

THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK



ALPHA INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

Thalassery, Kerala, India - 670 101

Ph: 0490 2344727, 2343707

Web: www.alphathalassery.org, Email: alphits@gmail.com



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Editorial Board: Rev. Dr. Joseph Pamplany
Rev. Dr. Thomas Kochukarottu
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Office Assistance: Mr. Renjith KC
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Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark (“John, also called Mark,” Ac 12:12,25; 15:37). The most important evidence comes from Papias (c. a.d. 140), who quotes an even earlier source as saying: (1) Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord; (2) this tradition did not come to Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter-preaching directed to the needs of the early Christian communities; (3) Mark accurately preserved this material. The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark (see note on Ac 10:37).

Author

B. External Evidence strongly supports John Mark as the author of the Gospel of Mark in association with the Apostle Peter. It is generally agreed that the Mark who is associated with Peter in the early non-Biblical tradition is also the John Mark of the NT. The first

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mention of him is in connection with his mother, Mary, who had a house in Jerusalem that served as a meeting place for believers (Ac 12:12). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after the famine visit, Mark accompanied them (Ac 12:25). Mark next appears as a “helper” to Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Ac 13:5), but he deserted them at Perga in Pamphylia (see map, p. 2273) to return to Jerusalem (Ac 13:13). Paul must have been deeply disappointed with Mark’s actions on this occasion, because when Barnabas proposed taking Mark on the second journey, Paul flatly refused, a refusal that broke up their working relationship (Ac 15:36–39). Barnabas took Mark, who was his cousin (Col 4:10), and departed for Cyprus. No further mention is made of either of them in the book of Acts. Mark reappears in Paul’s letter to the Colossians written from Rome. Paul sends a greeting from Mark and adds: “You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him” (Col 4:10; see Phm 24, written about the same time). At this point Mark was apparently beginning to win his way back into Paul’s confidence. By the end of Paul’s life, Mark had fully regained Paul’s favor. The following are the major external evidences:

1. Pseudo-Barnabas ([5:9; Mark 2:17] c. A.D. 70-130)
2. Polycarp (c. 110-150)
3. Hermas (c. 115-140)

4. Papias (the bishop of Hierapolis A.D. 140) wrote in his last work (*Exegesis of the Lord’s Oracles*) the strongest evidence for Marcan authorship tied to Peter: The Elder said this also: Mark, who became Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had neither heard the Lord nor been one of his followers, but afterwards, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to compose his discourses with a view to the needs of his hearers, but not as though he were drawing up a connected account of the Lord’s sayings. So Mark made no mistake in thus recording some things just as he remembered them. For he was careful of this one thing, to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no untrue statements therein.

5. Irenaeus (c. 130-202) also agrees with the Mark-Peter correlation: “And after their [Peter’s and Paul’s] death, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also handed down to us in writing the things preached by Peter”.

6. Justin Martyr ([Dialogue, 106.3] c. 150-155)

7. Clement of Alexandria ([preserved in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesia*, vi.14.6ff] c. 150-215)

8. Tertullian ([Adv. Marcion, iv.5] c. 150-220)

9. Origen (c. 185-254)

10. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386)

11. Eusebius (c. 325-340)

12. Jerome (c. 340-420)

13. Augustine (c. 400)

14. The Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark (A.D. 160-180) mentions Mark as the Gospel writer and connects him with Peter: "...Mark declared, who is called 'stumb-fingered' because he had short fingers in comparison with the size of the rest of his body. He was Peter's interpreter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy."

15. Murtatorian Canon (c. 170)

Internal Evidence is the realm where some questions are raised, but they are not determinative to overthrow Marcan authorship

1. John-Mark is mentioned elsewhere in the biblical material:

- ❖ He was a Jewish Christian whose mother, Mary, owned a home in Jerusalem where the early church met (Acts 12:12)
- ❖ He was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10)
- ❖ He was added to Paul and Barnabas' party when they visited Jerusalem for the famine relief (Acts 12:25)
- ❖ He went with Barnabas and Saul (Paul) on the first missionary journey, but turned back to Jerusalem when they went inland to Asia at Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:5,13)
- ❖ On the second missionary journey Barnabas wanted to take John-Mark along, but Paul refused because of his earlier defection, so Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus where he probably encouraged him (Acts 15:36-41)

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- ❖ Paul was later reconciled with Mark:
 - ▶ Mark was with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome and served as his delegate in Asia Minor (Phil 24; Col. 4:10)
 - ▶ Paul instructed Timothy to send Mark to Rome to be with him during his final imprisonment because he was useful to him for service (2 Tim. 4:11)
- ❖ When 1 Peter was written, Mark was with Peter in Rome and regarded as Peter's spiritual son (1 Peter 5:13)

2. It is unlikely that the early church would have assigned the authorship of a Gospel to a person of secondary, and even "questionable" history as John Mark since he was neither an apostle, nor a person of prominence in the early church

3. Luke may possibly have developed John Mark in the book of Acts not only for literary reasons within the book, but because he was a source which Luke used

4. There is evidence in Mark that it was written for Gentiles (perhaps from Rome):

- ❖ Mark does not include a genealogy
- ❖ Mark interprets Hebrew (Aramaic) words (5:41; 7:11,34; 14:36)
- ❖ Mark uses Roman time rather than Hebrew time (6:48; 13:35)
- ❖ Mark uses Latin (5:9; 6:27; 12:15,42; 15:16,39)
- ❖ Mark explains locations and places

5. There is evidence that the writer was from Palestine:

- ❖ He is familiar with the geography of Palestine, especially Jerusalem (5:1; 6:53; 8:10; 11:1; 13:3)
- ❖ He knew Aramaic, the common language of Palestine (5:41; 7:11,34; 14:36)
- ❖ He understood Jewish institutions and customs (1:21; 2:14,16,18; 7:2-4)

6. There is evidence that the author was connected with Peter:

- ❖ The vividness and detail suggest reminiscences of a close eyewitness such as Peter (1:16-20,29-31,35-38; 5:21-24,35-43; 6:39,53-54; 9:14-15; 10:32,46; 14:32-42)

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- ❖ The use of Peter's words and deeds (8:29,32-33; 9:5-6; 10:28-30; 14:29-31,66-72)
- ❖ The inclusion of the unique words "and Peter" in 16:7
- ❖ The similarity between the broad outline of this Gospel and Peter's sermon in Caesarea [Galilee, Jerusalem, Passion, Resurrection, Commission] (Acts 10:34-43)

DATE

Some, who hold that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a major source, have suggested that Mark may have been composed in the 50s or early 60s. Others have felt that the content of the Gospel and statements made about Mark by the early church fathers indicate that the book was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. Although the problem is complex, it is plausible that Mark was written sometime between A.D. 64-69

A. The usual discussion of date revolves around the synoptic problem and especially Marcan priority. In view of the historical identification of Matthew, a possible plurality of sources used by all of the synoptic writers, and the Jewish need for Matthew, it is possible that Matthew preceded the Gospel of Mark. Therefore, Mark need not be the first Gospel account

- ❖ Mark was considered to be an abstract of Matthew from Augustine until the early part of the nineteenth century (Guthrie, p. 133)
- ❖ Even though the parallels of "Mark" in Matthew and Luke are striking, it is entirely possible that they are using a similar source which Mark used (Ur-Mark/pre-Markan)
- ❖ Matthew was an Apostle, so one wonders why in his composition of a gospel account he would depend so heavily upon another's eyewitness account (e.g., the banquet held in his own house (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17) see Toussaint, Behold the King p. 330)
- ❖ Since the first church was Jewish and Matthew's gospel is characteristically Jewish, it is reasonable to consider Matthew as the first gospel designed to address the early concerns of the Jews

B. The description of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem suggests that Mark's Gospel was written before A.D. 70 (Mk. 13:2,14-23)

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C. Early testimony of the church is divided about when Mark was written (e.g., before or after the martyrdom of Peter, A.D. 64-68):

- ❖ Irenaeus and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue affirmed that Mark wrote after the death of Peter and Paul (see above) thus, placing the date of the epistle between A.D. 67-69 (Paul was probably martyred A.D. 67/68)
- ❖ Clement of Alexandria and Origen affirmed that Mark wrote during Peter's lifetime with Peter's ratification,⁶ thus placing the date of the epistle between A.D. 64-68 (Peter was probably martyred A.D. 64)
- ❖ It is possible that the statements are not contradictory:
 - ▶ Perhaps Mark began his gospel before Peter's death, and completed it after Peter's death
 - ▶ It is also possible that Irenaeus is not referring to the death of Peter so much as to his departure (ἐξίτησις^(a*)) from the place where Mark was
 - ▶ If the statements are not contradictory than a date would be in the early to mid-sixties

4. Because Marcan priority is not a necessary prerequisite to the synoptic problem, either option is possible allowing for all of the synoptics to have been written before A.D. 70:

- ❖ Matthew could have been written c. A.D. 50
- ❖ Luke could have been written c. A.D. 60
- ❖ Acts could have been written c. A.D. 64/65

Place of Origin and Destination: Rome to Gentile, Roman Christians

According to early church tradition, Mark was written "in the regions of Italy" (Anti-Marcionite Prologue) or, more specifically, in Rome (Irenaeus; Clement of Alexandria). These same authors closely associate Mark's writing of the Gospel with the apostle Peter. The above evidence is consistent with (1) the historical probability that Peter was in Rome during the last days of his life and was martyred there, and (2) the Biblical evidence that Mark also was in Rome about the same time and was closely associated with Peter (see 2Ti 4:11; 1Pe

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5:13, where the word “Babylon” may be a cryptogram for Rome; see also Introduction to 1 Peter: Place of Writing).

A. The church fathers (see above under “Author”) affirm that Mark’s Gospel was written in Rome for Gentile, Roman Christians

B. Evidence from the Gospel supports the affirmations of the church fathers:

01. Aramaic expressions are translated (3:17; 5:41; 7:11,34; 9:43; 10:46; 14:36; 15:22,34)

02. Jewish customs are explained (7:3-4; 14:12; 15:42)

03. Latin terms are used rather than Greek equivalents (5:9; 6:27; 12:15,42; 15:16,39)

04. Roman reckoning of time is used (6:48; 13:35)

05. He alone identifies Simon of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus (15:21; cf. Rom. 16:13)

06. Few OT quotations or references to fulfilled prophecy are used

07. Mark is concerned for all of the nations and has a gentile, Roman centurion proclaim Jesus’ deity at the end of the Gospel (5:18-29; 7:24 - 8:10; 11:17; 13:10; 14:9; 15:39)

08. The tone and message of the Gospel are encouraging to Roman believers who were encountering persecution and expecting more (8:34-38; 9:49; 13:9-13)

09. Mark assumes that his readers are familiar with the main characters, so he writes with more of a theological interest rather than a biological interest

10. Mark addresses his readers more directly by explaining the meaning for them of particular actions and statements (2:10,28; 7:19)

11. Mark does not include a genealogy as Matthew and Luke do

Outstanding Characteristics of Mark

A. In view of Christian martyrdom, Christ is presented as the One who continues to speak and act meaningfully in the context of crisis

B. Mark is simple and straightforward:

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- ❖ The language is less elaborate and more popular than Luke or Matthew
- ❖ Mark uses “and” a lot
- ❖ Mark uses “immediately” intimating vividness and excitement to the action
- ❖ Mark uses the historical present over 150 times making Jesus a contemporary of those reading (narrative tells what happens, not simply what happened)
- ❖ Mark uses detail in his narrative to heighten the sense of being there (names, pillow in the boat, wild beasts in the wilderness, nicknaming of James and John, etc.)
- ❖ Mark puts his readers in the scene where they may visualize and feel what the evangelist has described: especially by making parenthetical statements (13:37; 4:41, etc.)

Purposes of Mark

A. To encourage Roman Christians:

- ❖ To demonstrate in an active way how to suffer during persecution-as Jesus did! Jesus is constantly presented as one who speaks and acts meaningfully in the context of crisis. This “present” aspect of the gospel (tenses, “immediately”, and miracles et cetera) was for this purpose.
- ❖ To demonstrate how to be a disciple to Christians in Rome:
 - ▶ Mark explains Jewish customs (Pharisees 7:2; the preparation day 15:42)
 - ▶ This is portrayed through many of the portraits of Jesus and the Twelve
 - ▶ Jesus as Messiah is being portrayed as caring for his children - the disciples
 - ▶ Jesus teaches about discipleship in light of his death and resurrection

B. To fight the emergence of heretical, theological teachings

If Mark is a later gospel (see above), than it follows that he in narrative form would be addressing similar difficulties addressed more directly by the letters of Paul and Peter

C. To emphasize Jesus as a servant:

- ❖ Jesus proclaims himself as a servant 10:45
- ❖ Matthew identifies Jesus as King, Messiah, but Mark focuses upon Jesus as servant:
 - a. He is the Servant of YHWH
 - b. Mark emphasizes what Jesus does rather than what Jesus says as in Matthew

Structure of the Gospel of Mark

- ❖ **The Beginnings of Jesus' Ministry (1:1–13)**
 - ▶ His Forerunner (1:1–8)
 - ▶ His Baptism (1:9–11)
 - ▶ His Temptation (1:12–13)
- ❖ **Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (1:14–6:29)**
 - ▶ Early Galilean Ministry (1:14–3:12)
 1. Call of the first disciples (1:14–20)
 2. Miracles in Capernaum (1:21–34)
 3. Preaching and healing in Galilee (1:35–45)
 4. Ministry in Capernaum (2:1–22)
 5. Sabbath controversy (2:23–3:12)
 - ▶ Later Galilean Ministry (3:13–6:29)
 1. Choosing the 12 apostles (3:13–19)
 2. Teachings in Capernaum (3:20–35)
 3. Parables of the kingdom (4:1–34)
 4. Calming the Sea of Galilee (4:35–41)
 5. Healing a demon-possessed man (5:1–20)
 6. More Galilean miracles (5:21–43)
 7. Unbelief in Jesus' hometown (6:1–6)
 8. Six apostolic teams preach and heal in Galilee (6:7–13)
 9. King Herod's reaction to Jesus' ministry (6:14–29)

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- ❖ **Strategic Withdrawals from Galilee (6:30-9:29)**
 - ▶ To the Eastern Shore of the Sea of Galilee (6:30-52)
 - ▶ To the Western Shore of the Sea (6:53-7:23)
 - ▶ To Syrian Phoenicia (7:24-30)
 - ▶ To the Region of the Decapolis (7:31-8:10)
 - ▶ To the Vicinity of Caesarea Philippi (8:11-30)
 - ▶ To the Mount of Transfiguration (8:31-9:29)
- ❖ **Final Ministry in Galilee (9:30-50)**
- ❖ **Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (ch. 10)**
 - ▶ Teaching concerning Divorce (10:1-12)
 - ▶ Teaching concerning Children (10:13-16)
 - ▶ The Rich Young Man (10:17-31)
 - ▶ A Request of Two Brothers (10:32-45)
 - ▶ Restoration of Bartimaeus's Sight (10:46-52)
- ❖ **The Passion of Jesus (chs. 11-15)**
 - ▶ The Triumphal Entry (11:1-11)
 - ▶ The Clearing of the Temple (11:12-19)
 - ▶ Concluding Controversies with Jewish Leaders (11:20-12:44)
 - ▶ Signs of the End of the Age (ch. 13)
 - ▶ The Anointing of Jesus (14:1-11)
 - ▶ The Lord's Supper (14:12-26)
 - ▶ The Arrest, Trial and Death of Jesus (14:27-15:47)
- ❖ **The Resurrection of Jesus (ch. 16)**

Theological Themes in Mark

A growing consensus has emerged in recent years that the sacred evangelists were both historians and theologians. They produced accurate histories of the life of Christ and at the same time preached its implications for life in the church. Further, each evangelist had a distinctive message, seen in the way he selected and omitted certain scenes and details. It is therefore accurate to speak of a “theology of Mark.” His major themes will here be traced and an attempt made to delineate the way in which each is seen throughout his Gospel.

Christology

The book itself declares that it is “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” There is a great difference of opinion as to the central emphasis in this regard. Many have thought that Christ/Messiah is predominant and expresses Mark’s portrayal of Jesus as the antitype of the suffering servant of Yahweh. This is then linked to a royal stress in King of Israel (15:32), i.e., in Mark the servant becomes messianic King. While this is no doubt true, it is not the major stress; in fact, Jesus is seen as demanding that this fact be kept secret. Here we find

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the primary critical problem of the Gospel. Every group with which Jesus is involved is forced to silence: the demons (1:23-25, 34; 3:11-12), those healed (1:40-44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26), the disciples (8:30; 9:9). In addition, the leaders are kept from the truth (3:22; 4:10-12; 8:11-12), and Jesus withdraws from the crowds (4:10; 7:17; 9:28) and hides from them (7:24; 9:30). Many have thought that Mark created the theme in order to explain why Jesus was never recognized during his life (Wrede) or to oppose the disciples themselves, whom Mark believed were proclaiming a false gospel (Weeden). However, neither explanation is necessary. The crowds were not allowed to hear such teaching because they considered Jesus to be only a “wonder worker,” and the disciples could not proclaim it due to their own misunderstanding regarding the meaning of his office, i.e., they interpreted it in light of the Jewish expectation of a conquering king rather than a suffering servant. The demons were silenced as part of the “binding of Satan” theme (cf. 3:27 and further below), and the leaders were kept from understanding as sign of God’s rejection of them. On the whole, Mark stresses that Jesus’ messiahship is essentially incognito, hidden from all except those with spiritual insight. In short, while Jesus is indeed a wonder worker, Mark wishes to clarify the implications carefully. In this regard we must note “Son of God,” the title which begins the Gospel (1:1) and occurs at the climax in the centurion’s cry (15:39). The stress on sonship occurs at the baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7) and is a key element in Jesus’ control over the demonic realm (3:11). Further, Jesus is seen as omniscient (2:8; 5:32, 39; 6:48; 8:17; 9:4, 33; 11:2, 14; 12:9; 13:12) and omnipotent over demons, illness, death, and the natural elements. Yet at the same time Mark stressed his humanity: his compassion (1:41; 6:34; 8:2), indignation (3:5; 9:19; 10:14), and his distress and sorrow (14:33-36). Jesus “sighs” (7:34; 8:12) and shows anger (1:43; 3:5); he becomes weary (4:38) and admits limitations regarding miracles (6:5-6) and knowledge (13:32). The balance between these is important and demonstrates that Mark is probably trying to present a balanced picture in order to correct an overly enthusiastic stress on the supernatural aspects.

Mark’s favorite designation is “Son of man,” a term which undoubtedly was Jesus’ own self-designation but which also went beyond to picture the heavenly figure of Dan. 7:13. In Mark it speaks

of his humanity (2:10, 27-28); his betrayal, suffering, and death (the passion predictions of 9:12; 14:21, 41); and his exaltation and future reign (13:26). It is obvious that here we have the correction of misunderstandings regarding his purpose and personhood, especially since it occurs primarily in the second half of the Gospel, where Jesus begins to correct the disciples' views. It seems definite that Mark wishes to combine a *theologia crucis* with a *theologia gloria*. Therefore the so-called messianic secret centers upon the fact that the cross is the path to glory and that Jesus' live exaltation can be understood only by comprehending the significance of his suffering.

The final aspect of Mark's emphases is Jesus as teacher. In the past this designation was usually attributed only to Matthew, but recently it has been more and more recognized that Mark gives Jesus' teaching office prime place in his work. The one who performs such great and mighty deeds is demonstrated as the one who teaches; in fact, the first is subordinate to the second, for it is in his activity as teacher (4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:51; 11:21) that both the disciples and the opponents are confronted with the reality of the Christ event. It is in his teaching that true authority is manifest (1:22), and therefore this may well be the major stress.

Christological Titles attributed to Jesus

Many different titles are used for Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel, with slightly *different origins* and *different meanings*: For the origins and meanings, see my page on Christological Titles in the New Testament. The evangelist Mark seems to prefer "Christ" and "Son of God"; Jesus more often calls himself "Son of Man"; other characters in Mark's Gospel frequently call Jesus "teacher" or a variety of other titles. In Mark, Jesus is occasionally also identified as "the carpenter," the "son of Mary," and as being "from Nazareth."

1. Christ (the "Anointed One"; although Mark only uses the Greek *Christos*, modern English Bibles sometimes translate this as "Messiah").

- ♦ 1:1 - *Mark*: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."
- ♦ 8:29 - [*Jesus*] asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" *Peter* answered him, "You are the Messiah" (cf. parallels).

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- ◆ 9:41 - *Jesus*: "Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward."
 - ◆ 12:35 - *Jesus*: "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David?"
 - ◆ 13:21-22 - *Jesus*: "If anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!' - do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect."
 - ◆ 14:61 - *High priest*: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"
 - ◆ 15:32 - *Authorities*: "Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe."
2. Son of God and related terms (caution: *do not assume* this means "fully divine" yet):
- ❖ 1:1 - *Gospel opening*: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, [the Son of God].
 - ❖ 1:11 - *At Jesus' Baptism*: And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."
 - ❖ 1:24 - *At the first Exorcism*: and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, *the Holy One of God*."
 - ❖ 3:11 - *Evangelist's summary*: Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"
 - ❖ 5:7 - *Gerasene demoniac*: And he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."
 - ❖ 9:7 - *At the Transfiguration*: Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"
 - ❖ 12:6 - *Parable of the Wicked Tenants*: "He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"

- ❖ 13:32 - *Apocalyptic Discourse*: “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”
- ❖ 14:60-62 - *At Jesus’ Trial*: Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” / But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, *the Son of the Blessed One*?” / Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”
- ❖ 15:39 - *At the Crucifixion*: Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

Son of Man (“son of the human being”? - used only by Jesus, as quoted directly or indirectly by the Evangelist):

- ❖ 2:10-11 - “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” - he said to the paralytic - / “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.”
- ❖ 2:27-28 - Then he said to them [Pharisees], “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”
- ❖ 8:31 - Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.
- ❖ 8:38 - “Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”
- ❖ 9:9 - As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.
- ❖ 9:12 - He said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt?”

