'll go on YouTube, they'll listen to the sermons, they like the sermons, they're uplifting, they're challenging, there are many people who don't have problems necessarily with the message about Jesus, but they're pressured by people around them to cut off their access to truth because it's not politically correct.

Society around us telling us we shouldn't be listening to this, it's not tolerant. see, so there are a lot, I think, just like Herod, there are a lot of people who realize a spark of truth here but they don't come near, they cut it off because the people around them pressure them to.

[15 : 05] These are, and for many other reasons, the reasons why the gospel is offensive today and as Christians, I think what this passage is challenging us as Christians to do is to be prepared to face all of these as we take the gospel out there.

In other words, be prepared to offend people. Not because you're offensive, if you are, just in your manner and then you've got to change something, the gospel, you know, Bible does say in 1 Peter 3, 15 and 16 that we've got to do this with gentleness and respect.

With gentleness and respect we take the message of Jesus out but people will still be offended no matter how gentle and respectful we are, not because we're offensive but because our message is inherently offensive and we've got to be prepared for that if we're going to take the message out there.

Don't trick yourself into thinking that it is possible to share the truth about who Jesus is in a way that won't cause issues. We've got to come to terms with that because the truth about Jesus is that he has all authority over every life and everyone is accountable to him and while people don't want us to tell them that they need us to.

And that's the next thing we see in this passage. Not just the offense of the gospel but also the warning that comes with the gospel. Look with me from verse 11.

[16 : 36] So Jesus is commissioning, actually it's from verse 7, this next little section, he's commissioning his disciples to go out and to spread this message, this truth about the kingdom, about who he is.

Basically the same message as he was telling in Mark 1.15, he's now commissioned his disciples and also empowered them with power, kingdom power, restoration power that he's been showing so far.

so he's sending them out to represent the kingdom to the wider world but he prepares them, as he sends them out, he prepares them to expect hostility.

Do you see that? He tells them to expect hostility. Verse 11, he says, if any place does not welcome you or listen to you, he knows, he knows that this message is going to cause a lot of people to shut their doors and not welcome the disciples and he tells them what to do in that case.

When you leave there, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them. Now I want us to think for a minute or two, what does that mean?

[17 : 50] What does it mean to shake the dust off their feet to the people who won't listen to them? I think it's worth just spending some time on that because I think it's been misunderstood a lot by Christians and they use that phrase in the wrong way, I believe.

And so the way a Christian will use that phrase is, oh, you know, I told the person at work the gospel and really they didn't agree with me, so I'm just not going to bring it up again, I'm going to shake the dust off my feet and just not mention it again.

That's often how it's perceived, shaking the dust off your feet is leaving someone alone, just leave and don't rock the boat, don't cause any problems. That's not what it means. If anything, it means something like the opposite.

It's actually if they don't accept it, you've got to make sure they understand the seriousness of what they're rejecting. That's what shaking the dust off their feet means. Notice the disciples weren't supposed to go around the corner where nobody sees them and clean their boots.

That's not what Jesus is telling them to do. He says do it as a testimony against them. He says do it where they can see you. In other words, it's a sign of warning and that's what any Jew would have understood it to be because to a Jew, shaking the dust off your feet was symbolic of leaving a Gentile territory and entering back into the covenant land of Israel.

[19 : 19] So when a Jewish traveler was going in Gentile lands, the tradition would be as you come back into the land of Israel, into the promised land, you would shake the Gentile dust off your feet.

You would get rid of the non-Jewish part of the land. You wouldn't bring it into the promised land.

So in other words, for the disciples to stand outside the village that has rejected the gospel and shake the dust off their feet, you know what they're telling them? They're telling them you are no longer considered to be in the covenant anymore.

You are no longer part of Israel. That's the symbolism of what they're doing. In other words, it's a warning of the seriousness of rejecting the message of Jesus. And so today, shaking the dust off our feet doesn't mean well I'm not going to bring the gospel up again.

What it does mean is helping people to see the seriousness of rejecting Jesus, which may mean further conversations, more serious conversations.

[20 : 23] It's a willingness to warn people that when they reject the message of Jesus, they reject their place in the land. In other words, they reject their place in God's plans for the restoration of this world, and they reject their place in the new creation.

And they reject the only hope of forgiveness for the sins that they don't want to hear about. us. And for us as disciples, that principle of shaking the dust of our feet is a testimony.

That principle of having those serious conversations with people who are ignoring the gospel message, that warning is one that we have a calling to issue to the world, uncomfortable as it is.

And that's the last thing I want us to consider this morning, not just the offense of the gospel that we've got to be prepared for, not just the warning of the gospel that we've got to be prepared to tell, but the call of the gospel, what the gospel calls each of us, if we call ourselves disciples, what it calls us to in our daily life.

The call of the gospel. So, in this middle story here with Jesus sending the disciples out, he is asking them to step out of their comfort zones, and them stepping out of their comfort zones is a way that Jesus has chosen to extend his kingdom.

[21 : 53] He's chosen to do it through his disciples. Just like when God created the world, he chose that he's just going to make the world untamed, and he's going to put humans in it, and give humans the responsibility to steward and care for creation.

He could have done it himself, but God chooses always to work through means, and he, in creation, chose to work to steward the creation through the means of the humans he had put here, you and me.

So, Jesus, in the same way, chooses to extend his kingdom through means of disciples stepping out of their comfort zones.

He has chosen to grow his kingdom through people who are willing to expose themselves to this discomfort, and he uses people who are unprepared.

Do you notice that? I mean, if you've been following Mark so far, how ready are his disciples for this mission? Think of it. At this point in Mark, they are still confused.

[23 : 07] They still don't fully know what's going on. You don't remember the storm at sea and Jesus calmed it and they were freaked out. And they had Jesus, he criticized them for their lack of faith.

