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1. At first glance, the passage of Mark 6:14-29 seems out of place. One could probably go directly from 6:13 to 6:30, and not feel that the text had skipped a beat. It requires a second look to decipher the author's intent in the placement of this story. It fits into the larger narrative because it shows people's reactions to the ministry of Jesus, namely that he had come to be associated with prophets, both contemporary (to his time) and past. There is explicit association of Jesus with Elijah, as people describe their works of power as similar. This falls into sequence with an implicit connection being drawn between Jesus and Moses in 6:30-44, where Jesus feeds the multitudes akin to how God had fed mana to the people in the wilderness. The basic belief in resurrection is also seen in how the people and Herod buy into the notion that Jesus is John the Baptist returned.

This is also the first time in the gospel of Mark that there is a description given of Herod's personality. Herod seemed to share the same fascination with John the Baptist as Pilate later would with Jesus, not fully comprehending what each had to say, but marveling nonetheless. He is not unlike Pilate, in that he knows what the right thing is to do, to spare the life of a righteous man, but gives in to the will of his wife and her daughter. Herod had also given others a choice to make, of what to request of him, again similar to Pilate's questioning of the crowd regarding Jesus & Barabbas. At the moment of decision, they both vacillate between true justice and appeasement of the crowds. Also of importance is the fact that John's disciples take his body and put it in a tomb, whereas Jesus' disciples will do him no such courtesy, for fear of their own lives. These parallels are all foreshadowing the things to come later in the gospel.

I noticed a few interesting discrepancies between the Greek & English of this passage. In 6:14 the NRSV reads “for Jesus’ name had become known.” In the Greek, it reads τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ “the name of him (his name).” In the KJV, later on in verse 14 it reads “and he said” in reference to Herod, whereas the Greek says καὶ ἔλεγον “and they were saying.” While these differences are subtle, they could lead to slightly different interpretations of the text. In the first instance, *his name* could refer to Herod being well known, and having knowledge of Jesus because of this clout. And if the words *and he said* are read instead of *some said*, then it makes Herod look superstitious and paranoid, because this would make him the only person making claims about John the Baptist being raised from the dead. In that case, in verse 16, Herod would be seen as reaffirming his previous assumption, rather than buying into one of the theories of the masses. While these alternative readings are possible, I tend to agree with the more widely held view, that of Jesus’ name being well known, and the *some* saying that John was raised in verse 14. It makes more sense, rather than stating the obvious about Herod’s notoriety, and having his statement repeated.

The themes of politics and religion are played out here, as in the rest of the narrative. This story shows the two held in tension, especially in Herod’s attitude towards John the Baptist. On the one hand, Herod has the political power to do whatever he wants, as is evident by the fact that he stole his brother’s wife, and has John imprisoned when he speaks against it. The text tells us that Herod protected John against Herodias, who was more bitter and vindictive than her second husband. It even says that Herod liked listening to John, though he was often perplexed at what the prophet had to say. Herod appears to be torn in his conscience, because he is living a lifestyle that is not

in accordance with the teachings of the Jews (both with his wife and building projects on top of graveyards), yet he kept John captive and apparently visited him on at least a few occasions.

As stated earlier, this is a common theme in the gospel of Mark, that of the righteous both offending and intriguing those in positions of authority. On several occasions, we see Jesus offering teachings, exorcisms, and parables in front of Pharisees and Scribes who conspire to kill him. Yet, rather than write him off as a lunatic they continually seek out opportunities to dialogue with him, hoping to justify themselves in the process. It is interesting that so many people seek the demise of Jesus, and yet are unsuccessful until the appointed time. Conversely, John the Baptist was largely favored by the people, so much so that in 11:27-33 Jesus uses John's name to respond to the questions of religious authorities. Yet, it took only the prodding of a jealous wife to have John killed.

This is an account that Horsley completely (and conveniently) leaves out of his chapter entitled Women as Representative and Exemplary. He chose instead to talk only of occasions which made women look good in Mark. Clearly, if he had addressed this passage, he would have had to retool his thesis. Witherington on the other hand, while not over-emphasizing her role in the story, does say that "Herodias is elsewhere (with the women's group at the party?) biding her time." Seen in this light, the woman is hardly exemplary of a devotee to God, and is in fact working contrary to the very message John sought to proclaim.

2. I have chosen to examine the parable of Mark 12:1-12, because it is not so specifically spelled out as the parable in chapter 4, and the context is more challenging in my opinion. This parable is situated between two attempts to discredit Jesus, made by the religious authorities. Jesus appears to be telling this story as part of a one-two punch against the chief priests, scribes, and elders. The first one came in 11:27-33, in which Jesus leaves them dumbfounded over his question about John the Baptist. Having put them on their heels, Jesus then continues the offensive with the parable about the wicked tenants. This further offends them, but again in 12:12 like in 11:32, they are afraid of the reaction of the crowd, and so they choose to do nothing for the time being. Having gone away in 12:12, they send some Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus in 12:13 to test him. Here in 12:16 like in 11:30, Jesus again answers their question with a question, leaving them speechless.