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- ❖ 9:31 - ...for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”
 - ❖ 10:33-34 - “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; / they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”
 - ❖ 10:45 - “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
 - ❖ 13:26 - “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory” (cf. Dan 7:13).
 - ❖ 14:21 - “For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”
 - ❖ 14:41 - He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”
 - ❖ 14:62 - Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’” (cf. Dan :13; Ps 110:1).
3. Teacher (the most common title other characters in Mark’s Gospel use to address Jesus):
- ❖ 4:38 - But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”
 - ❖ 5:35 - While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?”
 - ❖ 9:17 - Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak;...”
 - ❖ 9:38 - John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

- ❖ 10:17 - As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- ❖ 10:20 - He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.”
- ❖ 10:35 - James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”
- ❖ 12:14 - And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?”
- ❖ 12:19 - “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that ‘if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.’...”
- ❖ 12:32 - Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’;...”
- ❖ 13:1 - As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”
- ❖ 14:14 - “and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ “Rabbi & Rabbouni (another common title of respect, lit. meaning ”my great one”):
- ❖ 9:5 - Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”
- ❖ 10:51 - Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher (rabbouni), let me see again.”
- ❖ 11:21 - Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”
- ❖ 14:45 - So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him.

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4. Prophet (lit. a “spokesperson” for God)

- ◆ Jesus himself never directly claims to be a prophet, but once implies that he is (6:4); various other people think he is a prophet (6:15; 8:28):
- ◆ 1:2 - As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;”
- ◆ 6:4 - Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.”
- ◆ 6:15 - *Anonymous opinions*: But others said, “It is Elijah.” And others said, “It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.”
- ◆ 8:28 - *Jesus’ disciples*: And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”
- ◆ Only two other texts in Mark refer to other prophets: Isaiah (1:2) and John the Baptist (11:32)

5. Kyrios = Lord, Master, Sir

- ◆ Some uses of *Kyrios* clearly refer to God (11:9; 12:29-30; 13:20), others to Jesus (7:28), and still others to human beings (12:9; 13:35; translated “master” or “owner”).
- ◆ Sometimes, however, the use of *kyrios* is ambiguous, possibly referring to God and/or to Jesus (1:3; 5:19; 11:3).
- ◆ The combined title/name “Lord Jesus” is used only once, in the later ending of Mark (16:19).
- ◆ 1:3 - “...the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”
- ◆ 2:28 - “...so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”
- ◆ 5:19 - But Jesus refused, and said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.”
- ◆ 7:28 - But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”
- ◆ 11:3 - “If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’”

- ◆ 11:9 - Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”
 - ◆ 12:9, 11 - “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. / Have you not read this scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; / this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’?”
 - ◆ 12:29-30 - Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; / you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’”
 - ◆ 12:36-37 - “David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ / David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?” And the large crowd was listening to him with delight. (cf. Ps 110:1; Matt 22:44; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34)
 - ◆ 13:20 - “And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut short those days.”
 - ◆ 13:35 - “Therefore, keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,”
 - ◆ [16:19-20 - So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. / And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.]
6. Son of David (directly attributed to Jesus only by Bartimaeus; is it a “royal” or “messianic” title?):
- ◆ 10:46-48 - They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus *son of Timaeus*, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. / When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” / Many sternly ordered him to be

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quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

- ◆ 12:35-37 - While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, “How can the scribes say that *the Messiah* is the son of David? / David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘*The Lord* said to *my Lord*, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ / David himself calls him *Lord*; so how can he be his son?” And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.
 - ◆ See also Mark 11:10 - “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (cf. parallels)
(cf. Matt 21:9 - “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”)
(cf. Luke 19:38 - “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”)
(cf. John 12:13 - “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord - the King of Israel!”)
7. King of the Jews & King of Israel (used only during Jesus’ trial before Pilate):
- ◆ 15:2 - Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “You say so.”
 - ◆ 15:9 - Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”
 - ◆ 15:12 - Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?”
 - ◆ 15:18 - And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!”
 - ◆ 15:26 - The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.”
 - ◆ 15:32 - “Let the *Messiah*, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

8. The Carpenter, the Son of Mary

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- ◆ 6:3 - [*Townsfolk in Nazareth*]: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.
- ◆ Note: Jesus is never called “son of *Joseph*” or “son of the carpenter” in Mark’s Gospel; nor is *Joseph* or any earthly *father* of Jesus ever mentioned.

9. Jesus of/from Nazareth

- ◆ 1:9 - [*Narrator*]: In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.
- ◆ 1:24 - [*Man with an unclean spirit at Capernaum*]: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”
- ◆ 10:47 - [*Bartimaeus*]: When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”
- ◆ 14:67 - [*Girl in the high priest’s courtyard*]: When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.”
- ◆ 16:6 - [*Young man to the women at the Empty Tomb*]: “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.”

Christology expressed in ACTIONS that Jesus performs

1. Jesus Preaches the “Reign of God” (*basileia tou theou*).
 - ◆ 1:14-15 - Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, / and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God* has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”
 - ◆ 4:11 - [*Jesus to his disciples*]: “To you has been given the secret of *the kingdom of God*, but for those outside, everything comes in parables;”
 - ◆ 4:26 - He also said, “*The kingdom of God* is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground...” [*The parable of the seed growing by itself*]

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- ◆ 4:30 - He also said, “With what can we compare *the kingdom of God*, or what parable will we use for it?” [*The parable of the mustard seed*]
- ◆ 9:1 - [*Jesus to a crowd & disciples*]: “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that *the kingdom of God* has come with power.”
- ◆ 9:43, 45, 47 - [*Jesus*]: “If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. / And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. / And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter *the kingdom of God* with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell...”
- ◆ 10:14-15 - But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that *the kingdom of God* belongs. / Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive *the kingdom of God* as a little child will never enter it.”
- ◆ 10:23-25 - Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter *the kingdom of God!*” / And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter *the kingdom of God!* / It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter *the kingdom of God.*”
- ◆ 12:34 - When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from *the kingdom of God.*” After that no one dared to ask him any question.
- ◆ 14:25 - [*Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper*]: “Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in *the kingdom of God.*”
- ◆ 15:43 - Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for *the kingdom of God*, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

- ◆ Note: Jesus and others also speak of earthly “kingdoms” in 3:24; 6:23; and 13:8.
- ◆ Compare what the crowds say as Jesus enter Jerusalem in Mark 11:10 - “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”
- 2. Jesus Acts with “Authority” (*exousia*)
 - ◆ Jesus teaches, forgives, and performs exorcisms, healings and other miracles:
 - ◆ 1:21-27 - They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. / They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having *authority*, and not as the scribes. / Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, / and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” / But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” / And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. / They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching - with *authority*! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”
 - ◆ 2:10-11 - “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has *authority* on earth to forgive sins” - he said to the paralytic - “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.”
 - ◆ 2:28 - “...so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”
 - ◆ 4:39-41 - He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. / He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” / And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”
 - ◆ 9:25 - When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!”
 - ◆ Jesus also gives “authority” to his apostles:

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- ◆ 3:14-15 - And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, / and to have *authority* to cast out demons.
- ◆ 6:7 - He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them *authority* over the unclean spirits.
- ◆ cf. 13:34 - “It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves *in charge*, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch...”
- ◆ Jesus argues with the religious authorities, besting any human “opponents”
- ◆ 2:1-3:6 - A cycle of five controversy stories
- ◆ 11:15-19 - The “Temple Incident”
- ◆ 11:27-33 - Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him / and said, “By what *authority* are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” / Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what *authority* I do these things.” / [*Jesus asks them about John the Baptist*] / So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what *authority* I am doing these things.”
- ◆ 12:1-44 - Another cycle of controversy stories

3. Jesus displays human emotions

- ◆ Mark portrays Jesus as completely human, with a full range of emotions and reactions; but these comments in Mark about Jesus’ emotional states are often omitted in the parallel stories of Matthew and/or Luke:
- ◆ 1:41 - compassion
- ◆ 1:43 - strong displeasure
- ◆ 3:5 - anger & grief
- ◆ 4:40 & 6:5 - amazement at disbelief
- ◆ 6:34 & 7:29 - compassion
- ◆ 8:12 - sighing deeply

- ◆ 10:14 - indignation
- ◆ 10:21 - love
- ◆ 14:33-34 - distress & grief
- ◆ 14:48-49 - questioning
- ◆ Jesus foretells & accepts his upcoming suffering
- ◆ 3:6 - The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.
- ◆ 8:31 - Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.
- ◆ 9:9-13 - As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. / So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. / Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” / He said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? / But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”
- ◆ 9:30-31 - They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; / for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”
- ◆ 10:32-34 - They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, / saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; / they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”
- ◆ 10:38-39 - But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized

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with the baptism that I am baptized with?” / They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized...”

- ♦ 11:18 - And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.
- ♦ 12:1-12 - Then he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. / When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. / But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. / And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. / Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. / He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ / But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ / So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. / What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. / Have you not read this scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; / this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’?” / When they realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away.
- ♦ 14:1 - It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him;
- ♦ 14:22-25- While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” / Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. / He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. / Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

- ♦ 14:32-36 - They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” / He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be *distressed and agitated*. / And he said to them, “*I am deeply grieved, even to death*; remain here, and keep awake.” / And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. / He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; *remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.*”

Cosmic Conflict

In Mark, Christ is presented as the one who “binds” Satan (3:27). Where Matthew centers upon healing miracles, Mark stresses exorcism. This is nowhere seen better than by comparing Mark and Matthew with respect to the healing of the demon-possessed/ epileptic child. Matthew mentions the demon only at the point of the miracle (17:14-18), while Mark relates an amazingly detailed narrative with four separate descriptions of the effects of the possession (9:18, 20, 22, 26). Jesus is pictured as one who violently assaults sin and the cosmic forces of evil. Moreover, he passes on this eschatological ministry to the disciples, who participate with him in his victory (3:15; 6:7, 13; for the problem of 9:18 see below). Implicit in 3:27 also is the idea of “plundering” Satan’s realm. This is certainly the thrust of the exorcism miracles (1:23-26; 3:11-12; 5:6-13; 9:14-27). When the demons utter Jesus’ name, they are not unwittingly acting as his “PR” agents, but rather are trying to gain control of him. In the ancient world (as in many tribal areas today) one would gain power over a spirit-creature by learning his “hidden name.” When Jesus forced silence upon them (1:25, 34; 3:12) or made them reveal their own names (5:9) this signified his mastery over the satanic forces. The authority and other blessings given Jesus’ followers are the spoil from that victory.

Eschatology

Many have stated that Mark is primarily a proponent of a futuristic eschatology, perhaps even calling the church to the imminent parousia in Galilee (Marxsen). Yet the Markan emphasis goes beyond this. According to 1:15, the kingdom has already come, and the time of fulfillment is here. Jesus’ deeds and words demonstrate the presence of the kingdom within history, and Jesus will continue to mediate this

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end-time power until the final consummation of the divine plan (8:38; 13:24-27; 14:62). Therefore the disciple exists in present hope, and Mark's eschatology is "inaugurated" rather than final, i.e., it recognizes the "beginning" of the "end" and the fact that the believer lives in a state of tension between the two.

At the same time we must acknowledge the stress on the future parousia in Mark. The three passages mentioned above (8:33; 13:26; 14:62) show that the suffering of Christ could be understood properly only in light of his coming glory at both the resurrection/exaltation and parousia. One event that illustrates the connection between the resurrection and the eschaton is the transfiguration (9:2-8); when one realizes that it is surrounded by passages on suffering, the point made here becomes clear. The same is true of the Olivet discourse (ch. 13), which demonstrates once more that suffering and persecution lead to glory. Yet even here we are not free of the strong realized stress, for it is seen in the great accent on watchfulness (13:5, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37) which permeates the chapter. The true disciple will be characterized by an expectant alertness in light of the imminent inbreaking of the final kingdom.

The Miracles and Soteriology

One cannot ignore the centrality of the miracle stories, for they form one fifth of the Gospel and 47 percent of the first ten chapters. The basic word, as in all the Synoptics, is "power" (dynamis), which points to the power of God operative in his Son. Mark, however, is careful to stress that the miracles do not form apologetic proof that Jesus is the Christ. The central theme in Mark is that they can be known only by faith; they cannot produce faith. The disciples misunderstand them (4:40; 6:52; 8:17-18), and their effect is diminished by the apparent humanity of Jesus himself (6:1-3; cf. 3:19-21). With the presence of many miracle workers, many of them false prophets (13:22), the common people could draw only erroneous conclusions. Therefore, they needed his teaching and his person to understand properly (1:37-38; 2:5; 4:40; 5:34). Mark was stressing the hiddenness of God in Jesus and wished to demonstrate that even his miracles were only glimmers of the true reality and as such comprehensible only by faith. Further, they are symbols of God's forgiveness; as the miracle is performed, the spiritual need is met (4:35-41; 6:45-52; 7:31-37; 8:22-26).

The connection of the miracles with faith and forgiveness leads to the further point: when faith is present, the miracles point to the salvific power of God in Christ. By actualizing the power and authority of God in the situation, they make the reader cognizant of the radical demands of God. It has often been said that Mark has no true soteriology. Yet that is to deny the implication of such key passages as 10:45, which presents Christ as the one who gave his life “as a ransom for many.” Mark seeks to drive men to decision, which he accomplishes by setting two scenes in contrast, thereby highlighting the issues and demanding encounter with God (e.g., 3:7-12, where the demons acknowledge him, and 3:20-35, where Jesus is called Beelzebub; or 11:12-21, which shows that the cleansing of the temple prefigured the “curse” of God upon Israel). Mark constantly shows men, common people, leaders, and disciples, in the conflict of decision.

Discipleship

The final emphasis in Mark, and in some ways the major emphasis along with Christology, is the discipleship motif. Again there is certainly controversy here, as some have argued that Mark has a negative thrust intended to show the error of the disciples (Weeden). However, this is hardly true of the Gospel as a whole. Mark does wish to stress the radical nature of the call and the difficulties of achieving the goal. However, the reader is expected to identify with the disciples in this dilemma, and it indeed forms the heart of the Gospel.

At the beginning of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus fulfills his own message of repentance (1:15) by calling the disciples to be “fishers of men” (cf. Matt. 4:18-22 and Luke 5:1-11, where it comes much later). Then after the conflict narratives (2:1-3:6) Jesus cements his “withdrawal” (3:7) by turning to the disciples and commissioning them (3:13-19), in a scene filled with election terminology and centering upon their authority and responsibility. Finally, the first segment of the Gospel concludes with a missions scene in which Jesus “sends” his disciples, again with authority and in complete dependence upon God (6:7-13). From here, however, the relationship seems to deteriorate, and the central section of Mark (6:7-8:30) has two themes, the withdrawal of Jesus from the crowds combined with his time with the twelve, and the failure of the disciples to comprehend his teaching. They are amazingly obtuse with respect to all aspects of his teaching and are both uncomprehending (6:52; 7:18; 8:17-18) and even “hardened”

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(6:52; 8:17), a startling term in light of its theological connotations and its presence after the two feeding miracles.

However, once more this failure is not the final point, although it is certainly stressed at the very end, especially if Mark ends at 16:8. Yet in the last section of the Gospel before the passion (8:31-10:52), the solution is seen in the presence of Jesus the teacher, who patiently and lovingly instructs them. Note that in 8:31 Jesus “began to teach” them, an act clearly linked to their failure to understand (8:32-33), which is countered by his instruction (8:34-38). This in itself follows the important healing of the blind man (8:22-26), a two-stage miracle which may have been intended to prefigure a two-stage overcoming of the disciples’ blindness (cf. 8:17-21) via first Peter’s confession (partial sight, as seen in 8:31-33) and then by the transfiguration, which solidified the revelation of God to the disciples. The passion predictions are followed by very serious failures on their part, and at the healing of the demonpossessed child this comes to a crisis when the disciples are unable to perform that which previously had been a significant sign of their authority (cf. 9:18 with 6:13). The solution is seen in awakened faith (9:24) and its response, prayer (9:29). Steps of this growing awakening are seen in the passion narrative, and there the core of the problem becomes even more evident: discipleship is a call to the cross, and it cannot be understood until the cross. The triumphal entry is an incognito message regarding Jesus’ true mission, and it is followed by the judgment on the temple (ch. 11). In three major scenes Jesus begins to lift further the veil, and the disciples are called to understanding, the anointing at Bethany (14:3-9), the eucharistic words at the Last Supper (14:22-25), and Gethsemane (14: 32ff.). Finally, at the resurrection failure is still seen (16:8, with most scholars realizing that the women are to be identified with the disciples), but it is obviated by the promise of Jesus’ presence (16:7). As the reader identifies first with the problem of discipleship and then with Jesus (the solution), victory becomes an act of faith. The theme of discipleship will be discussed in detail in the coming lesson.

Chapter 3

Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark

When the Gospels are read as separate texts, it becomes apparent that each writer emphasized certain themes. Matthew's Gospel strongly emphasizes Jesus's role as the one who fulfilled scripture. (By way of contrast, Mark virtually never mentions this.) In Matthew, Jesus is the "new Moses" who brings to fruition all that had been prophesied. In Luke, there is a definite emphasis on marginalized people: widows, orphans, the poor, the ill, and women take center stage as Jesus interacts with them. While there is some of this material in Mark's Gospel, it is much more subtle. John's Gospel is very cosmic and philosophical, and the distance between it and Mark's Gospel is quite great here. By contrast, the spotlight is almost always on the idea of discipleship in Mark; there is general agreement among scholars that discipleship is a key theme in this text.

Mark wrote his gospel sometime during or soon after the Roman Jewish war in 66-74 CE. Roman oppression led to numerous Jewish uprisings, involving great bloodshed. Finally, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and burned the temple in 70 CE. This destruction traumatized Christians and Jews alike. Against this background, Mark

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writes his gospel. One of the reasons for the composition was to reassure and instruct his readers in their faith. His main vehicle of instruction is the disciples. Mark presents the disciples in a harsher manner than the other three gospels. However, Mark's severe depiction of the disciples serves a powerful purpose: to teach the readers about true discipleship.

The way that each Gospel begins showcases how each writer shapes his distinct themes. Matthew's Gospel launches with a genealogical list that ties Jesus to the time of the Old Testament, and the story includes multiple explicit references to the idea that the events surrounding Jesus's birth fulfilled scriptural prophecies (Matthew 1:22, 2:5, 2:15, and 2:17.) Luke's Gospel begins with the private struggles of an older, infertile woman (Luke 1:7) and a young woman (Luke 1:27). John's Gospel, by starting with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," makes its philosophical and cosmic dimensions clear. By way of contrast, Mark begins his Gospel not with an exploration of Jesus's link to the Old Testament or a focus on marginalized people or a philosophical exploration, but a disciple: John the Baptist, who prepares people to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Mark's exploration of discipleship continues throughout the entire Gospel. If the author is the same person who is mentioned in Acts 15, then discipleship was a particularly tender topic for him: Paul was planning a missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul refused because John Mark had abandoned a previous missionary voyage (see Acts 15:38). If John Mark wrote this Gospel, then we know that he has had serious challenges in his own experience of discipleship (although we do not know the circumstances around his absconding from that assignment). If the immediate setting for Mark's Gospel is either the persecution that followed the fire in Rome or the Jewish War, then the audience might have been particularly concerned about what it meant to be a true disciple in a time of intense trial, as well as what might happen to those who experience setbacks and personal failures as disciples. We find that not just discipleship, but failed discipleship, is a core theme in Mark's Gospel.

Mark shows Jesus's disciples making significant mistakes: they don't understand the parables (Mark 4:13; this material is not found in

the other Gospels), they don't understand what Jesus teaches (Mark 8:14-21), Peter rebukes Jesus for his teachings (Mark 8:32-33), they fail when they try to perform miracles (Mark 9:14-29), they argue about who is best (Mark 9:33-34), they ask for positions of honor (Mark 10:35-40), Judas turns Jesus in to the authorities (Mark 14:10-11, 18-21, and 41-46), the disciples fall asleep when Jesus asked them to watch (Mark 34-41), Peter denies that he knows Jesus (Mark 14:29-31 and 66-72), the disciples all flee when Jesus is arrested (Mark 14:50-52), and the women leave the tomb in silence (Mark 16:8). In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus's disciples are far from flawless; instead, they are learners who repeatedly stumble. This may or may not relate to Mark's own experiences, but it does serve an important role in the narrative: the obtuseness of the disciples provides ample teaching opportunities for Jesus (which then become opportunities for the audience to learn) and also allows for Jesus to showcase his patience and faith in their eventual success. Joanna Dewey writes, "The very fact that Mark's story is being told suggests that Mark views failure as part of continuing disciple-ship." The failures of the disciples -and Jesus's patience in continuing to teach them - become a subtle testimony of the power of the atonement to bridge the gap between human inadequacy and the demands of discipleship. It may also highlight the importance of Pentecost: the role of the Holy Ghost is emphasized as we see how poorly the disciples function without it.