They're still not getting it. Only later in chapter 8 are they figuring out properly what's going on. And even then it takes a number of chapters for them to fully understand it. And so they're unqualified for this task.

And yet Jesus still calls them to it. Do you notice that? I think that's a very important thing for us to see. Jesus still uses them unqualified as they are because he tells them, and this is the key point of how he says they must prepare.

You notice that? He gives them some specific rules for what they must do before they go in preparation and essentially he's saying you must prepare by not being prepared.

he's telling them, look at verse 8 to 9, he says he instructed them to take nothing for the road except a staff, no bread, no traveling bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not put on an extra shirt.

[24 : 21] What Jesus is doing is he's telling them they need to, they can only be successful in taking this kingdom message out and doing this work if they don't rely on themselves, but if they rely on God to provide for them instead.

Jesus is using Exodus language, if you compare this to Exodus 12 I think it is, you'll do that in your Bible studies in the week. It's very similar instructions to what God gave the Israelites before they left Egypt when they were supposed to go out into the wilderness, leave civilization behind, leave all the trappings, even though they were slaves, at least they got food and shelter in Egypt, and go into the unknown wilderness and similarly they just had to take a staff and very minimal stuff because God was going to provide for them out there as they went forward in the plan that God had called them to, and in the same way Jesus is telling his disciples here that you can go and unqualified as you are, you can be used for the kingdom but only if you learn to rely on God and not yourself.

And you need to remember that as a Christian, I need to remember that. However you serve the kingdom, and if we are members of a church, we will all serve the kingdom in different capacities.

And the same principle applies, no matter what level you serve on, no matter what that looks like, this principle of going forward in faith and not relying on yourself applies just as much.

So a missionary will be called to a mission field, they might not have enough money, they might know exactly what they're going to do when they get there and how they're going to set up, but they go anyway because they trust God, because he's called them to this, and also in the same way just serving in a local church, just practical service, needs that same attitude of reliance on God.

[26 : 16] Let me demonstrate to you what that looks like. Today, in our frenetic society, most commonly I hear from Christians, I'm so busy.

I'm so busy. I need, you know, I want to serve more in church, I want to be involved in that, I want to come to that meeting, but I'm too busy, I need time with my family, I need time to rest as well.

I get that, but is that trusting in God? I don't think it is. If we look at our week and our resources and our time, we say, I can only do that, that's what I'm able to do, the rest of the time I need a rest, I need to relax, that's actually not trusting in God to provide those things.

Not trusting in God to provide the rest that you need if you are willing to serve Him first. Not trusting in God to provide that family time that you need if you are willing to serve Him first. Do you see how this challenge that Jesus gives to His disciples applies in every area of service, in every area of life.

Those excuses we use not to serve Jesus more, not to serve His church, and what we need as a church to go forward are actually very often failures to trust in God to provide for us.

[27 : 41] In those areas of life we think that service will take away from. We've got to learn to go out just with the staff. just with sandals on our feet. We've got to learn to go out and trust that as we do the mission of God, as we get stuck in, as we get involved, God will provide all those things you think that you need to provide for yourself.

That was the message to the Israelites going into the wilderness, and that is the message to disciples today. today, when Jesus asked his disciples here, many of whom had families, we know Peter was married, probably had children, not one of them when Jesus said to them, take a staff, go out, we're going to take the kingdom to those outlying villages, not one of them said, you know, I'm really, really busy, Jesus, and I've got to spend time with the family.

I've got an hour on Sunday that I can give you, Jesus, but other than that, you know, I've got to look after other things. Not one of them said that, because they got this idea, actually, this mission is more important than my life, and I'm serving a God who can provide all of my needs.

Jesus deliberately uses under-resourced, unprepared, incompetent disciples to do his kingdom work, because that work can only be done properly when we have to, when we're put in a position where we have to trust God to provide our needs.

Seek first the kingdom of God, Jesus says in Matthew 6, and all these other things will be given to you. All the things that you think seeking first the kingdom of God is going to sacrifice and take away, God will look after that.

[29 : 21] That is what the call of discipleship is. And that is the call that all disciples have. And that is why it's important, this call that we have, to step out in trust that as we serve Christ's mission, he will give us what we need.

This call is why it's important not to get intimidated to step back from serving Jesus, but being willing to no matter what the cost is.

That's the point of these stories here, to challenge us to consider the cost of discipleship. truth. But the truth is, what these stories show us, is that however you react to the gospel, it's going to cost you one way or the other.

If you respond to the gospel in the only right way, which is to follow and serve Jesus Christ as your authority more than yourself or anybody else, if you respond in that way, it's going to cost you.

It's going to cost you time. It's going to cost you energy. It's going to cause people to not like what you say and stand for. It's going to cost you. I have to warn you of that.

[30 : 42] If you want to follow Jesus, don't think it's not going to cost you, but it's going to cost you the other way too. If you choose to ignore the gospel and if you think you can keep Jesus in a neat box that makes no demands on your life, that's going to cost you even more.

That's going to cost you being cut off from God's plans for the world and being cut off from eternal life. You've just got to decide which is more worth it.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for these accounts that challenge us to consider our own lives and to consider whether we as disciples are willing to pay the cost that comes with following you.

Lord, we thank you that you have caught us up in an amazing story of the restoration of this world. We thank you that you have brought us to believe in you as the Messiah.

We thank you that you have brought us into your covenant to be your people and we pray, Lord, that you would help us to joyfully and willingly consider it all joy when we face trials us because we are doing it serving you.

[31 : 56] Help us to put our lives in perspective and to go out there ready to rely on you to provide what we need as we serve you and as we take this offensive kingdom message to a world that so desperately needs to hear it.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.