One cannot help but draw comparisons between the fig tree and the parable of the vineyard. I believe the parable of the fig tree to be analogous to a state of spiritual readiness, such as is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:2 NIV, "be prepared in season and out of season." I realize this is obviously not a verse that Jesus was making reference to, but perhaps Paul is alluding to the lesson of the withered fig tree. At any rate, I think a parallel can be drawn between the spiritual dryness of the chief priests/scribes/elders and the fig tree, and possibly even with Israel as a whole. I see the tenants in the vineyard as being like the fig tree in the regard that they were not ready to yield the fruits of their labor at the master's bidding. The result was the same in both cases. The unfruitful were cursed and forbidden the privilege/responsibility of bearing any fruit in the future.

Additionally, one could compare the lesson of the fig tree with the cleansing of the temple by reasoning they were similar in this regard: from a distance, they seemed to be flourishing, but when one got up-close it became obvious that there was no real fruit being displayed. In the temple, there was much business and trade, but little real spiritual vitality, which is what upset Jesus to the point of driving them out. Lastly of note is that in the story of Jesus asking for a denarius in 12:13-17. He is clearly not against trade or taxation, as some would argue on the basis of him driving the moneychangers out of the temple. In light of these two stories, it seems that Jesus is simply saying that there is a time and place for money to change hands, and it must be done rightly (if at all) within a place of worship.

Now that some of the secondary meanings of the context have been addressed, the primary meaning of the parable of the vineyard/wicked tenants will be fleshed out. The owner of the vineyard is likened to God the father. It seems that the chief priests, scribes, and elders of 11:27 have been hoarding their spiritual authority and are shown to be the wicked tenants. Rather than tending to the chosen vineyard of the Israel's lineage in order to please God, they are harvesting the benefits of influence for themselves. The past prophets of God are represented as the slaves that the owner of the vineyard sends to collect his share. While the description is not specific enough to pinpoint exactly which prophets are being alluded to (other than Elijah), it is clear that these were men of God who were not well received by past generations of religious authorities. The property owner's son is of course God's Son, the very one who is telling the parable. In telling this story, Jesus is both alluding to his forthcoming death, as well as the impending judgment upon those who are behind the crucifixion.

Now that I have said my piece, I will look at how my interpretation of 12:1-12 stacks up against those of Horsley and Witherington. On page 45 Horsley says, “The tenants in the parable of the vineyard whom the owner will destroy are taken as ‘the Jews’ generally (many of whom were indeed destroyed in the Roman reconquest of 69-70). The ‘others’ to whom it will be given must therefore be the Gentiles, who thus receive the Jews’ heritage (an idea now called Christian ‘supersessionism’).” Given that statement, it would seem that Horsley would disagree with my assessment of the parable.

Yet, on page 110, Horsley sings a different tune, “Jesus’ parable draws an analogy between the violent tenants responsible for the vineyard and the priestly rules responsible for tending Israel as God’s vineyard. The application of the analogy in the parable – which summarizes Mark’s whole story and the history of Israel it presupposes leading up to Jesus’ campaign – pronounces God’s imminent destruction of the violent tenants, i.e., the high-priestly and other rulers, themselves the great landlords of the society, who have been utterly unfaithful, even predatory, in not only failing to render up the desired produce of justice but also in beating and killing God’s servants (the prophets) and now his son (Jesus).” It appears after reading this that Horsley would agree near exactly how I described the parable. Once again, Horsley’s arguments fail to hold much validity.

For a more concrete answer, I turn to a more solid source. On page 320 of his book, Witherington seems to support the widely held traditional view that the vineyard represents Israel and the tenants represent the religious authorities. On these points his assessment comports with mine (and one of Horsley’s). He also pointed out that there is a “crescendo of violence I this parable with the first servant being beaten, the second wounded in the head and insulted, the next killed, and finally the beloved not only killed

but shamed by not being given a decent burial.” He also touched on the squatter’s rights of the time, and that land-ownership was 90% possession. Since Witherington supports my view on the parable, and Horsley halfway agrees, I’d say that my initial interpretation can stand as-is.

4. I felt that Gundry made valid critiques of the weaker arguments in Horsley’s book *Hearing the Whole Gospel*. I found Horsley’s response to be a bit dodgy, and thought he failed to address the issues Gundry brought up, continuing to “talk past him” and attempting to talk above him by over-using superfluous terminology. That being said, I will start by listing some of the points on which I agreed with Gundry’s critique, then move on to addressing Horsley’s response.