First, Mark presents the disciples in a positive light to encourage identification. In 1:16-20, the disciples respond to Jesus' call to follow him. Because the readers are also followers of Christ, they immediately identify with the disciples. Subsequent scenes reinforce this positive image. Jesus' appointment of the twelve in 3:13-19 shows they were specially selected for their roles. The next section, 3:20-35, suggests that the disciples are Jesus' true family. In 4:11, Jesus says he will give them the mystery of the kingdom of God. Then, in 6:7-13, the disciples are sent out on a mission where they experience success in preaching, healing and casting out demons.

After creating a strong identification between the readers and the disciples, Mark presents the failures of the disciples. Mark arranges their failures around three boat scenes, three passion predictions, and the arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

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- ❖ The first boat scene is in 4:35-41, After witnessing healings and receiving private instruction, the disciples still become afraid when Jesus calms the storm. They ask, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (4:41). For the first time, the readers question whether the disciples will understand Jesus and his purpose.
- ❖ The second boat scene in 6:45-52 follows the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walks on water and calms the sea, and the disciples’ response of amazement falls short of true understanding. The feeding of the five thousand gave the disciples a glimpse of Jesus’ divine sonship, and Jesus’ use of “It is I” (6:50) also alludes to divinity. Yet, the disciples failed to see these signs. Mark says the disciples’ hearts were hardened, a condition previously used to describe the Pharisees in 3:5.
- ❖ The third boat scene in 8:14-21 functions as the climax of the two preceding boat scenes, After taking part in two feeding miracles, the disciples worry about not having enough bread, and Jesus warns them about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Verse 18 references 4:11-12, comparing the disciples to outsiders, who have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear. This scene intimates that the disciples have already fallen prey to the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod: blindness.

The three boat scenes cause the readers, drawn to the disciples, to evaluate themselves in light of the disciples’ failures. The boat scenes show the disciples’ fear, lack of trust, and concern for themselves. Above all else, they show the disciples’ lack of understanding as to who Jesus is. Because of Mark’s introduction of Jesus in 1:1, the readers know exactly who Jesus is, but these scenes lead them to reconsider their view, evaluating whether they acknowledge Jesus’ complete divinity and authority.

The disciples’ next failures are arranged around three passion predictions. The first prediction in 8:31 follows Peter’s confession of Christ in 8:29. At first, the reader may assume that the disciples finally understand who Jesus is. However, Peter’s rebuke of Jesus after Jesus’ prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection shows this assumption to be false. Peter’s confession is only partially correct because he does not understand Jesus’ true mission. Jesus then issues a call to discipleship, emphasizing that to follow him means to take up the cross, a way of persecution and suffering.

The second passion prediction in 9:31 says the disciples do not understand but are afraid to ask. This lack of understanding becomes apparent in 9:33-34 which relates the disciples' conversations about which of them is the greatest. Even after two passion predictions and Jesus' call to true discipleship, they still hold onto the view that the messiah will bring a kingdom of power and glory. Jesus again attempts to clear the disciples' vision in 9:35-37. He tells them that power and glory come only when one assumes the role of a servant.

A similar incident follows the third passion prediction in 10:33-34. Jesus again predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection, and immediately afterwards, James and John ask to sit at his right and left hand in glory. This request shows the disciples' blindness most sharply. James and John are not asking for positions of glory as they suppose but positions of death and suffering beside Jesus on the cross. Jesus follows this request with a symbolic reference to his death and a reminder that to be great, one must follow his example and be a servant.

The readers are again compelled to embark on self-evaluation during these three passion predictions. The failures involve a rejection of suffering and a desire for personal power and glory. Jesus' teachings after each passion prediction reveal the true way of discipleship: a way of servanthood, suffering, and death. The readers examine their own lives to see if they are following the way of the cross.

Following Jesus

An unexpected twist to the discipleship theme is that, in contrast to the twelve disciples who were chosen by Jesus, minor characters who choose to follow Jesus are much better disciples. This group includes the paralytic whose sins are forgiven (Mark 2:1-12), the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5:21-43), the Syro-phenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), the widow donating to the temple (Mark 12:41-44), and the woman who anoints Jesus (Mark 14:3-9). In Mark's Gospel, the people that Jesus chooses to be disciples tend to do very poorly, while those who choose to follow Jesus seem to have a much better understanding of what it means to be a disciple. Perhaps the principle that the first shall be last and the last shall be first (see Mark 10:31) applies to coming to an understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

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Jesus's teachings on discipleship also feature prominently in this Gospel. In Mark 8:34, Jesus says, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Note how Jesus is emphasizing the costs - not the benefits - of discipleship here. Jesus does not encourage people to follow him because they will find happiness or wealth or community, but he explains to them that being a disciple means self-sacrifice and persecution. Similarly, in Mark 9:35, Jesus says, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." This word for "servant" finds its root in the idea of performing simple, menial, physical acts of service. Jesus is not promising them status or power - he's asking them to wait tables and tend to other physical needs. Even the highest-status males are expected to do the kind of work that was typically the sole domain of low-status females; as Joanna Dewey describes it, "The Twelve are called to do women's work." Similarly, women in this Gospel are invited to join in work normally restricted to men: theological discussions (see Mark 7:24-30), the ritual of anointing (see Mark 14:3-9), and following a teacher (see Mark 15:40).

Throughout the text, Mark carefully structures the message on discipleship: the twelve are shown to fail again and again. Jesus does not break faith with them, but rather continues to patiently teach them. At the end of the Gospel, the reference to Peter in Mark 16:7 continues this pattern: despite three outright denials that Peter even knew Jesus, it is assumed that Peter's discipleship will continue. This would have been a very comforting message to Mark's early audience, and perhaps to Mark himself. Jesus is patient with disciples, even when they make mistakes. And not minor mistakes - even when they fundamentally misunderstand his mission, betray him, deny him, and are afraid at the news of the Resurrection, he does not abandon them. They are continually invited to continue following him.

Passion Narrative and the last set of failures by the disciples

In 14:10-11, Judas Iscariot makes a deal with the chief priests, and in 14:43-45, he betrays Jesus with a kiss. Mark says three times (14:10, 20, 43) that Judas is one of the Twelve, highlighting his intimate relationship with Christ and emphasizing the treachery of his betrayal. Next, Gethsemane shows the final failure of the disciples to accept the way of suffering. While praying at Gethsemane, Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to keep watch and pray. However, as Jesus accepts his impending death, the three disciples sleep. Then, at the crucial

hour of Jesus' arrest, the disciples flee in terror. When seen in light of 14:31, where they communally pledged to die with Jesus, their desertion is even more devastating. The last failure is Peter's denial of Jesus, 14:66-72. As Jesus confesses before the high priest, Peter rejects Jesus before a servant girl and anonymous bystanders. Jesus' confession brings death, while Peter's rejection is an effort to save his life.

Throughout this set of failures, the readers evaluate their devotion to Christ and their acceptance of the way of suffering. Several positive examples of discipleship within this section aid the readers in their self-assessment. The woman at Bethany (14:3-9) portrays the absolute devotion of authentic discipleship.[13] Simon the Cyrene (15:21) fulfills the command in 8:34 by carrying Jesus' cross, which symbolizes taking up the cross of suffering. The centurion at the cross (15:39) contrasts Peter's denial with the only true confession of Christ in the entire book. In addition, Joseph of Arimathea (15:43) buries Jesus, a task which the disciples did not have the courage to do. Alongside the negative examples of the disciples, these minor characters help in the readers' self-evaluation.

Mark's presentation of the disciples teaches the readers about authentic discipleship by providing examples by which to compare themselves. Although Mark wrote specifically to the early church, believers today can also benefit from the lessons on Jesus' divinity, suffering, servanthood, and devotion. Believers can profit from the reminder that Jesus was not just a good man, a teacher, or a prophet but the Son of God with divine authority. Christians worldwide suffer daily for their faith. This gospel serves as a reassurance that they are following in the way of the cross and exemplifying true discipleship. While society places high importance on personal achievement and power, Mark reminds modern-day readers that true discipleship demands humility and servanthood. In addition, many people today separate faith from other aspects of their lives. This book reminds believers that being a disciple of Christ means complete devotion in all areas. The gospel of Mark crosses time in its message of discipleship and its relevance will never wane.

Messianic Secrecy in Mark

The problem of the messianic secret in Mark is posed squarely by William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1902,

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first translated 1971 [this is an indication of the importance of reading German; Bultmann's great work, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, was first translated in 1968, nearly 50 years after publication]). According to Wrede the messianic secret is a prohibition to make known the messianic character of Jesus. It is to be seen in

- Commands to silence addressed to the demons which acknowledge his power: 1.34; 3.12.
- Instructions not to make his healing-miracles public: 1.43-45; 5.43; 7.36; 8.26.
- Teaching to the disciples in private: 4.34; 7.17-23; 9.28; 8.31; 9.31; 10.32-34; 13.3.
- Commands to silence addressed to the disciples: 8.30 and 9.9.
- The parable-theory, 4.10-13, by which the parables are said to be intended to obscure the message so that outsiders may not understand.

Wrede saw all this as one phenomenon. He rules out from history any theory such as a progression in the revealing of Jesus' personality, on the correct grounds that the time-framework of the gospels is imposed on the material by the evangelist, and must therefore be attributed to his theology rather than to historical reality. Carried to its logical conclusion this would show that we cannot know how revelation progressed; however, it leaves open the possibility that gradual revelation was Mk's intention. Wrede interprets the whole as an attempt made by Mark to account for the fact that Jesus was not accepted as messiah: he simply made no messianic claims public. Wrede held that the earliest and most authentic Christian belief was that Jesus became messiah at the resurrection - whence 9.9, authorising publication of the knowledge after the resurrection -and it was only with the development of Christology that his followers came to hold that his whole life had been messianic.

One of Wrede's most positive reasons for maintaining that the 'secret' was unhistorical is that some of Jesus' miracles simply would not have been able to be kept quiet, for example the raising of Jairus' daughter, 5.43. On the one hand the crowds gather to be healed and to acclaim Jesus; on the other he attempts to silence them. But he simply does not act as a man who wants to stay hidden! The commands to silence simply ring unrealistically and unhistorically. There are also

some judderings, e.g. when the commands to silence are disobeyed, or not even given after a miracle. It is unlikely that historical commands of Jesus which were disobeyed were recorded, and some non-historical explanation for this would be preferable.

The major Christological contention of Wrede cannot be upheld. Even if the commands to silence after the miracles of healing are invented subsequently, the fact of these miracles (unless they too are invented) must constitute a messianic claim; this is made clear in the Mt 11.2-6//Lk saying, where the meaning of the healing-miracles as the fulfilment of Isaiah's predictions is explained to the messengers of John the Baptist; but the whole tone of Jesus' proclamation, from its first opening with 'The kingship of God has come near' (1.14-15), is messianic. A much larger demolition-job needs to be done on the historicity of Mark if all public messianic indications are to be removed from the lifetime of Jesus. The miraculous feedings are a sign that Jesus is a second Moses, and so a messianic figure. Peter's messianic confession cannot have been invented subsequently because of its slur on the chief apostle. The messianic entry into Jerusalem may have been built up, but the deliberate entry on a donkey must have been intended by Jesus messianically. Finally the cleansing of the Temple must have messianic overtones, as the reaction to it by the Jewish authorities shows, both in their demand for Jesus' authority and in the accusation at the trial.

It is further impossible to explain Jesus' own claims unless they include messianic overtones. In particular his assembly of his own little community of the Twelve, his own *qahal* (= community, 3.13-14), parallel to Israel, implies that he is the representative of the Lord who originally gathered Israel to be his own special people. The same (delegated?) divine authority is implied by the claim to forgive sin (2.10) and to be Lord of the Sabbath (2.28). Particularly related to the end-time expectation of the messiah is the claim to be the bridegroom (2.19).

Is It Markan Finding or Rising from Historical Jesus?

The second question, however, remains: did Mark impose the secret on the material or does it genuinely go back to Jesus? In either case, what is its sense? Before these questions are discussed, the extent of the secret must be somewhat pared down. It is possible that not all the evidence assembled by Mark in fact belongs together.

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1. The concept of further private teaching to an inner group is quite different from the positive withholding of information implied by a secret. This private teaching could be simply a literary move (common elsewhere, e.g. Plato) to give the chance for further teaching and explanation. In addition, much of the private instruction to the disciples has nothing to do with the personality of Jesus: 7.17-23 concerns the meaning of Jesus' imaged teaching on clean and unclean foods; 9.28-29 teaches the disciples that certain spirits can be driven out only with prayer; 13.3ff concerns the future of the Temple and of the community. None of these, therefore, concerns a messianic secret. This limits private instruction about the person of Jesus to the great prophecies of the passion, 8.31; 9.31; 10.32-34; these must all be seen in the light of 9.9, the injunction to keep his identity secret until after the resurrection.

2. The matter of parabolic method of teaching must certainly be considered separately from the general matter of secrecy. Dunn, in his 1970/1974 article in Tuckett, p. 128-9, stresses *ta. pa,nta* in 4.11, balanced by the Markan 4.34 'without parables he did not speak to them': all Jesus' teaching was in parable (or imaged) because this forceful, imaged sort of teaching was the only way in which such a new teaching and new mindset could be conveyed. Jesus chose this method 'Rather than a straightforward statement of certain truths which would register on most of his hearers' understanding but make no impact on their emotions or their will.' It is certainly true that virtually all Jesus' teaching makes thorough-going and constant use of images; this is only to be expected from a near eastern charismatic teacher - or indeed, probably any effective modern communicator.

But this is not the whole story, for the parabolic teaching is viewed by Mark as obscure and needing clarification: 4.34 'but to the disciples he interpreted everything' (*evpilu,w* is used primarily of interpreting dreams or visions). The *i`na* of 4.12 must be taken seriously, and may not be brushed under the carpet as a Markan misunderstanding of an Aramaic *d`*, giving the same sense as Matthew's 'because'. However, despite the fact that in the Old Testament God is frequently said to harden hearts (e.g. Pharaoh's), it is difficult to imagine that deliberate obscurity was Jesus' intention. Raisanen insists that Mk's claim here (4.11, 34) that all the teaching to the crowds was in parables is simply not true: in 8.34 Jesus teaches the crowds as well as his disciples about taking up the cross. Nor can the crowds have wholly failed to

understand his teaching, 1.22 and 11.18 evxeph,ssonto at his teaching; 1.27 the impressive dida, ch kai, nh kat evxousi, an must have been at least partly understood. The stylistic indications are that Mk 4 is a composite chapter, for Mark very frequently joins on a new saying with kai. ev, legen auvtoi/j (vv. 11, 34) or more simply kai. ev, legen (vv. 9, joining on a serviceable warning-phrase which occurs also v. 23 and 7.16; v. 24, introducing an unconnected proverb which occurs also in the Targum of Isaiah; vv. 26, 30, introducing the parables of the Seed Growing Secretly and the Mustard Seed respectively). The run of the disciples' question in v. 10 and Jesus' answer in v. 13 is much smoother if the intervening verses are removed.

The whole atmosphere of the pair of verses is in fact Pauline: musth, rion is used nowhere else in the Gpp, but 8 times in Rm and 1 Co, and 10 times in ColEph, always in this sense in the singular (Mt and Lk change the singular into plural, which certainly fits this context better; the singular sounds thoroughly puzzling).

- ❖ The phrase ta. pa, nta is not used elsewhere in GppAc (except Ac 17.25, in a different sense), but 26 times in Paul.
- ❖ The phrase oi' evxw. occurs only here outside Paul, but 5 times in Paul; the idea of the division into insiders and outsiders is Pauline. It has no place in the ministry of Jesus.
- ❖ The idea of God hardening the hearts of the Jews is itself Pauline: Rm 9.18. It is perhaps not without significance that in Acts 28.26 Paul's last words to the Jews quote the same passage of Isaiah. The function of the explicit quotation in Mark may be no more than to stress that the scripture is fulfilled.

It may well be, therefore, as Raisanen suggests, that these verses reflect the difficulties experienced by the apostolic missionaries to the Jews ('a sort of compendium of mission problems', p. 135) rather than Jesus' own experiences, let alone his intentions. However, the fact that it does not stem from Jesus does not remove this passage from the Markan problem.

It might, nevertheless, be reasonable to localise the problem and suggest that it can be safely applied only to the parables rather than to Jesus' teaching as a whole. After the first parable of the Sower, Mark brackets the remainder of his parable-chapter with these reminders of their need for explanation. He again harks back to the same subject,

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the revealing of what is concealed, between the Explanation of the Sower and the remaining pair of parables. Did perhaps Mark himself find parables especially different? Outside the parable-chapter he uses only one story-parable, compared to the dozen used by Mt and Lk.

3. We are left with three phenomena, commands to silence addressed to demons, to those healed and to the disciples. The first two of these can hardly be historical: Jesus cannot have intended simultaneously to make a public impression and to hide away. Attempts have been made to differentiate between cases, to substantiate the historicity of the commands by explaining why they are sometimes missing. The Gerasene ex-demoniac is told to spread the news in his region, but then he is in the Decapolis which makes him a special case. The blind man at Bethsaida is forbidden even to go into the village (presumably a form of silence-injunction, 8.26) but Bartimaeus at Jericho is not prevented from following Jesus on the road (10.52); but then it is too late for silence as Jesus approaches Jerusalem. Anyone standing at the bottom of the Wadi Qilt on the tell of Herodian Jericho is well aware that Jerusalem, where the full revelation of Jesus is to occur, is only a couple of hours walk away. The Bartimaeus-incident is the immediate prelude to the exposure of the secret. In any case, exceptions do not necessarily prove a rule.

4. The commands addressed to demons must be seen as particularly difficult to accept as historical if the whole concept of demon-expulsion is seen as a mythical way of understanding the healing of an inexplicable and partly psychological illness through the force of Jesus' personality. It is psychologically plausible that the sick person, in the emotional and tortured moment of break of tension, should give an inarticulate cry; it is this which the gospel tradition reasonably interprets as an acknowledgement of Jesus' personality, putting the sounds in the form of a verbal recognition. The statement thus becomes wholly Christian and theological.

Messianic Secrecy and the Proclamation of the Kingdom

The commands to silence addressed to the disciples cannot directly be gainsaid. But when they were sent out to preach, what did they preach? A kingdom without mention of Jesus? The coming of the kingship of God through their own miraculous powers, without reference to their Master? At any rate, until Caesarea Philippi, the commands to silence refer primarily to the person of Jesus. He seeks

to focus attention on the kingdom rather than on his own person. This explains why (if their mission is historical) they could preach at all before they had understood his personal messiahship.

The answer to this question therefore provides the answer to the theology behind the secrecy commands. The structure of Mark's gospel makes clear that the instruction into Jesus' personality comes in two stages: first, leading up to Caesarea Philippi, the gradual process of learning that Jesus is messiah. This is prepared by the blindness of the disciples suddenly being shattered at the symbolic healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. But the first silence-command to the disciples comes immediately after it (8.30), showing that this knowledge is not yet sufficient. They have still to learn what sort of messiah is Jesus. The second command (whose explicit mention of the resurrection excludes at least verbal historicity) is related explicitly to the resurrection (9.9); it is only then that they will have received the full message. At this stage a third element may be introduced, the centurion's confession (15.39). This public protestation in a public scene must be significant, the more so because it is made by a gentile and because it uses the title 'son of God' which is of such significance for Mark. It would seem that for Mark as for John the moment of the resurrection has already begun in the death of Jesus.

The secret therefore has a twofold function:

1. It is part of Mark's theology of the cross. The message of suffering was not easy to understand. In fact the presentation of Jesus as the Suffering Servant (the Voice at the Baptism quotes Is 42.1, the opening of the first Servant Song, etc) was a complete novelty in messianic thought. It took time to digest, and without it the message would not be ready for preaching. Mk is insisting that any message of Jesus which does not include the cross and resurrection is incomplete. Those who are forbidden to spread the Good News are so prevented because they cannot yet know the full import of that Good News.

2. It is a function of Mark's irony. If Mark is to maintain the dual level of discourse which is the basis of all irony, he cannot allow the actors in the drama to come too quickly to a realisation of Jesus' identity. Hence his insertion on various occasions of the secrecy commands (stylistically shown to be his own work) and of the parable-secret, which originally had a quite other import.

Chapter 4

Mark 1:1, Gospel of the Son of God

The history of the word in the New Testament books is worth notice. It seldom occurs in those lives of our Lord which now are emphatically so called, and where it does occur, it is 'the gospel of the Kingdom' quite as frequently as 'the gospel' of the King. The word is never used in Luke, and only twice in the Acts of the Apostles, both times in quotations. The Apostle John never employs it, either in his 'gospel' or in his epistles, and in the Apocalypse the word is only once found, and then it may be a question whether it refers to the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. John thought of the word which he had to proclaim as 'the message,' 'the witness,' 'the truth,' rather than as 'the gospel.' We search for the expression in vain in the epistles of James, Jude, and to the Hebrews. Thrice it is used by Peter. The great bulk of the instances of its occurrence are in the writings of Paul, who, if not the first to use it, at any rate is the source from which the familiar meaning of the phrase, as describing the sum total of the revelation in Jesus Christ, has flowed. The various connections in which the word is employed are remarkable and instructive. We can but touch lightly on the more important lessons which they are fitted to teach.

1. The Gospel is the 'Gospel of Christ'

On our Lord's own lips and in the records of His life we find, as has already been noticed, the phrase, 'the gospel of the kingdom'-the good news of the establishment on earth of the rule of God in the hearts and lives of men. The person of the King is not yet defined by it. The diffused dawn floods the sky, and upon them that sit in darkness the greatness of its light shines, before the sun is above the horizon. The message of the Forerunner proclaimed, like a herald's clarion, the coming of the Kingdom, before he could say to a more receptive few, 'Behold the Lamb of God.' The order is first the message of the Kingdom, then the discovery of the King. And so that earlier phrase falls out of use, and when once Christ's life had been lived, and His death died, the gospel is no longer the message of an impersonal revolution in the world's attitude to God's will, but the biography of Him who is at once first subject and monarch of the Kingdom of Heaven, and by whom alone we are brought into it. The standing expression comes to be 'the gospel of Christ.'

It is His, not so much because He is the author, as because He is the subject of it. It is the good news about Christ. He is its contents and great theme. And so we are led up at once to the great central peculiarity of Christianity, namely that it is a record of historical fact, and that all the world's life and blessedness lie in the story of a human life and death. Christ is Christianity. His biography is the good news for every child of man.

Neither a philosophy nor a morality, but a history, is the true good news for men. The world is hungry, and when it cries for bread wise men give it a stone, but God gives it the fare it needs in the bread that comes down from Heaven. Though it be of small account in many people's eyes, like the common barley cakes, the poor man's food, it is what we all need; and humble people, and simple people, and uneducated people, and barbarous people, and dying people, and the little children can all eat and live. They would find little to keep them from starving in anything more ambitious, and would only break their teeth in mumbling the dry bones of philosophies and moralities. But the story of their Brother who has lived and died for them feeds heart and mind and will, fancy and imagination, memory and hope, nourishes the whole nature into health and beauty, and alone deserves to be called good news for men.

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All that the world needs lies in that story. Out of it have come peace and gladness to the soul, light for the understanding, cleansing for the conscience, renovation for the will, which can be made strong and free by submission, a resting-place for the heart, and a starting-point and a goal for the loftiest flights of hope. Out of it have come the purifying of family and civic life, the culture of all noble social virtues, the sanctity of the household, and the elevation of the state. The thinker has found the largest problems raised and solved therein. The setting forth of a loftier morality, and the enthusiasm which makes the foulest nature aspire to and reach its heaven-touching heights, are found together there. To it poet and painter, architect and musician, owe their noblest themes. The good news of the world is the story of Christ's life and death. Let us be thankful for its form; let us be thankful for its substance.

But we must not forget that, as Paul, who is so fond of the word, has taught us, the historical fact needs some explanation and commentary to make the history a gospel. He has declared to us 'the gospel which he preached,' and to which he ascribes saving power, and he gives these as its elements, 'How that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.' There are three facts-death, burial, resurrection. These are the things that any eye could have seen. Are these the gospel? Is there any saving power in them? Not unless you add the commentary 'for our sins,' and 'according to the Scriptures.' That death was a death for us all, by which we are delivered from our sins-that is the main thing; and in subordination to that thought, the other that Christ's death was the accomplishment of prophecies-these make the history a gospel. The bare facts, without the exhibition of their purpose and meaning, are no more a gospel than any other story of a death would be. The facts with any lower explanation of their meaning are no gospel, any more than the story of the death of Socrates or any innocent martyr would be. If you would know the good news that will lift your heavy heart from sorrow and break your chains of sin, that will put music into your life and make your days blaze into brightness as when the sunlight strikes some sullen mountain-side that lay black in shadow, you must take the fact with its meaning, and find your gospel in the life and death of Him who is more than example and more than martyr. 'How that

Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures,' is 'the gospel of Christ.'

2. The Gospel of Christ is the 'Gospel of God'

This form of the expression, though by no means so frequent as the other, is found throughout Paul's epistles, thrice in the earliest-Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:8), once in the great Epistle to the Romans (Romans 1:1), once in Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:7), and once in a modified form in the pathetic letter from the dungeon, which the old man addressed to his 'son Timothy' (1 Timothy 1:11). It is also found in the writings of Peter (1 Peter 4:17). In all these cases the phrase, 'the gospel of God,' may mean the gospel which has God for its author or origin, but it seems rather to mean 'which has God for its subject.'

It was, as we saw, mainly designated as the good news about Jesus Christ, but it is also the good news about God. So in one and the same set of facts we have the history of Jesus and the revelation of God. They are not only the biography of a man, but they are the unveiling of the heart of God. These Scripture writers take it for granted that their readers will understand that paradox, and do not stop to explain how they change the statement of the subject matter of their message, in this extraordinary fashion, between their Master who had lived and died on earth, and the Unseen Almightyness throned above all heavens. How comes that to be?

It is not that the gospel has two subjects, one of which is the matter of one portion, and the other of another. It does not sometimes speak of Christ, and sometimes rise to tell us of God. It is always speaking of both, and when its subject is most exclusively the man Christ Jesus, it is then most chiefly the Father God. How comes that to be? Surely this unconscious shifting of the statement of their theme, which these writers practise as a matter of course, shows us how deeply the conviction had stamped itself on their spirits, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' and how the point of view from which they had learned to look on all the sweet and wondrous story of their Master's life and death, was that of a revelation of the deepest heart of God.

And so must we look on that whole career, from the cradle to the cross, from Calvary to Olivet, if we are to know its deepest tenderness

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and catch its gladdest notes. That such a man has lived and died is beautiful, and the portrait will hang for ever as that of the fairest of the children of men. But that in that life and death we have our most authentic knowledge of what God is, and that all the pity and truth, the gentleness and the brotherliness, the tears and the self-surrender, are a revelation to us of God; and that the cross, with its awful sorrow and its painful death, tells us not only how a man gave himself for those whom he loved, but how God loves the world and how tremendous is His law-this is good news of God indeed. We have to look for our truest knowledge of Him not in the majesties of the starry heavens, nor in the depths of our own souls, not in the scattered tokens of His character given by the perplexed order of the world, nor in the intuitions of the wise, but in the life and death of His Son, whose tears are the pity of God as well as the compassion of a man, and in whose life and death the whole world may behold 'the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,' and be delivered from all their fears of an angry, and all their doubts of an unknown, God.

There is a double modification of this phrase. We hear of 'the gospel of the grace of God' and 'the gospel of the glory of God,' which latter expression, rendered in the English version misleadingly 'the glorious gospel,' is given in its true shape in the Revised Version. The great theme of the message is further defined in these two noteworthy forms. It is the tender love of God in exercise to lowly creatures who deserve something else that the gospel is busy in setting forth, a love which flows forth unbought and unmotivated save by itself, like some stream from a hidden lake high up among the pure Alpine snows. The story of Christ's work is the story of God's rich, unmerited love, bending down to creatures far beneath, and making a radiant pathway from earth to heaven, like the sevenfold rainbow. It is so, not merely because this mission is the result of God's love, but also because His grace is God's grace, and therefore every act of Christ which speaks His own tenderness is therein an apocalypse of God.

The second of these two expressions, 'the gospel of the glory of God,' leads up to that great thought that the true glory of the divine nature is its tenderness. The lowliness and death of Christ are the glory of God! Not in the awful attributes which separate that inconceivable Nature from us, not in the eternity of His existence, nor in the Infinitude of His Being, not in the Omnipotence of His unwearied

arm, nor in fire-eyed Omniscience, but in the pity and graciousness which bend lovingly over us, is the true glory of God. These pompous 'attributes' are but the fringes of the brightness, the living white heart of which is love. God's glory is God's grace, and the purest expression of both is found there, where Jesus hangs dying in the dark, The true throne of God's glory is not builded high in a remote heaven, flashing intolerable brightness and set about with bending principalities and powers, but it is the Cross of Calvary. The story of the 'grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,' with its humiliation and shame, is the 'gospel of the grace,' and therefore is the 'gospel of the glory, of God.'

3. The good news of Christ and of God is the gospel of our salvation and peace

We read of 'the gospel of your salvation' (Ephesians 1:13), and in the same letter (Mark 6:15) of 'the gospel of peace.' In these expressions we pass from the consideration of the author or of the subject matter of the good news to that of its purpose and issue. It is meant to bring to men, and it does in fact bring to all who accept it, those wide and complex blessings described by those two great words.

That good news about Christ and God brings to a man salvation, if he believes it. To know and feel that I have a loving Father who has so cared for me and all my brethren that He has sent His Son to live and die for me, is surely enough to deliver me from all the bonds and death of sin, and to quicken me into humble consecration to His service. And such emancipation from the burden and misery of sin, from the gnawing consciousness of evil and the weakening sense of guilt, from the dominion of wrong tastes and habits, and from the despair of ever shaking them off which is only too well grounded in the experience of the past, is the beginning of salvation for each of us. That great keyword of the New Testament covers the whole field of positive and negative good which man can need or God can give. Negatively it includes the removal of every evil, whether of the nature of sorrow or of sin, under which men can groan. Positively it includes the endowment with all good, whether of the nature of joy or of purity, which men can hope for or receive. It is past, present, and future, for every heart that accepts 'the word of the truth of the gospel'-past, inasmuch as the first effect of even the most incomplete acceptance is to put us in a new position and attitude towards the law of God, and to plant the

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germs of all holiness and joy in our souls; present, inasmuch as salvation is a growing possession and a continuous process running on all through our lives, if we be true to ourselves and our calling; future, inasmuch as its completion waits to be unveiled in another order of things, where perfect purity and perfect consecration shall issue in perfect joy. And all this ennobling and enriching of human nature is produced by that good news about the grace and glory of God and of Christ, if we will only listen to it, and let it work its work on our souls.

Substantially the same set of facts is included under that other expression, ‘the gospel of peace.’ The Hebrew use of the word ‘peace’ as a kind of shorthand for all good is probably to be remembered. But even in the narrower sense of the word, how great are the blessings set forth by it! All inward serenity and outward calm, the tranquillity of a soul free from the agitations of emotion and the storms of passions and the tumults of desire, as well as the security of a life guarded from the assaults of foes and girded about with an impregnable barrier which nothing can destroy and no enemy overleap, are ours, if we take the good news about God to our heart. They are ours in the measure in which we take it. Clearly such truths as those which the gospel brings have a plain tendency to give peace. They give peace with God, with the world, and with ourselves. They lead to trust, and trust is peace. They lead to union with God, and that is peace. They lead to submission, and that is peace. They lead to consecration, and that is peace. They lead to indifference to fleeting joys and treasures, and that is peace. They give to heart and mind and will an all-sufficient and infinite object, and that is peace. They deliver us from ourselves, and that is peace. They fill the past, the present, and the future with the loving Father’s presence, and brighten life and death with the Saviour’s footsteps—and so to live is calm, and to die is to lay ourselves down in peace and sleep, quiet by His side, like a child by its mother. The good news about God and Christ is the good news of our salvation and of our peace.

4. The good news about Christ and God is *the* gospel

By far the most frequent form in which the word gospel occurs is that of the simple use of the noun with the definite article. This message is emphatically the good news. It is the tidings which men most of all want. It stands alone; there is no other like it. If this be not the glad

tidings of great joy for the world, then there are none. Let no false liberality lead us to lose sight of the exclusive claims which are made in this phrase for the set of facts the narrative of which constitutes 'the gospel.' The life and death of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world, His resurrection and continuous life for the saving of the world—these are the truths, without which there can be no gospel. They may be apprehended in different ways, set forth in different perspective, proclaimed in different dialects, explained in different fashion, associated with different accompaniments, drawn out into different consequences, and yet, through all diversity of tones, the message may be one. Sounded on a ram's horn or a silver trumpet, it may be the same saving and joy-bringing proclamation, and it will be, if Christ and His life and death are plainly set forth as the beginning and ending of all. But if there be an omission of that mighty name, or if a Christ be proclaimed without a Cross, a salvation without a Saviour, or a Saviour without a Sacrifice, all the adornments of genius and sincerity will not prevent such a half gospel from falling flat. Its preachers have never been able, and never will be able, to touch the general heart or to bring good cheer to men. They have always had to complain, 'We have piped unto you and ye have not danced.' They cannot get people to be glad over such a message. Only when you speak of a Christ who has died for our sins, will you cause the heavy heart of the world to sing for joy. Only that old, old message is the good news which men want.

There is no second gospel. Men who preach a message of a different kind, as Paul tells us, are preaching what is not really another gospel. There cannot be two messages. There is but one genuine; all others are counterfeits. For us it is all-important that we should be no less narrow than the truth, and no more liberal than he was to whom the message 'how that Jesus died for our sins' was the only thing worth calling the gospel. Our own salvation depends on our firm grasp of that one message, and for some of us, the clear decisiveness with which our lips ring it out determines whether we shall be blessings or curses to our generation. There is a Babel of voices now preaching other messages which promise good tidings of good. Let us cleave with all our hearts to Christ alone, and let our tongues not falter in proclaiming, 'Neither is there salvation in any other.' The gospel of the Christ who died for our sins, is the gospel.

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And what we have for ourselves to do with it is told us in that pregnant phrase of the apostle's, 'my gospel,' and 'our gospel'; meaning not merely the message which he was charged to proclaim, but the good news which he and his brethren had made their own. So we have to make it ours. It is of no use to us, unless we do. It is not enough that it echoes all around us, like music borne upon the wind. It is not enough that we hear it, as men do some sweet melody, while their thoughts are busy on other things. It is not enough that we believe it, as we do other histories in which we have no concern. What more is needed? Another expression of the apostle's gives the answer. He speaks of 'the faith of the gospel,' that is the trust which that glad message evokes, and by which it is laid hold of. Make it yours by trusting your whole self to the Christ of whom it tells you. The reliance of heart and will on Jesus who has died for me, makes it 'my gospel.' There is one God, one Christ, one gospel which tells us of them, and one faith by which we lay hold upon the gospel, and upon the loving Father and the ever-helpful Saviour of whom it tells. Let us make that great word our own by simple faith, and then 'as cold water to our thirsty soul,' so will be that 'good news from a far country,' the country where the Father's house is, and to which He has sent the Elder Brother to bring back us prodigal children.

1:1-8: Isaiah and Malachi each spake concerning the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the ministry of John. From these prophets we may observe, that Christ, in his gospel, comes among us, bringing with him a treasure of grace, and a sceptre of government. Such is the corruption of the world, that there is great opposition to his progress. When God sent his Son into the world, he took care, and when he sends him into the heart, he takes care, to prepare his way before him. John thinks himself unworthy of the meanest office about Christ. The most eminent saints have always been the most humble. They feel their need of Christ's atoning blood and sanctifying Spirit, more than others. The great promise Christ makes in his gospel to those who have repented, and have had their sins forgiven them, is, they shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost; shall be purified by his graces, and refreshed by his comforts. We use the ordinances, word, and sacraments without profit and comfort, for the most part, because we have not of that Divine light within us; and we have it not because we

ask it not; for we have his word that cannot fail, that our heavenly Father will give this light, his Holy Spirit, to those that ask it.

1:9-13: Christ's baptism was his first public appearance, after he had long lived unknown. How much hidden worth is there, which in this world is not known! But sooner or later it shall be known, as Christ was. He took upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh; and thus, for our sakes, he sanctified himself, that we also might be sanctified, and be baptized with him, John 17:19. See how honourably God owned him, when he submitted to John's baptism. He saw the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. We may see heaven opened to us, when we perceive the Spirit descending and working upon us. God's good work in us, is sure evidence of his good will towards us, and preparations for us. As to Christ's temptation, Mark notices his being in the wilderness and that he was with the wild beasts. It was an instance of his Father's care of him, which encouraged him the more that his Father would provide for him. Special protections are earnest of seasonable supplies. The serpent tempted the first Adam in the garden, the Second Adam in the wilderness; with different success indeed; and ever since he still tempts the children of both, in all places and conditions. Company and conversation have their temptations; and being alone, even in a wilderness, has its own also. No place or state exempts, no business, not lawful labouring, eating, or drinking, not even fasting and praying; often in these duties there are the most assaults, but in them is the sweetest victory. The ministration of the good angels is matter of great comfort in reference to the malignant designs of the evil angels; but much more does it comfort us, to have the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

1:14-22: Jesus began to preach in Galilee, after that John was put in prison. If some be laid aside, others shall be raised up, to carry on the same work. Observe the great truths Christ preached. By repentance we give glory to our Creator whom we have offended; by faith we give glory to our Redeemer who came to save us from our sins. Christ has joined these two together, and let no man think to put them asunder. Christ puts honour upon those who, though mean in this world, are diligent in their business and kind to one another. Industry and unity are good and pleasant, and the Lord Jesus commands a blessing on them. Those whom Christ calls, must leave all to follow

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him; and by his grace he makes them willing to do so. Not that we must needs go out of the world, but we must sit loose to the world; forsake every thing that is against our duty to Christ, and that cannot be kept without hurt to our souls. Jesus strictly kept the sabbath day, by applying himself unto, and abounding in the sabbath work, in order to which the sabbath rest was appointed. There is much in the doctrine of Christ that is astonishing; and the more we hear it, the more cause we see to admire it.

1:23-28: The devil is an unclean spirit, because he has lost all the purity of his nature, because he acts in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit of God, and by his suggestions defiles the spirits of men. There are many in our assemblies who quietly attend under merely formal teachers; but if the Lord come with faithful ministers and holy doctrine, and by his convincing Spirit, they are ready to say, like this man, What have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth! No disorder could enable a man to know Jesus to be the Holy One of God. He desires to have nothing to do with Jesus, for he despairs of being saved by him, and dreads being destroyed by him. See whose language those speak, that say to the Almighty, Depart from us. This unclean spirit hated and dreaded Christ, because he knew him to be a Holy One; for the carnal mind is enmity against God, especially against his holiness. When Christ by his grace delivers souls out of the hands of Satan, it is not without tumult in the soul; for that spiteful enemy will disquiet those whom he cannot destroy. This put all who saw it upon considering, What is this new doctrine? A work as great often is wrought now, yet men treat it with contempt and neglect. If this were not so, the conversion of a notorious wicked man to a sober, righteous, and godly life, by the preaching of a crucified Saviour, would cause many to ask, What doctrine is this?

1:29-39: Wherever Christ comes, he comes to do good. He cures, that we may minister to him, and to others who are his, and for his sake. Those kept from public ordinances by sickness or other real hinderances, may expect the Saviour's gracious presence; he will soothe their sorrows, and abate their pains. Observe how numerous the patients were. When others speed well with Christ, it should quicken us in seeking after him. Christ departed into a solitary place. Though he was in no danger of distraction, or of temptation to vain-glory, yet

he retired. Those who have the most business in public, and of the best kind, must yet sometimes be alone with God.

1:40-45: We have here Christ's cleansing of a leper. It teaches us to apply to the Saviour with great humility, and with full submission to his will, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt," without any doubt of Christ's readiness to help the distressed. See also what to expect from Christ; that according to our faith it shall be to us. The poor leper said, If thou wilt. Christ readily will favours to those who readily refer themselves to his will. Christ would have nothing done that looked like seeking praise of the people. But no reasons now exist why we should hesitate to spread the praises of Christ.

Chapter 5

Mark 2

One of the most powerful movies in recent years is the epic film *Gladiator*. At the beginning of the film, the aging Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius has a private conversation with Maximus, his most trusted and successful military commander. During this dialogue, the Emperor communicates his desire that Maximus succeed him as “Protector of Rome” instead of the Emperor’s evil son, Commodus. Shortly after this conversation, Marcus Aurelius privately gives Commodus the same information. But the ambitious Commodus doesn’t react well to the news. He quickly murders his father, thus securing the throne before anyone else learned of his father’s plans for Maximus. He then gives the order that Maximus and his family be disposed of.

Unbeknownst to the young Emperor, Maximus escapes and rushes off to save his family. But he doesn’t make it. He finds them murdered and his beautiful home destroyed. His desire to live now absent, he is gathered up by a slave trader and sold as a gladiator. But after experiencing success as a gladiator - and learning of the potential to fight in the Roman coliseum before Emperor Commodus - Maximus has renewed hope...

and vengeance. The climactic moment of the movie occurs after the Emperor has witnessed this masked gladiator's spectacular performance and, accompanied by his guards, walks out onto the floor of a packed coliseum to meet him. Let's join the scene:

Commodus: "Why doesn't the hero reveal himself and tell us all your real name. You do have a name."

Maximus: "My name is gladiator." (turning his back on the Emperor to show his disrespect)

Commodus: "How dare you turn your back on me! Slave! You will remove your helmet and tell me your name!"

Maximus: (removing his helmet while turning to face Commodus) "My name is Maximus Desimus Meridius, commander of the armies of the north, general of the fearless legions, loyal servant of the true emperor-Marcus Aurelius, father to a murdered son, husband to a murdered wife, and I will have my vengeance in this life or the next!"

Commodus was offended by the gladiator's audacity to turn his back on him. He wondered, "Who does this guy think he is? Does he have a right to do such a thing?" But after Maximus reveals himself, everyone in the coliseum responds: "Ohhhhh." Now they realize who this guy is, and that he does have the right to do such a thing.

In Mark chapter two, Jesus is going to say and do such audacious things that those around Him are going to ask, "Who does this guy think He is?" Jesus will attempt to answer that question in four ways. And once He does, many present will respond: "Ohhhhh." They will realize who this Guy is, and that He does have the right to say and do such things.