Gundry’s first critique was Horsley’s apparent downplaying of the Christology present in Mark’s gospel. Gundry points out that Jesus did not rebuke Peter for calling him the messiah, rather he rebuked him for denying his claim to the impending crucifixion. He also points out that the author of Mark was not trying to place Jesus on equal footing with Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration, but was emphasizing Jesus’ priority and authority as both before and above the other two. The command from God came for Peter to be silent and listen to Jesus, not to pay homage to Moses or Elijah. These are but two examples of how Gundry successfully refutes Horsley’s claims that Jesus was ambiguous about his messianic identity.

The next critique Gundry makes of Horsley is that he downplays the importance of Jesus’ mission of liberating people from spiritual oppression, in order to play up a theme of economic renewal and liberation from Roman domination. I appreciate that

there are instances in which Jesus obviously addresses the economic conditions of his day, but to think that this was somehow the primary purpose is to misread the gospel. Gundry addresses some of the more problematic interpretations in Horsley's book, such as the exorcism of the Legion simply being a political statement against the Roman guards stationed in the area. Gundry also refutes Horsley's claim that Jesus outright denies that a rich person can enter heaven, as he alluded to in his dealing with the passage about the rich young man in 10:17-25. Gundry's quote on page 138 sums up these types of issues, "To stress present economic concerns at the expense of the hereafter, Horsley treats the reference to 'eternal life'... as a 'throwaway' line."

Gundry then refutes Horsley's unnecessary use of women as exemplary, and points out on several occasions how they are no more worthy of exaltation than the hard-headed male disciples. He says that Horsley reads too much into the significance of the 12 years of the woman's hemorrhaging and the 12 year old "near-dead" (as Horsley puts it) girl. I think that while poetic, Horsley's use of the numerology here is unnecessary, and agree with Gundry that the age of the 12 year old girl was mentioned simply to explain that she was at an age that she was able to walk around after Jesus revived her. Gundry also pointed out that the command that was given to the women at the tomb was to inform the men of Jesus' resurrection, and to tell the men that Jesus went ahead of them to meet up with them (the men). Horsley glosses over this when making his case for women as exemplary. Neither Gundry nor Horsley make mention of Herodias, which apparently was not deemed an important enough character to make the cut, so to speak.

The last critique that I clearly favored Gundry on was his questioning Horsley's downplay of individual discipleship. It is obvious in reading Mark that Jesus clearly



singles out a core group of followers and, for whatever reason, has them gather a larger following after he leaves, rather than assembling a loyal crowd during his earthly ministry. Horsley's argument for restoration of households is particularly weak in light of Gundry's point that Jesus called people to leave their houses/vocations/families in order to seek after the things of God. The last critique Gundry brought up was that of oral vs. written tradition, which I thought was a grey area and could be seen either way. In my opinion, the instance of "let the reader understand" could have very well been instructions written to the orator for consideration when speaking the gospel to a group.

Now that I have all but totally aligned myself with Gundry, I will address how Horsley fared in his response to the review. At the risk of looking like I am trying to kick a man while he's down, I really have to say that many of Horsley's assertions in his response are as flimsy as the initial points were in his book. He basically writes off what Gundry had to say, and fails to address any of his points head-on. Instead, he seems to hide behind wordy sentences that do little more than rephrase what he has already (ineffectually) argued in the book. If I were Gundry, I would have been slightly disappointed, and possibly even a bit offended at Horsley's apparent disregard of the critique. It is as if Horsley is saying, "Your critique is invalid, because you just don't get it, so instead of address what you said, I'll restate it all again for you and maybe you'll get it this time. If not, you're a neo-imperialist." I thought Horsley had a lot of nerve to accuse Gundry of proof-texting him (page 153 of the response), when that's what Horsley did to Mark for most of his book.

My final verdict is as follows. While Horsley eloquently restates most of his main points from *Hearing the Whole Gospel*, he does not do so any more convincingly

than in his book. I would use a comical metaphor to characterize Horsley's attempt to restructure Biblical reading. In the initial critique, Horsley is like a martial artist that spontaneously tried to invent a new fighting style in the middle of a match, and received a solid old-school whooping by a student (Gundry) of the traditional discipline. While he may have had a new take on things, and caused people to question the more tried-and-true methods for a short time, seeing the two put head-to-head leaves the Horsley method a bit wanting. Horsley's response to Gundry's critique then, is like a boxer that's been knocked to the canvas and is at risk of a TKO, but stands up again with some fancy footwork, only to be decisively knocked out. He needs to know when he's been beat.