Recall that the purpose of the Gospel of Mark is "to evoke a lasting response in word and deed to the true identity of Jesus." Today's lesson clearly unpacks the true identity of Jesus for us. In Mark 2:1-3:6 we should notice a great deal of controversy between Jesus and the religious leadership of His day. Pay careful attention to the response of these 3 groups:

- ❖ Experts in the Law: Also known as scribes, these Jewish leaders were professional interpreters of Scripture. Scribes could also be Pharisees.

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- ❖ Pharisees: Numbering about 6,000 in first century Palestine, these defenders of Judaism were known for their knowledge of the Law and its application to life.
- ❖ Herodians: Mentioned only three times in the Gospels (Mark 3:6; 12:13; Matthew 22:16), these Jewish leaders were politically loyal to Herod and the Herodian dynasty. They never appear without the Pharisees.

“Who does this guy think he is?” Jesus has four responses:

1. He Is the Lord of Forgiveness (2:1-12)

Anyone who saw this paralyzed man would have known his most urgent need, right? I’m confident that if a survey had been taken of those present that day, the consensus would have been that this man’s greatest need was physical restoration. Not so. Sometimes our greatest need is below the surface. Augustine once said, “One need not be paralyzed bodily to be paralyzed inwardly.” This man happened to be paralyzed both inwardly and outwardly. You and I may not be paralyzed physically, but each of us was born paralyzed inwardly. Our greatest need, regardless of our physical condition, is healing of our fallen spiritual condition.

Please note that Jesus does not ask, “Which is easier to do: forgive sins or heal?” Clearly the answer to that question would be that it is easier to heal. There have been many people throughout history with the ability to heal physically. However, no person in history has had the ability to forgive sins, let alone the audacity to claim that ability for himself. Rather, Jesus’ question was, Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up. . .’ It is certainly easier to heal than it is to forgive sins, but it is easier to say that someone’s sins are forgiven than it is to say that someone is healed. That is, the statement “you are healed” is falsifiable - it can be proven wrong. Who can prove you wrong if you claim you have forgiven someone’s sins? It is an invisible act. Thus, Jesus proves He has accomplished the invisible act by likewise accomplishing the visible act.

Jesus claims for Himself the ability to forgive. Who alone but God has the authority to forgive? In characteristic form, Mark packages this story by first zooming in on Jesus, and then panning out to record

the audience's response. And they responded right - they accuse Jesus of blasphemy¹¹ - reproaching the name of God rather than honoring it. Only God could forgive sins. Only God could make such a claim without it being blasphemous. Unless Jesus is God, He is speaking blasphemy.

The point of this text is that folks had gathered to see Jesus work a miracle, and they left with the awareness that there may be more to this man than the ability to heal. The audience gathered that day was given pause: If the paralytic was healed when Jesus said he was healed, then perhaps his sins were forgiven when Jesus said they were forgiven. Then who is Jesus?

“Who does this guy think he is?” He is the Lord of Forgiveness.

2. He Is the Lord of Redemption (2:13-17)

2:13 Jesus went out again by the sea. The whole crowd came to him, and he taught them. 2:14 As he went along, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. “Follow me,” he said to him. And he got up and followed him. 2:15 As Jesus was having a meal in Levi's home, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 2:16 When the experts in the law and the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 2:17 When Jesus heard this he said to them, “Those who are healthy don't need a physician, but those who are sick do. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

Levi is the first of two individuals (along with Bartimaeus in chapter ten) pictured sitting by the road as Jesus passes by. Each one is called by Jesus, and each rises, steps onto the path behind Jesus, and “follows” Him on His journey. Levi is a tax collector. Tax collectors were Jews who were despised for two reasons: 1) they collected taxes for the Roman government and were thus viewed as traitors to their own people, and 2) they were known for collecting more taxes than required, and pocketing the profits. They were the chief sinners according to first century Judaism. And yet this tax collector receives a personal invitation to follow Jesus. Even worse, Jesus is seen eating - fellowshiping - with this guy and other well-known sinners! Who does this guy think He is?

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Jesus answers this question by stating that He did not come to call the righteous (the self-righteous, that is), but sinners (those who recognized their need). That is THE prerequisite to forgiveness and redemption. God has never saved a person who didn't think he needed saved, and in this Gospel the Pharisees didn't think they needed saved. Just as a sick person goes to a doctor to receive health, so a sinner goes to Jesus to receive righteousness. If that sick person refuses to visit the doctor, he will remain sick. Likewise, if a sinner refuses to acknowledge his own sin, he will remain a sinner.

“Who does this guy think he is?” He is the Lord of Redemption.

3. He Is the Lord of Change (2:18-22)

2:18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. So they came to Jesus and said, “Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't fast?” 2:19 Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they do not fast. 2:20 But the days are coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and at that time they will fast. 2:21 No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and the tear becomes worse. 2:22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be destroyed. Instead new wine is poured into new wineskins.”

Fasting in the first century was closely associated with mourning. To fast with the bridegroom present at a wedding would be insulting to the bridegroom, who wished for you to celebrate with him upon the special occasion. Jesus is the bridegroom; the Man of honor.

New material is incompatible with an old tattered garment. It would be inappropriate to attempt to bring the two together. Jesus is the new, superior material. He is incompatible with the old garment - the Old Testament religious system. He is bringing about something entirely new.

New wine and old wineskins were incompatible, and it would be inappropriate to put new wine into old wineskins. Old wineskins were already stretched from the fermenting gas of the wine it had already carried. New wine would likewise release fermenting gas that would

burst an old wineskin which was already stretched to its limit. Jesus is the new wine that proves incompatible with the old wineskins - the Old Testament religious system. Jesus is the Guest of honor about to affect radical change that will overshadow the Old Testament way of life. The time of fulfillment has come in Jesus. The old is past; new things have come by virtue of His arrival. The wedding, the garment, and the new wine are all symbolic of the newness Jesus brings. Jesus is going to establish the Age of Grace in place of the Age of the Law. Who is this that thinks He can overshadow the Old Covenant and inaugurate a New Covenant?

“Who does this guy think he is?” He is the Lord of Change.

4. He Is the Lord of Sabbath (2:23-3:6)

Jesus and the disciples are gleaning food from a grain field, which is entirely permitted by the Law - even on the Sabbath (Deut. 23:25). When the Pharisees object to such activity on the Sabbath, Jesus explains that the Sabbath was designed for mankind and not the other way around (just as the bread that David ate was made for mankind, and not the other way around).

Traditionally, only if one's life were in danger could you rescue or attempt to heal on the Sabbath. There is no such restriction in the Old Testament. These are simply examples of the Pharisees placing additional legislation upon the Jews to protect them from breaking the Law.

First, Jesus explains the purpose of the Sabbath (it was made for people, not people for the Sabbath), and then He claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath.¹³ In fact the reason Jesus can state with authority the purpose of the Sabbath is because He is Lord of the Sabbath. After all, He authored it. And here we end, as those with the titles of authority plot to kill the one possessing genuine authority.

“Who does this guy think he is?” He is the Lord of Sabbath.

Chapter 6

Mark 3

Families are a bitter-sweet reality of life. There is no better place to receive unconditional love and care than from one's family. "Home," it has been said, "is where they have to let you in when you want to go there." Rudyard Kipling once wrote this about families: "All of us are we-and everyone else is they. A family shares things like dreams, hopes, possessions, memories, smiles, frowns, and gladness... A family is a clan held together with the glue of love and the cement of mutual respect. A family is shelter from the storm, a friendly port when the waves of life become too wild. No person is ever alone who is a member of a family."

Yet sadly, many cannot relate to such a warm and positive description of family. Because of our deep love for our families, they have the potential to hurt us the most. While no family is perfect, some experience greater levels of harmful brokenness than others. Divorce, verbal or physical abuse, disapproval, abandonment, favoritism, and neglect-these and more threaten to rob us of God's plan for the modern family. In Mark chapter three, Jesus will not only encounter trouble in His family, but He will also redefine for us the notion of family. He will show

that there is a stronger bond than that of flesh and blood. This stronger bond rests with one's spiritual family. It is to this family that Jesus calls His disciples in this lesson. It is the same calling that every Christian receives-not to a specific vocation or mission field or ministry, but to the family of God and our responsibilities within those relationships.

1. We have been called to God's family (3:7-19)

The reason for Jesus' withdrawal in Mark 3:7 is obvious: The authorities were after him (3:6) and it wasn't yet time for him to be arrested. Mark 3:7-12 is meant to summarize Jesus' ministry (see also 2:13). He was teaching the large crowds, performing miracles, and casting out demons whom He commanded not to talk about Him.¹⁸ One might get the impression from what Mark has recorded thus far that Jesus was rather aloof, not allowing folks to talk about Him and not getting too close to anyone. What follows will certainly put an end to such thoughts.

Jesus chooses a motley crew of followers: Four blue collar fishermen, one hated tax-collector, one radical member of a violent political party, one doubter, and one betrayer (known to Jesus). We know virtually nothing about six of these men, whose names never appear again in Mark's Gospel. Although the word "family" has not yet occurred in this chapter, Jesus has nevertheless established the pattern of a family with these disciples. This pattern has three components.

First, Jesus "names" them apostles. The text does not say that He "called" them apostles, nor that He "appointed" them apostles. It uses the specific Greek word meaning "name." Furthermore, Peter, James, and John receive additional "names" from Jesus. Isn't that the first step for a new member of a family? Isn't that what happens when you enter a family? When we are called into God's family, He gives us a new name. What name has God given to you? I like to think that when a person is born again the Father breaks open His book of baby names and states, "Ah, a new precious child. What shall I name this one?" I would imagine that book contains names such as "Patient One," "Joyful One," "Servant," "Trusting One," "Courageous One," "Honest One," "Faithful One." What name has the Father bestowed upon you? Are you living up to that name?

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Second, these disciples are called to “be with Him.” Isn’t this the next stage for a member of a family? A child is born, named, and then “with” the family for a period of time—usually about 18-20 years. During this time the children are taught, trained, and prepared for life. In the same way, Jesus seeks to teach, train, and prepare these disciples for ministry.

Finally, after a period of time “with Jesus,” these disciples will be sent “to preach and to have authority to cast out demons.” After receiving the training and preparation, the disciples will be sent out to accomplish ministry. In the same way, children are born, named, with their family for a period of time, and then sent out into life. While you and I are not apostles in a technical sense, our job is quite similar. Are you and I following that pattern within God’s spiritual family? We have been born again, named, and with Jesus. Are we now accomplishing the ministry we have been trained and prepared for? I wonder how many of us like the “be with him” part but not the “going out” part. You and I are irrevocably called into God’s family just as these disciples were.

2. We have been called to stand together (as a family) (3:20-30)

Note the opposition. The ones who oppose Jesus are precisely the ones who should have known better: The religious leadership and His own family. Note the parallel verses:

“ ... [his family] said, ‘he is out of His mind.’” (3:21)

“ ... [the experts in the Law] said, ‘he has an unclean spirit.’” (3:30)

Have you ever been falsely accused? How did it make you feel? In this passage, Jesus is accused by His family of insanity and accused by the religious leaders as satanic. He was neither.

The text here is rife with implied and stated division: Satan vs. Satan, Jesus vs. His family, Jesus vs. the scribes, kingdom vs. itself, house vs. itself. Jesus states that where there is division, a house or a kingdom will not be able to stand. He is emphasizing the necessity of standing together as a family—just when His very own family was divided! Typically, families seek to stick together. In fact, if a family does nothing else, it at least tries to stand together! Having four older brothers, I understand the necessity of standing together. Practically

every day of my adolescence one or other of my brothers beat me up. The trade-off, however, was that I knew I would be protected should anyone outside of my family threaten to lay a finger on me. Why? Because families seek to stand together. My wife can talk bad about her parents from dawn until dusk if she wishes to, but the moment that I begin to agree with her . . . she turns on me! She can talk bad about her parents but I cannot. Why? Because families stand together.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are a child of God. We are a family, and families stand together. The following list was initially written by Tim & Diane Wulburn as rules to live by in their house. Yet I believe they apply just as well-if not better-to a church. Standing together as a church requires that we follow these rules:

Chapter 7

Mark 4:1-34

“**W**hat animal do you most closely resemble?” This question makes up a game that most of us have played at a party or some other social event. It’s an exercise to build relationships and get to know one another a bit better. Perhaps you think of an animal that you physically resemble, such as a giraffe if you have a long neck, a leopard if you consider yourself sleek, or a hippopotamus if you think you have the spiritual gift of leverage. But most often it’s a character trait that we share in common with an animal: an elephant is able to remember, a fox is clever, a snake is an introvert (if bothered in your secret grotto you may bite), a bird enjoys freedom and resists structure, a monkey is highly trainable, a dog lives for entertainment, a bear loves sleep, a pig is notoriously messy, a cat is aloof, a donkey stubborn, a squirrel resourceful, a tiger aggressive or protective-you get the idea. From these animals or others, which animal do you most closely resemble?

In Mark chapter four, Jesus plays a very similar game. But the choices are limited and the consequences far-reaching. Jesus describes for us four different types of soil that vary according to their receptivity to sown

seed, and begs the question: “Which soil does your life most closely resemble.” Chapter four is one of only two places in Mark where Jesus teaches extensively (also chapter 13). Here He uses parables—short instructive stories that contain analogies from everyday life. Parables disclose information and conceal it at the same time—depending upon the receptivity of the listener’s heart. This indirect approach attracts some and provokes others. Some of the best known biblical passages are parables. The first parable in today’s passage is the Parable of the Soils.

1. Am I an Influenced Follower? (4:1-20)

Earlier Jesus had his disciples prepare a boat in case the crowds became too great and threatened to force Him into the water. Here the crowds had grown so large that Jesus has to use that boat as a platform (though He sits as was customary for a teacher) while the listeners gather by the edge of the sea. At the beginning and end of the Parable of the Soils, Jesus invites these listeners to listen carefully, suggesting that the meaning might not be self-evident. The four soils share in common the “hearing” of the Word—they each receive seed. The contrast lies in their varying levels of receptivity to that Word. While Jesus is not often given to explaining His parables, here He chooses to do so for those close to Him.

Like the social game in which we identify which animal we most closely resemble, Jesus now describes four different types of soils and asks which soil we most closely resemble. Which soil best represents the condition of your heart?

Soil sample 1:

- ❖ This is seed that falls “on the path.” A first-century path alongside—or through—a field was composed of dirt that was well-worn and firmly-packed from high volumes of foot traffic, virtually impenetrable to scattered seed.
- ❖ Jesus explains to His disciples that the seed in the parable represents the Word of God.
- ❖ The birds in the parable symbolize Satan. Because of the firmness of the soil, birds were able to snatch up the scattered seed before they could penetrate the hard ground.

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- ❖ The result that Jesus emphasizes is that this soil produces no fruit.
- ❖ This soil represents a hard heart that doesn't permit the Word of God to penetrate its surface. These individuals are in control of their own lives; they have all of the answers. They are unteachable, and the Word of God falls upon their deaf ears.

Soil sample 2:

- ❖ This is seed that falls "on rocky ground."
- ❖ Jesus again identifies the seed in the parable as the Word of God.
- ❖ The sun in the parable symbolizes trouble or persecution.
- ❖ The result that Jesus emphasizes is that this soil produces no fruit.
- ❖ This soil represents a vulnerable heart. While these receive the Message with joy, it fails to run deep enough to affect their lives. These are shallow in their comprehension of Christian things. Rather than overflowing from a personal relationship with God, their behavior is paroted from what they see other Christians doing. How can we identify such individuals? Watch them when trouble or persecution comes along. Because they lack the intimacy that accompanies a personal walk with Christ-because they have no root-they are the first ones to fall away.

Soil sample 3:

- ❖ This is seed that falls "among thorns."
- ❖ Jesus again identifies the seed in the parable as the Word of God.
- ❖ The thorns in the parable represent worldly cares, wealthy pleasures, and desire for other things.
- ❖ The result that Jesus emphasizes is that this soil produces no fruit.
- ❖ This soil represents a distracted heart. The most commonly-cited obstacle to spiritual growth by Americans is busi-ness, distractions. Is your life choked by the distractions of worldly cares, wealthy pleasures, and desire for other things?

Soil sample 4:

- ❖ This is seed that falls "on good soil."
- ❖ Jesus again identifies the seed in the parable as the Word of God.

- ❖ The result that Jesus emphasizes, in contrast to the three previously-mentioned soils, is that this soil produces lasting fruit in varying measures.
- ❖ This soil represents a receptive heart. Please note that the word translated here as “receive” is a different Greek word than that translated “receive” in v. 16. Only the receptive heart receives the Word rightly.

Remember, in the Gospel of Mark Jesus calls His followers to a lasting response. This parable is a warning to the soil. It conveys the importance of lasting fruit-fruit that remains. Only soil that produces fruit pleases the Father. Has the Word of God affected you? Are you an influenced follower?

- ❖ The moral of the story: Be the right soil.

2. Am I an Influential Follower (4:21-34)

Mark 4:21-25 describes for us the purpose of the Message. In the same way that the purpose of a lamp is to provide light for many, so the purpose of the Message is that it not be hidden away but broadcast widely. That same Message that has transformed your life is not to be retained, but to be given away. Global influence begins with individuals and moves to influenced individuals and moves to influenced individuals influencing others with that same Message that first influenced them. Thus, as good stewards, we are to “take care about what we hear.” It cannot stop with us; it moves through us to others. That’s the purpose of the Message.

Mark 4:26-29 describes for us the power of the Message. Perhaps someone might misunderstand Jesus to be giving us the responsibility to change others’ lives. Not so. Jesus makes it crystal clear that the sower is not responsible for any resulting growth. Rather, “he does not know how” the seed spouts and grows, for it does so “by itself.” Who’s going to influence this vast kingdom that Jesus speaks about? These 12 unlikely candidates? If they were responsible for the result, then rest assured that the mission is doomed from the start. Instead, their responsibility is merely to scatter the seed (and to remain good soil for the seed itself to grow from). As sowers of the Word of God, it is not our power that affects change in others’ lives; it is the power of the Message Itself that does so. The seed holds within itself the secret power for growth. You may doubt whether you could possibly

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contribute to such growth in the present kingdom. Remember, your job and mine is merely to remain faithful and available sowers of the Message. We are not responsible for the growth of the hearers.

Mark 4:30-34 describes for us the potential of the Message. Although small and seemingly insignificant now, it will one day be global. If you doubt that such a glorious kingdom could grow from such humble beginnings-remember the mustard seed. It was common knowledge that God's kingdom would one day fill the earth; Jesus here teaches that Jesus and this small band of close followers, though obscure, would continue to spread His Word until such kingdom is established. Certainly the glory of the kingdom is for the future age, but there is still the sowing and growth in the meantime. These parables are meant to be encouraging to the sower. Has the Word of God affected others through you?

The title of this lesson is deliberately ambiguous. It could refer to the influence upon the follower; it could also refer to the influence wielded by the follower. In fact, it refers to both.

It is no coincidence that Mark 3:14 was our meditation verse in the previous lesson. Jesus appointed them to be with Him and to go out to preach and to accomplish ministry. In fact, that verse serves as the outline for today's message. When we are with Jesus, we are being influenced by Him; when we are sent out we are being influential for Him. The disciples are with Jesus now; what do you think might happen in the next couple of chapters? That's right-they will be sent out equipped with nothing but the Word of God. Look for it.

Chapter 8

A Follower's Proof - Mark 4:35-5:43

Many like working on cars. In fact, at the risk of bragging just a little, I am very good at working on cars. We draw a firm distinction between “working” on cars and “repairing” cars. When we ourselves try to repair our own damaged cars, we will often reach nowhere, but an expert mechanic may be able to fix the problem within a few seconds.

Sometimes we do the same thing in our walk with Christ. When we encounter an obstacle or face some difficulty in life we will exhaust all of my power and skills and resources attempting to fix the problem before turning to the Lord. Usually we only succeed in making matters worse. And then, when I reach the end of my rope-when we am undeniably in over my head-we turn to Him to bail me out. He becomes my last resort rather than my first resort. Mark 4:35-5:43 records four miracles of Christ. Their common thread is that in each case the resources of the people are first exhausted before they turn to Jesus. He becomes their last resort. These miracles are designed to authenticate-to prove-the teaching of Christ in the previous section (4:1-34). Remember, in the Gospel of Mark actions speak louder than words. Thus, Mark's selection of parables (4:1-

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34) is followed by a series of miracles (4:35-5:43), indicating that what Jesus did (His works) authenticated what He said (His words).

1. Jesus Offers Safety through Life's Storms (4:35-41)

The vivid details suggest an eye witness account, namely that of Peter (see background on Mark). These were experienced fishermen who were frightened and overcome by a squall. They were in a boat on the same lake they had spent half their lives; they were in their element, in their backyard, and yet they were sinking. It would be hard to imagine that before waking Jesus these men hadn't utilized every skill they had acquired. Certainly they had tried every tool in their aquatic toolbox. Their every resource must have been exhausted. They could find no safety, until Jesus. Perhaps they thought it futile to awaken this carpenter-a dry-land handyman-and ask His assistance in battling these waves. They learned that day that trusting in their own experience and skills accomplished little. Their trust needed to be in Jesus, who demonstrated-proved-that He is Lord over the seas (Psalm 65:7; 89:9; 107:23-32; Job 12:15).

Mark is showing that the closer one's proximity to Jesus, the safer he is from even the most perilous of danger. A soldier in the Persian Gulf War one said, "Safety lies not in our distance from danger, but in our nearness to God." The fear of the disciples was unfounded.³⁷ Had they listened to Jesus' words they would have known that He had said, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." He didn't say, "Let us go to the middle of the lake and be drowned." They should have been saying to the howling wind and raging waves, "We have no fear of you, for you can do us no harm. Christ our mighty Savior is aboard!"

Are you facing a storm? Trust in Him before exhausting all of your own resources.

2. Jesus Offers Peace during Life's Confusion (5:1-20)

Rather than put up any sort of fight, the demons surrender to Jesus at once. Thus far in this text, the wind, the sea, and the demons have all obeyed Jesus. On the other hand, the townspeople-perhaps more concerned about their swine and their economy than one man's restored health-request that Jesus leave their region.

Two surprising features surface in this pericope. First, Jesus refused this man to follow Him. ³⁹ Second, Jesus doesn't prohibit him from

speaking openly about the miracle (remember, the “Messianic Secret” is a prominent theme in Mark; see background on Mark). Why would Jesus refuse to allow him to follow and then permit him to speak openly? By accompanying Jesus he would only have his own words to depend on (“this is what I used to be like but now I’m different...”). Jesus knew that his witness would be much more powerful among those who had known him as a demoniac. By going to his own people in the Decapolis (the “10 cities” in that region), the former demoniac would be talking about Jesus to the very same people who had chained his hands and shackled his feet. He would explain the miracle to the very same people who had heard him cry out day and night among the tombs and in the mountains. He would proclaim Christ to the very same people who had watched him cut himself. In the Gospel of Mark, actions speak louder than words. The man went away in obedience to Jesus and declared the message of which he was the living proof.

The out-of-control demoniac resembled the chaotic, raging storm in the previous section; likewise the stillness of the demoniac after his exorcism corresponds to the stillness that follows Jesus’ meteorological miracle. It is difficult to understand the precise meaning associated with the title “Legion” (in military, it indicated a squad of 6000 soldiers). In the least it conveys possession by a number of demons rather than just one. Perhaps the number of pigs that were destroyed (namely, about 2,000) indicates the precise number of demons involved. The herd that drowns itself, coupled with the possessed man’s self-destructive behavior of cutting himself, suggests that the purpose of demon possession was the destruction of its host. And every thinkable resource had been exhausted trying to restrain this man possessed by this “Legion.” Nothing worked until Jesus.

The demoniac was living a life of confusion; he was out of control. Harry S. Truman once said, “If you can’t convince them, confuse them.” I tend to think that if Satan cannot convince someone to reject God and a life of righteousness—and there are many he cannot convince—then his next-best strategy is to confuse them. He seeks to confuse our lives and spin them so out of control that we are rendered ineffective in our relationship with Christ.

Are you living in confusion? Trust in the Lord before exhausting all your resources to figure it out. Let Him sort out your life and offer you peace.

3. Jesus Offers Relief from Life's Pain (5:21-34)

In characteristic form Mark tells a story-within-a-story: The encounter with the hemorrhaging woman is couched within the story of the healing of Jairus' daughter. The cause of the woman's loss of blood is unrevealed. However, if her condition resulted from a uterine discharge then she was not merely in pain, but also in a chronic state of ritual impurity (Lev. 15:25-27). In that case she was prevented from leading a normal social life; she was never invited to parties, and no one could embrace her to comfort her from her pain.

The "power" that goes out from Jesus may give a hint about the entire chapter-Jesus has the power to accomplish that which you and I cannot. No one could control the storm; no one could control the demoniac; no one could heal this woman. Like the sea and the demoniac, others had tried to fix the problem with no success. All of her resources had been exhausted. She had spent all of her money on several doctors, but after 12 years her illness only grew worse. She had no relief from her pain, until Jesus. C.S. Lewis once wrote in *The Problem of Pain*: "Pain is not good in itself. What is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and, for the spectators, the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads."

Is that how you live? Must you do everything in your own power before turning to invite His?

Jesus confronts every crisis situation with power and He overcomes.

Don't cope with pain on your own. Trust in Him to offer you relief through your pain.

4. Jesus Offers Hope through Life's Tragedies (5:35-43)

The delay caused by the hemorrhaging woman proved fatal for Jairus' daughter. Mark picks up this story with an abrupt message that Jairus' only daughter had died.⁴¹ Jesus had the power to calm the sea, to exorcise the demons, and to heal the woman, but certainly death would be too difficult to reverse. The people who bring the devastating news suggest that involving Jesus further would simply prove futile. Every resource was exhausted. No hope remains, until Jesus. After reassuring Jairus, Jesus raises the girl from the dead in front of a select and captive audience.

Chapter 9

Importance of Faith

We encountered the theme of faith in the previous lesson, “A Follower’s Proof.” It surfaced explicitly in three of the four miracles Jesus performed from Mark 4:35 - 5:43. First, the disciples arouse Jesus to save them from the tumultuous storm on the sea. After calming the waves and hushing the winds Jesus asks them, “Do you still not have faith?” Second, after Jesus heals the hemorrhaging woman He tells her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well.” Finally, messengers approach Jairus to inform him that during his journey to retrieve Jesus his daughter had died: “Why trouble the teacher any longer?” Jesus (“paying no attention to what was said”) then said to Jairus, “Do not be afraid; just believe.” Today we are going to pursue that theme of “faith” and, in particular, faith-based action. Mark will disclose five scenarios, each highlighting a different dimension of faith.

Deficiency of Faith (6:1-6)

Once again our passage begins with people trying to identify Jesus. They simply haven’t the categories. This time it is those in His own hometown of Nazareth and His family. Five questions of unbelief are expressed by those who hear Jesus teach. These were astonished by his teaching because He didn’t act like this when He

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lived there before. They think it is all new stuff and wonder what sort of act He is putting on. Whether Joseph was living or dead, it was still an insult to identify one as the son of his mother. This could also be a subtle reference to Jesus' alleged illegitimacy.

Imagine, here was the eternal Son of God right before their eyes performing miracles and teaching authoritatively. He wanted to be there; He wanted to teach these friends and family that were so dear to Him; He wanted to perform miracles for His loved ones. Yet because of their unbelief-and perhaps their scoffing-He chooses to go elsewhere with His message and miracles. These people who should have welcomed Him with open arms are the very ones who miss the opportunity of a lifetime. How sad.

Those who were closest to Jesus likewise had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and sadly their lack of faith likewise prevented many of them from experiencing the eternal Son of God in the way He wanted them to. Does God want to do something miraculous in your life, but you lack the faith He requires to do so? Do you suffer from unbelief-a deficiency of faith? You just might be missing out on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Duplication of Faith (6:7-13)

Mark 6:12-13 is in direct fulfillment of 3:14-15 (also 1:17), where it is said that the disciples would preach and exorcise demons. These were sent as official representatives, as apostles.⁴⁷ Jesus prohibits them from packing for their trip, and instead commands them to take only what they currently have (staff and sandals). In doing so, Jesus stresses the necessity of utter dependence upon God to supply their every need and to bring about the fruit. Thus faith is required from those sent out, and they are sent out demanding others to respond in faith. Jesus tells them to accept hospitality, and not to seek better accommodations once settled ("Wherever you enter a house, stay there..."). He also warns that some will not respond well to the message. Perhaps Jesus was thinking of the recent rejection He had received in His own hometown (6:4).

This passage is appropriately used by many churches as a blueprint for evangelism training. The principles here are relevant even for today. First, notice that the disciples had been with Jesus first. They themselves were disciples before they attempt to make their own

disciples. Next, notice that Jesus sends them out in pairs. Far too often a church's evangelism training program involves a 2-hour course on how to witness and nothing more. Evangelism training in the classroom must be followed by on-the-job training in evangelism-pairing up and going! Next, notice Jesus' emphasis on relying on God. Evangelistic efforts in our own strength with ultimately fail. Furthermore, we are not to rely on our own style of evangelism or smooth delivery, but in the power of the message itself. Next, Jesus prepares them for rejection. It is important to remind people that when a door is slammed in their face it is the message of Jesus Christ that is being rejected, not the messenger. Finally-as we will see in 6:30-it is important to regroup after an evangelistic outreach to hear others' stories about how God worked and to celebrate together.

Are you involved in any such evangelism strategy? Does your church have anything that resembles the duplication of faith described in Mark 6:7-13? Perhaps today your faith in Jesus Christ demands that you tell someone else about Him.

Duration of Faith (6:14-29)

Confusion over the identity of Jesus is far-reaching (is He Elijah, some other prophet, John the Baptist back from the dead?). Herod believes Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead. Herod Antipas is the son of Herod the Great who had tried to kill the infant Jesus by slaughtering all children two years old and under. He was not technically a king. He was a proud man (not wanting to embarrass himself before his guests) and fearful of losing face. He was officially dismissed from office and exiled in a.d. 39 for requesting the title "king."

In the Gospel of Mark, only five verses are given to the ministry of John the Baptist, while fourteen are dedicated to his death. Does that seem backward to you? Not if you understand the message of the Gospel of Mark. In this Gospel, finishing well is just as important as starting well (see Mark 9:9-13). John the Baptist is held up in the Gospel of Mark as an example of one who finished well. In fact, in Mark only two people die for the Gospel-Jesus and John the Baptist. He is heralded as a hero to Mark's persecuted Roman audience. He harbored no fear of the establishment, and no fear of death. He did not waiver in unbelief when imprisoned, nor did he waffle when the

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executioner arrived for his head. He remained faithful-and full of faith-until the very end.

Perhaps today your faith in Jesus Christ demands that you vow to finish strong the way John did. He demonstrated a faith that endured. There are many like him today, folks who have walked with Jesus Christ for decades and are still walking strong. Will you be counted among their number one day?

Development of Faith (6:30-44)

There is no indication that the crowd understood that a miracle had occurred. Rather, the text makes it clear that this was done for the disciples' sake. They are charged with finding food for the crowd, inventorying the food, serving the food, and collecting the leftovers (according to John 6).⁵³ Just as the disciples had just been sent to spiritually feed the people, now they are sent to physically feed the people. Both are instigated by Jesus' compassion for the people.

A few years ago, my wife and I attended a conference at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. The 5,000 conferees had prepaid for the conference, and in turn the organization had arranged for everyone to eat at the numerous campus cafeterias. At around 11:20 a.m., about thirty minutes before our lunch break, CSU experienced a campus-wide electrical blackout. It was then that the organization hosting the conference demonstrated their excellence. They knew that the cafeterias would not be able to prepare lunch and that ultimately the host organization was responsible for feeding these 5,000 hungry people. A delegation of about twelve people was sent just off campus in pursuit of telephones from which they could order food. Equipped with a short script describing the urgency of the situation, they began dialing restaurants. Twelve pizza places were called, along with Burger King, Taco Bell, and Macdonald's. Domino's was told, "Whatever you can make and deliver in 30 minutes we'll buy." When all was said and done, the conference purchased 170 burritos, 170 tacos, 600 Quarter Pounders, 70 large fries, and an entire truckload of Pepsi. 504 pizzas were delivered-140 from Domino's alone! None of the twelve pizza places delivered less than 20 pizzas. All was delivered and eaten in less than 90 minutes. What was left over? 6 Pizzas and 6 Quarter Pounders-about 12 baskets full.

Jesus performs some miracles because of peoples' faith; the feeding of the 5,000 was performed in order to cause people to have faith. This miracle was done for the development of the disciples' faith. Had their hearts not been hardened (see 6:52), they would have realized that a miracle had taken place and acknowledged Jesus' true identity as the Son of God. Perhaps today your faith in Jesus Christ demands that you trust Him to provide for your needs.

Direction of Faith (6:45-56)

This miracle is related to the feeding of the 5000 (as indicated in Mark 6:52). The multiplying of the bread was intended to show the disciples once again who Jesus was and that God was working through Him. They didn't get it. If forced to characterize the disciples' relationship with Jesus throughout the Gospel of Mark, it would have to be one of non-understanding.

Jesus' intention was to "pass by them." Probably this language is meant to evoke epiphany language from the Old Testament, where God "passes by" while revealing His glory. It is doubtful that Jesus merely meant to "walk past" them. Thus Jesus intended to disclose His glory to these men by "passing by." This is further substantiated by the language Jesus Himself uses when He addresses the frightened disciples in the boat. "Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid" is literally, "Have courage! I am. Do not be afraid." Did you hear that? Jesus identifies Himself with the title, "I am," meant to convey His deity. But because of the hard hearts of the disciples, the plan backfires. They do not understand the epiphany nor the self-disclosing title. If they had, they would surely have redirected their faith and placed it in Jesus.

We are convinced that very few people suffer from a lack of faith. In my experience, most folks have plenty of faith to go around, but their faith is misdirected. God is not pleased with abundance of faith if it is misguided. What is the direction of your faith? In our culture there are many possible answers to that question. Some have faith in plants, animals, crystals, the stars, fate-the list goes on and on. Probably the most common misplacement of faith is in ourselves. What is the direction of your faith? Perhaps today the Lord is asking that you redirect your faith and place it in the great "I am."

Chapter 10

A Follower's Anatomy Mark 7:1-8:26

What thoughts enter your mind when you hear the words, “Complete Physical Examination?” What feelings does the phrase evoke? I recently read some comical doctors’ notes taken from actual physical exam reports, though reading them may make you question the wisdom of visiting your local family doctor for that overdue, looming check-up:

- ❖ Patient has chest pain if she lies on her left side for over a year.
- ❖ The patient is tearful and crying constantly. She also appears to be depressed.
- ❖ The patient has been depressed since she began seeing me in 1993.
- ❖ Healthy-appearing decrepit 69-year-old male, mentally alert but forgetful.
- ❖ The patient refused an autopsy.
- ❖ Patient’s medical history has been remarkably insignificant with only a 40 pound weight gain in the past three days.
- ❖ She is numb from her toes down.

- ❖ Occasional, constant infrequent headaches.
- ❖ Patient was alert and unresponsive.
- ❖ Patient has two teenage children, but no other abnormalities.

In today's passage, Jesus will conduct a physical exam on His hearers, especially the disciples. In particular, Jesus is going to test the health of His audiences' heart, ears, and eyes. Some in Jesus' audience do not want to be examined. They get squeamish when He administers His exam of these body parts. And some of them don't respond well to Jesus' instructions when He discovers unhealthy body parts. They like their life as it is, thank you very much. They want to hear that they are in perfect health, but Jesus has other news for them. Let's listen in as Jesus the Great Physician administers examinations of the heart, ears, and eyes. But beware; you just might see yourself in this text...

Could You Benefit from a Heart Attack? (7:1-23)

If you read the passage above, then you just witnessed a heart attack. Jesus attacking the hearts of the Pharisees, that is. We often think of heart attacks as sudden, obvious, physical attacks where someone grabs his chest and falls over (thanks again, Hollywood). This is simply not true in the vast majority of heart attacks. Probably this describes a cardiac arrest, which differs from a heart attack. A heart attack occurs when an inadequate supply of oxygen-rich blood reaches the heart muscle and damage results. Most heart attacks occur because over a long period of time, fatty materials build up inside the arteries that supply blood to the heart. These arteries are called coronary arteries, and the buildup of fatty material is called coronary artery disease or coronary heart disease. When the buildup prevents adequate supply of blood to reach the heart—presto, you experience the symptoms of a heart attack. Heart attacks usually show gradual symptoms: Pain in the chest area that lasts for more than a couple of minutes, discomfort in neck, stomach, arms, etc. Because of the symptoms, you can usually benefit from a heart attack—but it requires responding appropriately to the symptoms.

The Old Testament only required priests to wash their hands, and only priests serving at the tabernacle (Exodus 30:18-21). Here Jesus is explaining that appearing clean on the outside does not necessarily

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mean that we are clean on the inside. In the same way that having clean hands does not indicate genuine cleanliness, so also following the rules does not indicate genuine obedience. Jesus teaches that one's heart is not regulated by behavior; rather, one's behavior is driven by one's heart. You and I can appear at times to have it all together. Like the Pharisees, we can give the appearance of purity but remain vulgar on the inside. We, too, can be hypocrites. Which is important to you? Do you want people to think you are pure; or is it more important to you that you are pure indeed? The Pharisees were masters of appearance. Are you?

I wonder how many of us live out that ratio in our Christian lives. Instead, how many of us spend the vast majority of our time focusing on our cover, our appearance, our marketability? I'm convinced that we've grown into a culture of individuals that want to be judged by their cover! Where are you spending your time? Are you focusing on your contents-your guts, your insides, your heart? Or are you preoccupied with your cover-your appearance, your reputation, your marketability? Perhaps you could benefit from a heart attack.

Closed-Captioned for the Hearing Impaired (7:24-37)

The healing of the deaf-mute occurs only in Mark. Jesus is sensitive to remove this man from public distractions and takes him aside by himself. Jesus touches the man's ears to indicate to the man that they would be opened; He touches his tongue to indicate that it will work again; and then He looks up to heaven to indicate that God is the one accomplishing this.

This miracle serves as a visual parable. There is more than a healing to this story. I think Jesus says to you and me-listen! Let your ears be opened. If only our spiritual ears were as tuned as that man's physical ears from that day forth.

Psychology tells us that there are four types of selective listening: 1) Selective exposure, 2) selective attention, 3) selective understanding, and 4) selective retention. I'm convinced that most of the times Jesus spoke, most of the times you and I open our Bibles, and most of the times you and I listen to a sermon, one or more of these types of selective listening is taking place:

- ❖ The first type, Selective exposure, is what occurs when you turn the station on your radio and begin listening in the middle of a broadcast. You have not been exposed to the entire program, and thus you only hear part of the conversation. You experience this when you read your Bible by starting in the middle of a particular context and thus fail to be exposed to the overall idea of the passage. You experience this in church when you arrive late and miss the beginning of the sermon or when you go to the restroom or to check on your child in the nursery in the middle of the pastor's second point.
- ❖ The second type, selective attention, is when you zone out while listening to a radio program. You are exposed to the entire program, but you're distracted through parts of it. It happens when you read your Bible, but your eyes gloss over the words without engaging your mind. You give selective attention on Sunday morning when you are distracted from the sermon by the overweight lady sleeping in the next row, doodling on the bulletin, or daydreaming.
- ❖ The third type, selective understanding, occurs when you correctly process only some of the information you're exposed to. Psychology has proven that we all at times deliberately misinterpret certain data in order to make it fit our own liking, although we do so unconsciously. This happens when you sing along with the radio while filling in the unknown lyrics with familiar phrases they sound like. It is misinterpreting the strong teachings of the Bible or a sermon to endorse your actions, but to condemn the behavior of the person sitting next to you.
- ❖ Finally, the one most of us are perhaps guilty of, selective retention. This happens when you've listened to and understood all of the radio program, the Scripture passage, or the sermon, but you live tomorrow as though you weren't even exposed to it today.

Which of these types of selective listening are you most often guilty of? Perhaps you require Jesus' healing hand to touch your ears and make them listen more effectively.

Objects Are Closer Than They Appear (8:1-26)

The healing of the blind man here and the deaf-mute in chapter seven are the only two miracles that appear only in Mark's Gospel.

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Also, this healing of the blind man is the only two-stage miracle that Jesus performs. This entire section is building up to the two-stage healing of the blind man. Why a two-stage healing? Jesus does this deliberately because He is trying to communicate something; He is not merely trying to heal this man. Like the healing of the deaf-mute, this is a visual parable. Sight often represented understanding, and Jesus is depicting the foggy understanding that the disciples had concerning Him. It is performed to depict the denseness of His disciples.

In Mark, only three of Jesus' miracles are performed before private audiences: Jairus' daughter, the deaf-mute, and this blind man. However, Jesus was not entirely alone with the blind man, for the man saw "people, but they look like trees walking." Presumably it was the blurry disciples that the man saw. Perhaps Jesus was trying to let them know what it felt like to only be partially seen (just as the disciples had only partially understood Jesus). Do you have a distorted view of Jesus?

Chapter 11

A Follower's Fee - Mark 8:27-9:29

Jesus predicts His own suffering and crucifixion in three famous passages in Mark (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In this lesson, we will encounter the first of these. It is important to note the improper response of the disciples when Jesus predicts His own suffering and death. They have an improper view of Jesus as the Christ. Because of this misunderstanding, they also misunderstand their role as followers of Christ. In today's passage, Jesus is going to clarify His role as the "Messiah," while clarifying the role of those who wish to be called His followers. He does so by delineating the cost of discipleship.

Following Jesus: How Much Does It Cost? (8:27 – 9:1)

Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your

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soul for?” You just read the price tag of discipleship. How much does it cost? Everything.

Jesus asks who others say that He is only to create the opportunity to ask the disciples who they think He is. Most people had a misguided view of who Jesus was (see also Mark 6:14-16). The theories about Jesus (John the Baptist, Elijah, some other prophet) all involve preparatory roles. Jesus was not preparatory; He was the real thing. “Christ” is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew, Messiah, meaning “anointed one.” Mark 8:29 is the first time the word has resurfaced since Mark 1:1 (and it will appear 5 more times in Mark after 8:29). Those in the Old Testament that were anointed were prophets, priests, and especially kings. Jesus was all of the above. The disciples had the vernacular right, but still didn’t fully understand what was meant by “Messiah.”

Most (including the Twelve) were expecting a victorious Messiah by conventional means. The Jewish understanding of the Christ (i.e., “Messiah”) was that He would bring deliverance through conquest. Here, Jesus explains that He will bring deliverance through the cross. He would achieve victory through suffering. He would take up the cross, not the crown. Thus Jesus requires His listeners to adjust-and raise-their expectations of the Messiah. He is more, much more, than they had anticipated. God’s means of deliverance was through suffering and death. Jesus knew that His followers still viewed His Messiah-ship incorrectly, thus He immediately sets out to correct their mistaken view.

He is met with disapproval and rebuke by Peter. Peter “rebukes” Jesus-the same strong language that is used of Jesus elsewhere to silence demons. Why Peter’s negative response? Because the identity and destiny of Jesus will determine the identity and destiny of His followers. What will the disciples receive in return for following Jesus? If He is going to reign, they will partake in His glory. But if He is going to die, they will partake in His suffering. If your military commander predicts that he will suffer and die in an upcoming battle-how willing would you be to enter the battle with him? If your basketball coach declares that he will not be victorious in the upcoming game-wouldn’t that discourage the players? That’s why Jesus tells Peter that he is interested in the things of men (namely himself) and not that of God. Peter is interested in saving his own neck! The “things of God” indicates that God’s plan includes Jesus’ suffering.

Mark 8:34 is the only time in this Gospel that Jesus calls the crowds together with the disciples—he is about to say something important. In fact, what he says is the hinge to the entire book. How much does it cost? What is the price tag for discipleship? You must deny yourself. It means treachery or disavowal of oneself. The closest opposite of the notion of “self-denial” is “self-allegiance”—concerned ultimately for one’s own good, looking out for number one. Discipleship, Jesus informs us, costs everything. Jesus had challenged many of his disciples to follow him prior to this (see chapter one), but they were evidently not clear on what was required.

Are you aware of the personal cost of discipleship? What has it cost you personally? Are you willing to pay such high tuition? Is there an area of your life that you are refusing to submit to Him? Then you are delinquent on payment. What are you holding back from God? Write it down, put it in an envelope, and give it over to Him. Does it hurt? Absolutely. But there is comfort on the other side, and peace because you know you’ve done the right thing. What are you holding on to in allegiance to yourself? Jim Eliot spoke some famous words that continue to challenge us today: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

If allegiance can no longer be paid to ourselves, then who does it rightly belong to? To put it another way, “Who do I pay?”

Following Jesus: Who Do I Pay? (9:2-9:13)

After discovering how much something costs, you then must determine who you will pay. Jesus is worth our reliance and allegiance.

Many scholars hold the Transfiguration to be the fulfillment of Mark 9:1. In fact, in each of the Synoptic Gospels (there is no record of the Transfiguration in the Fourth Gospel) the Transfiguration is immediately preceded by this prediction (Matthew 16:28; Luke 9:27). The Transfiguration of Christ was done for the benefit of the disciples—“before them” (9:2, 4), “enveloped them” (9:7), a voice addressed them (9:7). It is meant to confirm for them the true identity of Jesus as God’s Son. The voice from heaven repeats that Jesus is “My beloved Son” (compare with the voice at Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:11), but adds that the disciples are to “listen to Him,” suggesting that they had hitherto not been doing so (see Peter’s rebuke of Jesus in 8:32). Imagine

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how foolish Peter felt when, after rebuking Jesus in Mark 8:32, the Father instructs him to “listen to him.”

Who do you pay? Who’s receiving your allegiance? Who are you following? As you try to live this life of self-denial, who are you listening to? According to the revelation of the Transfiguration and the voice from heaven, Jesus alone is worthy-follow Him! The Apostle Paul perhaps understood this more than any other writer of the New Testament. Paul understood that the suffering Messiah had indeed come, and had accomplished salvation that demands a response of self-denial and Christ-allegiance.

Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

He writes in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Finally, in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 the great Apostle writes, “For the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised.”

Following Jesus: How Does It Work? (9:14-29)

After learning an item’s cost and purchasing it, you then take it home and try it out to determine how it works. The disciples haven’t learned to deny selves and rely solely on Him.

This text describes the disciples’ inability to cast out a demon. Why were they unable to do so? After all, they had experienced success at casting out demons when they depended upon God (Mark 6:13). Jesus informs them that the demon could only be exorcised “by prayer,” indicating that the disciples were relying on themselves instead of God. They had not yet learned to deny themselves, and they still retain a fair measure of self-confidence.

The disciples’ failure stems from their limited perspective. They simply haven’t learned their own limitations and the limitless power

of Christ. They are living lives of self-dependence and self-allegiance. They have not learned to deny themselves, sacrificing their self-interests for the sake of the cross. Do you struggle to maintain the right perspective regarding the way you live your life? Perhaps this story from one man's life-and death-will assist you in your struggle.

Charlemagne, king of the Franks, was a man who seemed to have everything. According to one of his closest assistants, "He was six feet four inches tall, and built to scale. He had blond hair, animated eyes, a powerful nose ... a presence 'always stately and dignified.'"

Charlemagne went to Rome on Christmas Day in a.d. 800. There in a church, dressed in his best imperial purple, he received the name "Charles the Great." While kneeling before the altar, the Pope took the imperial crown and placed it upon Charlemagne's head, hailing him the sixty-eighth Emperor of Rome-an empire that he been dead for over 300 years. Charlemagne was so great, so rich, so brave, and so powerful, that his influence was virtually global.

Charlemagne never submitted himself to the medicine of his day. Therefore, in a.d. 814 when he became ill at the age of seventy-two, he declined medical treatment, refused to eat, and died at the end of a week.

He had, however, made all of his last arrangements with meticulous care and specificity. At his request, he was buried in the vault of the cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle. His body was dressed in imperial purple and seated upon a throne inside the unusual tomb. With a crown on his head, a scepter in his hand, a sword by his side, and an open Bible on his knees, the great Emperor sat in all of his glory, and the vault was closed. Charlemagne had prescribed all of this in his will, and had besides given instructions that his tomb should never be opened.

But a German emperor, wishing to secure the regalia (the crown, scepter, and other royal and imperial ornaments), had the vault opened in a.d. 997-nearly 200 years later. Charlemagne's body was found just as had he had requested. And, there, on his lap was the open Bible Charlemagne had requested. And one bony finger pointed to Matthew 16:26 = Mark 8:36-37: "For what does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or what can a person give in exchange for his life?"

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How does it work? How is it possible to deny one's own interests for the sake of the cross? It's realizing that this world is not all there is. There is more to this life than having the highest-paying job or the fastest car or the most money or the greatest reputation or the most attractive figure. We are citizens of another world. Some of you have grown comfortable here; you have grown deep roots in this world. In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul writes,

“But our citizenship is in heaven-and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of his glorious body by means of that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself.”

Can you say with Paul in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”? Did you hear that? To die is gain! The fee that is requested for this ride with Jesus-the tuition to enter into His school of discipleship-is your very life. Anything less would be a slap in the face to the Savior who bought you.

Chapter 12

Three Attitudinal Changes

En route to correcting his disciples' (and our) perspectives, Jesus will also articulate his second of three Passion Predictions. We'll encounter the third and last one in the next lesson. In this lesson, Jesus challenges His disciples to adjust their perspective in three areas.

A Disciple of Jesus Christ Chooses Insignificance Over Recognition (9:30-37)

After the second prediction, the disciples discussed which among them was the greatest. In other words, they still didn't get it! How dense they seem. Jesus is spelling out for them His own future suffering and impending death, and they are preoccupied with comparing themselves with one another in an attempt to discover which is the greatest, the most important, the most significant.

Twice in this lesson, Jesus uses children to teach lessons. The Greek word *παῖδες* (used in Mark 9:36-37; 10:13-15) often refers to very young children, but can mean children of any age up to early teens, and without regard to parental relationship. In the first century, children were especially regarded as

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insignificant. They had no power and no status, and were not considered full persons. Thus to embrace a child publicly was to embrace that which was insignificant. Jesus was choosing insignificance by association. In contrast to the discussion the disciples shared about being the greatest, Jesus characterizes “kingdom greatness” by showing them a helpless, self-denying child. Children recognized their own insignificance. Only someone with a true servant’s heart—voluntarily taking last place—could receive an insignificant child. Following Christ and denying ourselves involves becoming insignificant because of the Kingdom of God.

What is your ministry of insignificance? Are you fearful for your reputation or your status. Remember, even Jesus, for the joy set before Him, became insignificant and endured the cross for you and me. That’s what a disciple of Jesus will do. He chooses insignificance over recognition.

A Disciple of Jesus Christ Chooses Sacrifice Over Selfishness (9:38 - 10:12)

Notice that John describes the person as not following “us.” Clearly, he has selfish motives in this text. We learned about denying ourselves in the previous lesson and redirecting our allegiance onto Christ; this week we learn to deny ourselves in consideration of others. The main message of this passage is self-denial or sacrifice over selfishness and self-allegiance. The kingdom of God belongs to those who sacrifice.

I’m going to zero in on Jesus’ illustration. I believe that the reason Jesus teaches against divorce in this context is to portray divorce as a purely selfish act. He begins by correcting John’s selfishness and affirming any who sacrifice for the name of Christ (9:39-41). He transitions to talk about selfless living around others so as to prevent them from stumbling and one’s willingness to sacrifice life and limb for the Kingdom (9:42-48). Salt, Jesus says, at times represents judgment upon people (9:49). But the salt of selflessness and sacrifice is the secret to “peace with each other” (9:50). The very next line begins the pericope on divorce. No one in antiquity spoke out against divorce more strongly than Jesus does here.

Then it hit me. There were no classes being offered on strengthening your marriage or marriage success or marriage rescue.

Balance was sorely absent. There was lots of emphasis on recovery after the fact but no emphasis on rescue before the fact! How different that is from Scripture's treatment of the subject. Of course the Bible teaches grace and to care for those hurting and broken. But the emphasis in Scripture is on obedience in the first place.

It is commonly known that the divorce rate among Christians is virtually identical to the divorce rate among the unsaved. Furthermore, the average marriage today in the U.S. lasts 7.2 years. California leads all states in divorces annually, followed closely by Texas. Finally, eighty percent (80%) of all divorces claim "irreconcilable differences" as the reason for the divorce.

Irreconcilable differences has been described thus: "The most common ground for dissolving a marriage is dissolution of matrimony based on irreconcilable differences which have caused the irremediable breakdown of the marriage. The irreconcilable differences ground is broad for a reason. It is intended to represent the actual reasons underlying marital breakdowns, simply stated, it is a "no fault" basis for terminating a marriage. Once the court finds that irreconcilable differences have indeed caused the irremediable breakdown of the marriage, the court must grant the requested dissolution of marriage."

We have sat across from couples who told us they were constantly fighting and that divorce would be the best thing for them. Other times couples have informed us that they were divorced because it was the best thing for their kids. We may offend some when we abjectly disagree with that proposition. Divorce is never the answer when a couple fights too much. And divorce is never the best thing for your children. Taking that step is giving a geographical solution to a heart problem-it just doesn't work. You know what would be best for your kids? Stop fighting! Divorce is never "better for the kids."

Finally, the Bible makes it clear that divorce is always the result of sin. Did you catch that? Perhaps that statement needs to sink in a little for some of you, as you may have never heard such a bold statement pertaining to divorce. We can say it again; Divorce is always the result of sin. Whether adultery, neglect, selfishness, or any number of other sins. If this is true, then why does the divorce rate among believers remain so high? Perhaps it's because we refuse to listen to

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God's Word and acknowledge the firm stance it takes on the issue. If the reason you wish to get divorced is not permitted in Scripture, then it is not permitted. Now, before you sit down to write that angry letter to me, please remember two important things: 1) Church is not the one who is strict about marriage - Jesus is. Church is simply in agreement with Him. 2) If you plan to defend your right to a divorce, you'd better be able to defend yourself from Scripture, because the church would ask you for a chapter and verse from the Word of God that justifies your decision. A disciple of Jesus Christ chooses sacrifice over selfishness, even (especially?) within the family.

A Disciple of Jesus Christ Chooses Dependence Over Self-Reliance (10:13-31)

The characteristic that Jesus wants the disciples-and us-to learn from these children is that of dependence. In a culture where 6 of 10 children died before the age of 16,87 Jesus communicates His love for the helpless and dependent. The issue is one of dependence over self-reliance. Children must depend upon others. In contrast to these dependent children, the rich man was relying solely on himself ("What must I do to inherit eternal life?"). The kingdom of God belongs to those who depend on God rather than the self-reliant.

I spent three years as a school teacher. As a teacher, I was often asked my position on the modern teaching theory that instructs children that they have the potential to do anything. Rather than damage a child's fragile self-esteem, the theory says, we should assign the highest grades to each child while whispering in their ear that they've earned it. A teacher should only be affirming, never negative. "If you believe it, you can achieve it!" is the rallying cry for today's youth. "Where there's a will there's a way!" "You can do anything you set our mind to!"

As a teacher, I cannot subscribe to such a theory. As a reasonable human, I realize how hopelessly flawed and unrealistic such teaching really is. Reality proves that such statements are absurd. No child has such potential, and each child has his or her own unique potential. To falsely convince a child of his limitless potential in order to save his self-esteem today is to set him up for failure and damage his self-esteem tomorrow-because inevitably he will fail. And when he fails,

who does he have to blame but himself? He did, after all, have all the potential to succeed.

Moreover, such a theory fails students in another crucial area—teaching them their limitations. Children today can do amazing things and they have enormous (albeit not unlimited) potential. We must teach them that. But we must also teach them their limitations and what cannot be done. The word “can’t” seldom comes up anymore, because we want folks to believe so they can achieve. But when appropriate, the word “can’t” is a great teaching tool, for it shows limitation. It balances what they are able to do with what they are unable to do. And it discourages isolationistic Lone Rangers while creating a need for healthy dependence-upon others and upon God. You and I must depend on God because we “can’t”—in God’s ears it is one of the most beautiful words, as it communicates dependence on Him. Thus we are perfectly positioned for His miraculous hand to work. Have you told God lately that you can’t do it? With people it is impossible; but with God, all things are possible.

Chapter 13

Discipleship is Servitude

What images come to your mind when you hear the word “servant”? Perhaps you envision that waiter or waitress at your favorite restaurant. Maybe you think of that mechanic that you’ve built a relationship with through years of broken cars. Some may even think of their mother who worked tirelessly to care for her family. Another image conjured up by the title “servant” is “minister.” The word is derived from a Latin term meaning “servant” or “minor.” The Bible talks candidly about the minister’s primary role of serving others. But in an age of domination and faulty ideas about leadership, it is difficult to discern the true servant from a false one. How would I know a servant if I saw one? You will know whether a person is a servant or not by the way they act when they are treated like one.

In today’s passage, we learn two essential characteristics of a true servant.

A Servant Surrenders What’s Best for Himself (10:32-45)

This passion prediction is the most detailed of the three. Jesus mentions for the first time that Jerusalem

is His destination. He also adds that he will be turned over to the Gentiles (implying that His death will be by crucifixion - a prominent Roman form of execution), and that He will be mocked, spit upon, and flogged severely.

After the first prediction, Peter rebuked Jesus and was rebuked in return. After the second, the disciples discussed along the way who was the greatest, and Jesus had to instruct them that whoever wishes to be first must be last of all and servant of all. Here, after the third, James and John approach Jesus requesting to partake of His coming glory. Mark 10:35-40 clearly shows the mistaken view the disciples had of "Christ" - and again Jesus seeks to correct them by challenging them to be "servant" and "slave." They still don't understand. And Jesus once again responds by instructing them that if it is greatness you seek, then you must be a servant and slave of all. Again, not what they were expecting. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die; the disciples' response conveys that they still think Jesus is going to Jerusalem to reign.

James and John were not mistaken in recognizing that they were especially favored by God, but they were mistaken in imagining that this would come at no cost. They sought close association with the future king of Israel - and all the rights and privileges that accompany such proximity. They were anticipating all of Jerusalem bowing before Jesus and paying Him homage; instead they bowed before Him mockingly and spit upon Him. They were anticipating a crown of gold; instead He received a crown of thorns. They were anticipating a throne; instead He received a cross. They were anticipating sitting at his right and left; instead criminals were hung there.

The Son of Man did not come to be served. If the Son of Man did not come to be served - how wrong it is for you and me to seek to be served. Rather, we should dedicate our very lives in service to others, and look out for others' interests over our own. The Apostle John who requested this privileged position beside Jesus would later understand servant-hood. He who penned John 3:16 also penned 1 John 3:16:

"We have come to know love by this: that Jesus laid down his life for us; thus we ought to lay down our lives for our fellow Christians."

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Jesus was choosing to suffer unjustly for the sake of the Gospel. A servant will allow others to treat him unfairly for the sake of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-19). He will not instinctively defend himself, but will supernaturally serve others without expectation of remuneration. Why would a servant relinquish what's best for himself? It's not that a servant seeks last place out of self-deprivation, but that he wishes others to receive first place and promotes them over himself. It is not for self-punishment. Don't deprive yourself for deprivation's sake. Do so for others. Others will be in first place by virtue of your taking last place. Jesus didn't go to the cross because He was a masochist; He went for you and me. True greatness in God's kingdom is found in the servant.

A Servant Seeks What's Best for Others (10:46-52)

The healing of blind Bartimaeus is Jesus' last healing miracle of in the Gospel of Mark. The cloak that was thrown off was a beggar's cloak used to collect hand-outs by spreading it out before him as he sat begging. By casting it aside, Bartimaeus was forsaking his former way of life, completely confident that Jesus would heal him. In contrast to the rich man (10:17-22), Bartimaeus leaves everything he has and follows Jesus. He is the picture of true discipleship-He recognized his own need for a Savior, calls out to Jesus, receives healing (lit., "your faith assaved you"), and then follows Jesus. The sight of Bartimaeus stands in contrast to the spiritual blindness of the disciples and the religious leaders Jesus is about to encounter in Jerusalem.

Twice in this passage Jesus asks the servant's question: "What do you want me to do for you?" The question is asked of the disciples in 10:36, and then of Bartimaeus in 10:51. Of course, this question is always on the lips of a servant, and never on the lips of one who seeks to be served. How often do we ask the question, "What will you do for me?" Or, we ask the right question with all sorts of strings attached. We ask it for recognition or we ask it because we are paid to ask it.

My wife is a servant, always asking others what she can do for them. I can't count the number of meals that have been cooked in my house for other families. She is thoughtful and considerate of even the smallest detail, and puts her compassion to practice by serving others-usually without recognition (the last thing she is interested in).

Is there someone in your life that could benefit from being served? Consider asking them the servant's question this week. What do you want me to do for you?

Fruits of Discipleship (11:1-26)

With Mark chapter eleven, we begin the final division in the Gospel of Mark: Passion Week-where Jesus prepares for His own suffering and death. We also begin here a new mini-series leading up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. The next three lessons focus on the notion of Israel's failure and consequent judgment. In the next lesson, Jesus will demonstrate his rejection of Israel (11:27 - 12:44). And in the following lesson Jesus will describe Israel's rejection (13:1-37).

In this lesson, we see the declaration of judgment upon Israel for her lack of fruit. The reader is intended to understand that a similar declaration of judgment will be pronounced upon all who produce no fruit.

Our Messiah Has Arrived (11:1-11)

Mark 11 records the beginning of what has traditionally been called "Passion Week." Beginning with Palm Sunday (named this because the people spread palm branches out before Jesus during His so-called Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem), this final week of the Savior's life is filled with unpleasant interactions with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, culminating in Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Up until this point in the Gospel of Mark, most scholars agree on its basic meaning. At chapter eleven, scholars each take their own road with this difficult text.

Accompanied by several powerful Old Testament citations and images, this passage has very strong Messianic overtones. The primary Old Testament passages drawn from are cited here:

- ❖ Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your king is coming to you: he is legitimate and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey on a young donkey, the foal of a female donkey.
- ❖ 2 Kings 9:13 Each of them quickly took off his robe and they spread them out at his feet on the steps. The trumpet was blown and they shouted, "Jehu is king!"

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- ❖ Psalm 118:25 Please Lord, deliver! Please Lord, grant us success!
- ❖ Ps 118:26 May the one who comes in the name of the Lord be blessed! We will pronounce blessings on you in the Lord's temple.

The crowd probably responded to Jesus because they saw Him riding on a donkey. Thus, in accordance with Zechariah 9:9 they hailed him as the Messiah king, even placing branches (palm branches according to John's Gospel) before his path (see 2 Kings 9:13).

The temple that Jesus sees was quite a sight indeed! This temple was enormous, standing 150 feet tall and 150 feet long—roughly the size of a 15-story building. At this time, merely one week before a major Jewish Feast—all the eyes of the world were upon Jerusalem, which swelled to double or perhaps triple its normal population of 30,000. But especially, all eyes were upon the Temple as the center of religious activity. By entering the temple, Jesus is sizing up the playing field for the battle that will commence the next day. It is a fierce battle which, according to the Synoptic Gospels, ultimately leads to His arrest and execution.

Our Deception Will Be Revealed (11:12-19)

This passage has proven to be one of the most difficult passages in all the Gospels. The cursing of the fig tree is Jesus' only recorded miracle that results in destruction rather than restoration. The passage, however, becomes clear when understood in its literary context.

Mark has several interrupted accounts. The fig tree incident is yet another one. On a number of occasions, Mark begins one story and concludes it only after another story is interjected and resolved. This is almost always a literary device designed to tie two incidents together thematically. In this passage, two encounters with a fig tree are deliberately sandwiched in between Jesus' cleansing of the temple. There is apparently a relationship between the two incidents, and the reader is left to discover that relationship.

The temple cleansing is a fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-3. Moses commanded that folks were to purchase sacrifices conveniently, so the purchasing of sacrifices was not the impetus for Jesus' actions. There seem to be two reasons for Jesus' abrupt behavior: 1) the Gentile court was not functioning as intended: it was supposed to be a house of worship and instead these worshippers were being crowded

out by merchandisers, and 2) It was supposed to be primarily a place of worship, not primarily a marketplace.

Although leaves would commonly appear in March or April, figs normally sprouted in June. The fully developed leaves on this tree, however, suggested that fruit would also be found. Jesus approaches the leafy fig tree fully expecting to find fruit there (if any tree is going to have fruit, this tree certainly would). When He finds none, Jesus responds in righteous anger. Likewise, Jesus enters the temple fully expecting to find fruit there (if any place is going to produce spiritual fruit, this temple certainly would). When He finds none, Jesus responds in righteous anger.

The fig tree incident, then, is a visual parable. Clearly Jesus is indicating judgment, but judgment on whom? Since the tree had leaves, one would expect that fruit accompanied them. Jesus expects to see fruit, and is visibly disappointed when He finds none. The tree was “pretending” to bear fruit. What a terrific picture of the Jewish leadership of Jesus’ day. They “pretended” to have fruit. What a great picture of countless believers today.

The point lies in the difference between the appearance of the temple and the tree from a distance and their true condition, which a closer inspection reveals. Does that sound like your life? To most people you appear to be genuine. But what if we examined you closer? What if we could follow you around for a week? Would we find fruit, or have you grown adept at giving the appearance of fruit from a distance?

Our Fruitfulness Pleases the Lord (11:20-26)

Jesus is here giving a summons to faith and to action consistent with one’s faith. He mentions two specific fruits of genuine faith: Prayer and forgiveness - two of the most difficult fruits to counterfeit. Incidentally, the first fruit Jesus describes (namely, prayer) is the primary fruit He found missing at the temple (“My house will be called a house of prayer...”). Just as a pulse is the sign of a heartbeat, so fruit is the sign of internal spiritual life.

Charles Ryrie says on the inevitability of producing fruit”

“Every Christian will bear spiritual fruit. Somewhere, sometime, somehow. Otherwise that person is not a believer. Every born-again

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individual will be fruitful. Not to be fruitful is to be faithless, without faith, and therefore without salvation.”

Perhaps you should take some time today to do some fruit inspection in your life. Are you skilled at appearing fruitful from a distance, or does a closer examination reveal true, lasting fruit? You may find it helpful to begin your examination using the words of David recorded in Psalm 139:23-24 (taken from *The Message*, a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson):

“Investigate my life, Oh God.
Find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
Get a clear picture of what I’m about;

See for Yourself whether I’ve done anything wrong, Then guide me on the road to eternal life.”

Chapter 14

Authority of Jesus

In the personal battles of your life today you may be asking “Who is really in charge?” So many today are experiencing pain and discouragement that could never have been anticipated. A sick loved one, a car accident, a pink slip appearing in our work mailbox. Is life merely a series of coincidences or disconnected letdowns? Or is there a Sovereign God of the universe that maintains His authority - even on our worst day?

Jesus Claims Authority over Jewish Leadership (11:27 – 12:12)

On January 15th, 2003, The Wall Street Journal ran an article on thermostats. According to the article, some companies have instructed their HVAC technicians to install dummy thermostats in an effort to minimize employee complaints. Employees are thereby given the illusion of control, and complaints have grown to a minimum as a result. The rumor is that the next investigation will look into the “close door” buttons in elevators that never seem to function.

In the same way that these employees possessed the illusion of control, this passage will expose the “illusion” of many in the first century that they possessed

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ultimate authority. If the previous lesson was a declaration of judgment, this is a demonstration of judgment by the one who has authority to judge. Four times in this passage the word ἰσχύς (“authority”) appears. There are those who seem to be in authority, and God who is in fact in authority.

These three groups mentioned together - the chief priests, the experts in the law, and the elders - make up the Sanhedrin. It is the legislative Jewish body- the highest Jewish authority. They ask where Jesus received authority to act with such boldness in cleansing the temple (this same Sanhedrin will sentence Him to death this very week). After saying that He would not answer their inquiry, Jesus proceeds to answer them in the form of a parable. Chapter twelve, then, is an unhelpful chapter break.

In this parable, the vineyard is Israel, the owner is God, the tenant farmers are the Jewish leaders, the servants are the prophets that are sprinkled throughout Israel’s history that the leadership has always rejected (see also Acts 7:51-53), and the only son is of course Jesus (literally, “beloved son”; see Mark 1:11). Here we have a veiled prediction that Jesus would be killed by the religious leadership of His day. Jesus’ authority comes from His Father who sent Him just as the son in the parable received his authority from his father. Thus Jesus was claiming higher authority than those in the Sanhedrin, who were mere renters in the unfolding plan of God. The claim of any one man to have authority greater than the Sanhedrin would have shocked a first century Jew.

Authority over Rome (12:13-17)

The Pharisees opposed Roman rule while the Herodians supported the Roman appointed Herodian Dynasty. The Pharisees despised paying taxes; the Herodians were in favor of it. These two groups rarely agreed with one another and seldom associated together. What brings them together here is not a common bond, but a common enemy.

These two groups approached Jesus with a denarius to test Him. The denarius contained Caesar’s inscription. It was probably that of Tiberius Caesar (a.d. 14-37). If so, the coin would have read “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Caesar’s image was on the coin, so Jesus instructs His listeners to give back to Caesar what rightly belongs to him. In the same way, we

should give back to God what rightly belongs to Him - we the bearers of His image. Jesus used the coin to distinguish between Caesar and God in a culture that drew no such distinction. In doing so, He clearly demonstrates that God's authority is higher than that of Caesar.¹¹¹

In Jesus' day there were two prominent views on authority: Either the religious leadership (especially the Sanhedrin) was in authority or the Romans (especially Caesar). Jesus dismisses each of these possibilities. While these entities certainly give the appearance of authority (the "illusion of control"), God alone possesses the rights and privileges as the one in control.

Jesus outsmarted these religious leaders, but He also out-authorized them.

Authority over the Law (12:18-40)

The Sadducees were just as hostile to the Pharisees as the Herodians were, yet they too unite with the Pharisees to bring down a common enemy. They were a small but influential group that would cease to exist following the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70.

The Sadducees accepted only the Book of Moses - the first five books in the Old Testament - as authoritative. They did not believe in life after death, as they found no evidence for it in the Pentateuch. Jesus affirms a future resurrection by affirming from the Book of Moses the doctrine of life after death. God is (present tense) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although these were all dead when this was spoken, Jesus suggests that they lived on. Thus, Jesus proves that His understanding of the Law is superior to that of the Sadducees.

Likewise, Jesus demonstrates His superiority over the expert in the law by assessing verbally the thoughtfulness of his comments on the Law. After Jesus answers Him well, the expert attempts to assume a superior role by positively assessing Jesus' answer. However, Jesus reassumes authority with the last word when He tells the expert that he is not far from the kingdom of God.

Jesus then begins an excursus on a difficult passage to remove any doubt that He is the Master of the Scriptures. The Christ is going to come from the line of David. If so, the Messiah is the son of David and could rightly be called his son. A son could refer to his father as lord, but never a father to a son. But David realized that this descendent

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would be superior to himself, and so calls Him Lord. Thus, Jesus is greater than a typical Israelite king, and even greater than the great king, David. The only answer that can be given is that David's son is also David's Lord. This hints at the dual nature of Jesus, the human and divine.

Authority over Our Lives (12:41-44)

In contrast to the presumptuous authority of certain pompous religious leaders, Jesus commends the action of a sacrificial woman who recognizes that God is really in control. This woman has only two small copper coins - the least valuable coins in circulation during the time of Jesus. Their total value measured about 1/64th that of a denarius (a day's wage). If this is all she had, then she was poor indeed. What could compel this impoverished woman to courageously yield all she had to live on? She must have been leaning entirely on the care of a Sovereign God. If you were to ask her that day, "Who's in charge?" - she would not have spoken of the reigning Jewish leadership or the security of the always-stable Roman Empire. She would have spoken of her God.

Having claimed authority over competing rulers, Jesus points out a woman who lives her life under the authority of God. She exhibits at least these traits:

- ❖ Humble - contrasted with those who threw in large amounts of money to make much noise, this woman is unashamed to come and put hers in.
- ❖ Sacrificial - she gave out of her poverty all she had.
- ❖ Fearless - she was trusting in something other than money for her survival.

What would it look like if the Lord Jesus were your authority in life? You would love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You will love Him and trust Him with everything you have and everything you are - like this poor woman does.

Chapter 15

Olive Discourse (13:1-37)

This passage is the longest discourse in Mark's Gospel. It is called the "Olivet Discourse" because it is a discourse that takes place on the Mount of Olives. The message was delivered by Jesus on either Tuesday or Wednesday before His Friday execution. Here, Jesus will predict a far-future event (His return) by comparing it to a near-future event (destruction of the temple).

Be ready to wrestle with deception (13:1-8)

Jesus predicts the destruction of the massive temple in Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian, compared the temple to a mountain. He said some of its stones measured 25 x 12 x 8 cubits! The temple was destroyed in AD 70.

When the disciples ask for the sign that will indicate when "these things" will take place, Jesus responds by listing the false signs. In other words, when Jesus is asked about the end, He begins His answer by saying when it will not be. His first comment is to watch out! Yet many over the centuries have ignored this warning. Countless Christians have been misled by false predictions of pinpoint accuracy.

Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth* was such a book. According to the *New York Times*, Lindsay's

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book was the number one best-selling non-fiction book in the decade of the 70's. However, rather than teach believers how to better prepare for the Lord's coming, Lindsay played the dangerous game of "this is that," pointing to future people, nations, and events as depicted in biblical prophecy and naming their contemporary fulfillment. The Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain countries favor prominently in this cold war scare novel. Libya, Vietnam, and Iran have more than a little representation.¹¹⁶ Those who found confidence in the accuracy of the Bible because of Lindsay's pinpoint accuracy must certainly be disillusioned today.

Jesus warns against confidence in identifying modern phenomenon with biblical prediction. We are to wrestle with such deception.

Be ready to withstand persecution (13:9-13)

Suffering and persecution do not mean the end has come, although persecution is sure to increase as the end draws near. Jesus' encouragement to persevere was certainly a challenge that the early readers of Mark's Gospel understood. Here as much as anywhere Jesus seeks to prepare His followers for the age to come.

And Christian persecution isn't limited to the early church.

The 20th century was the bloodiest Christian century in history. What does the 21st century hold for us? Will it surpass the 20th century in persecution of Christians? Are we prepared for that contingency?

It is estimated that as many as 160,000 Christians die for their faith each year. Christians die for their faith every day. They are sold into slavery and buried alive in Sudan. They are raped and executed in Central America and the Balkans. They are burned alive, beaten and stoned in India, Indonesia and the East Timor. They are imprisoned and abandoned by their families in the Middle East.

Today violence against Christians is widespread primarily on the continents of Africa and Asia, but Christian persecution exists in every country on the planet every day of the year. When you and I are challenged about our faith, we are to speak boldly by the Spirit in our answer.

Be ready to witness judgment (13:14-23)

What is the "abomination of desolation" (see also Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11)? It seemingly had a partial fulfillment in 167 b.c. when Antiochus

IV Epiphanes erected an altar to the pagan Greek god Zeus over the altar of burnt offering and sacrificed a pig on it. Jesus is probably looking ahead to the destruction of Herod's Temple in a.d. 70, and perhaps using both of these events to foreshadow the end times, when the antichrist will stand where he does not belong-presumably in the temple. This will inaugurate the "Great Tribulation" the second half of the 7-year judgment on Israel. It is useless to try to escape from the judgment, according to Jesus; all will experience it. Both the destruction of the Temple and the Tribulation period are judgments directed primarily at Israel, which is Jesus' main message in this passage.

It will certainly be a terrible day, but Christians are promised that we will be spared from God's wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9).

Be ready to welcome the Lord (13:24-37)

The moral of the story: Be prepared! It is precisely at this point in Matthew's Gospel that Matthew records Jesus' parables about preparation (lamps) and stewardship responsibility (talents).

"Drop-in visits" are not as common in today's culture as they were in the time of our grandparents. It is considered poor etiquette to surprise a friend or neighbor without calling them ahead of time. Although our home is not always perfectly tidy, my wife and I enjoy drop-in guests. Usually we say something like, "I wish I'd known you were coming, and I would have straightened up a little." The Lord is a drop-in visitor. He promises to drop in unexpectedly; He will not call ahead. Is your house in order? He will not accept excuses. He has warned us in advance that we should be prepared.

Do you experience restlessness, knowing that you are not precisely where God wants you? Do you have in the back of your mind plans to change someday - to begin to pray or to read your Bible or to share your faith or to attend church more regularly? Are you ready to give an account today? Sixty-two percent of Americans claim to believe that Jesus is coming back; I wonder how many of them are prepared for His return.

Markan Passion Narrative

Mark's Gospel has often been described as a passion narrative with an extended introduction. This is not an exaggeration. The entire Gospel is oriented toward the passion and resurrection of Jesus. In this year of Mark it is good to recall this trajectory to help shape our proclamation of the passion and resurrection during Holy Week and the Easter season.

The Markan Passion

In comparison with the rest of the Gospel, which runs at a fast pace, time in the passion narrative (chap. 14-15) slows down. It's as if a camera has been put in slow motion to recount the last three days of Jesus' earthly life hour by hour. We witness the well-known events of those fateful days all within the span of two chapters: the anointing in Bethany, the treachery of Judas Iscariot the Betrayer, the Last Supper and the prediction of Peter's denial, the agony in the garden, the arrest of Jesus, the "trial" before the Sanhedrin, Peter's tragic denial of Jesus, the hearing before Pilate, the mockery of Jesus as "king," his crucifixion and death, and his burial in a rock tomb.

We celebrate these events through the Stations of the Cross during Lent, and we know them so well that

we may forget just how theological the narrative is. We may be used to thinking of it as history, which indeed it is. But for Mark and the community for which he wrote, it is more than simply an account of Jesus' fate. It is a drama of divine salvation and a life-giving sacrifice by a "king" dying for the sake of his people.

Two Intertwining Threads

Two distinct but interrelated threads converge in the Markan passion story: the portrait of Jesus as the Son of God who is also the suffering Son of Man, and the portrait of the disciples. In the first instance, Jesus' life climaxes as a fulfillment of the Scriptures (14:50) and confirmation of the reason he was born, namely, to shed his blood for the world (14:24). In the second instance, the disciples show themselves to be as obtuse as they had been portrayed throughout the Gospel, despite the occasional bravado, like Peter's insistence that he would "die with you" rather than deny Jesus (14:31). In the end, one of the closest followers betrays Jesus, Peter denies him not once but three times, and the rest flee for their lives. Not a great track record for the inner circle.

But this story is not an account of mere human failure. It is rather the story of a "king" who redefines the nature of kingship and who makes the ultimate sacrifice for his people by the gift of his own body and blood.

Irony in the Passion Narrative

Subtly, irony is what drives the Markan passion narrative. From the very beginning of the Gospel, the characters in Mark have inquired after Jesus' identity. They have wondered whence his power over demons came, and how he could teach with such authority (i.e., miracles, 1:27). In the final days, Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem as king in the line of the great king of Israel, David (11:7-10). Throughout the passion story, this search continues, with much of the questioning of Jesus surrounding the entire notion of his "kingship." The chief priests, elders and scribes seek to know if he is the Messiah, the long-awaited leader who would cast off the Romans (14:61), while Pilate, the visible sign of Rome's presence and power in Jerusalem, inquires directly about the nature of Jesus' kingship (15:2, 9, 12). After his condemnation by Pilate, Jesus is mocked as a king (15:18), and

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from the cross, he is again mocked by passersby as “King of the Jews” and “King of Israel” (15:26, 32). Ironically, what his mockers don’t realize is the truth of their words. Jesus is, in fact, a king, but not the kind they expect. His kingship consists not in leading armies but in being a true shepherd who cares for his flock (6:34), a suffering Messiah whose identity can only be understood from the cross that he came to bear. He is struck down and the sheep scattered (14:27), but in the end, a Roman soldier (paradoxically representing the Gentiles) recognizes in this drama that Jesus was truly God’s Son (15:39).

The Naked Young Man

One of the curious details in the Markan passion narrative is the short narrative of the young man, wearing only a linen cloth (Greek, *sinдон*), who follows Jesus from a distance after the latter’s arrest (15:51-52). The crowd attempts to seize him, too, but he flees naked, leaving the cloth behind him. Although the story can easily be accepted as a curious historical remembrance, it is not without its symbolic value. First, it follows immediately the laconic line about the disciples: “And they all left him [Jesus] and fled” (15:50). The naked young man’s flight also alludes to the disciples’ inability to follow Jesus throughout the story, in contrast to some others (even the blind!) who see and follow (e.g., Bartimaeus, 10:52). Thus Jesus is left entirely alone. The young man’s nakedness implies this utter vulnerability which also presages Jesus’ humiliation of death on a cross, ignominiously put on display, literally exposed to the world in defeat.

But there is another aspect of this tale. It prefigures Jesus being placed in a tomb. His naked body, utterly spent from the suffering of the cross, is dutifully wrapped in a linen cloth (*sinдон*, 15:46) to be placed in a new tomb. It reinforces Jesus’ full experience of our humanity, including the human dimension of death. He even partook of the aloneness of the tomb. In fact, Mark’s passion narrative ends rather abruptly and starkly with the story of the empty tomb (16:1-8). It recounts the arrival of the faithful women on Easter morning to anoint the body of Jesus, only to find the tomb empty and (again) a young man clothed in white, who announces the resurrection and advises them to tell “his disciples and Peter” to go to Galilee to meet the risen Lord. But then, inexplicably, the text ends with the curious line, “they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (16:8).

Hope of the Resurrection

If the women said nothing, how would we know of the resurrection? With what we have said thus far, one might get the false impression that Mark is unremittingly gloomy in outlook. That is not at all the case. For Mark, what was important all throughout his Gospel was the contrast between the disciples' lack of full comprehension of Jesus' mission and that of the demons and some Gentiles who understand quite well Jesus' divine identity. What the disciples misconstrue is the necessity of Jesus' suffering before he can be vindicated by his heavenly Father. Even when some of them get to glimpse the future glory in the story of the Transfiguration, it is followed by another passion prediction (9:30-32), for Jesus' glory can only come from his sacrificial offering of himself on the cross.

An even more promising image is found in the message to the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee. This is symbolically important. In essence, it is a command to start over again, to go back to Galilee where the Gospel began (1:9). It is, then, an announcement of a new beginning. One need not stand gazing at the empty tomb in wonderment. Our faith is not in an empty tomb but a risen Lord, who has gone before us, both in the experience of death and resurrection, and in the ministry of shepherding people. And this explains the open-ended ending of Mark, which really invites us to receive the same message of hope in the resurrection.

Four Tests of Discipleship in Passion Narrative

In the Passion narrative of Mark, the disciples undergo four tests, and they fail each of them. If the Gospel of Mark was written to evoke a lasting response in word and deed to the true identity of Jesus, this chapter teaches us how the disciples respond when the heat is turned up. Remember to pay particular attention to the responses of those witnessing the action in this story. Mark enjoys painting the overall scene for his reader. Let's look at the disciples' four tests:

A Test of Priority (14:1-11)

This bottle of costly oil was worth about a year's wages. That's a lot of money to pour out! I've often read this story and reacted with these onlookers: What a waste! How much good could have been accomplished if only the oil had been sold and the money properly

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budgeted? In fact, the Gospel of Matthew tells us that those who were disgruntled about the seeming waste were the disciples themselves (26:8).

Judas Iscariot was the designated treasurer of the Twelve and Jesus, according to John's Gospel. The record of his betrayal of Jesus immediately follows the incident of the "wasted" perfume in Mark and Matthew, leading many to conclude that the two were related incidents. He, representing the disciples' misplaced priorities, was overly financially minded. And they all failed to realize a person of Jesus' true stature deserved more than flavored water. The God-man was worthy of even more than this expensive oil.

This unnamed woman responded appropriately to the true identity of Jesus, though His closest followers did not. She alone passed the test of her priorities. She was preoccupied with Jesus alone, evidenced by her eagerness to sacrifice such a valuable commodity for Him.

There are many good things vying for our preoccupation. The disciples were preoccupied with the poor, wanting to sell the oil and care for the poor with the proceeds. What good things threaten to steal your preoccupation away from your Lord? Are you preoccupied with the poor? Your family? Education? Evangelism? The Bible? These are all very good things, but, as Christians, we have only one top priority: the Lord Jesus Christ. Preoccupation with anything else indicates that our priorities, like those of the disciples, need rearranging.

A Test of Pride (14:12-31)

In this passage, Jesus and the disciples celebrate the Last Supper. The Last Supper is a celebration of the Passover, which involved a sacrifice of blood so that the Lord would not pour out His wrath. The Lord's Supper or Communion is a commemoration of the Last Supper. In some traditions, the Lord's Supper or Communion is sometimes labeled "Eucharist," derived from Jesus' offering of "thanks" (Greek, εὐχαριστία) in Mark 14:23. Tradition has it that the Last Supper was hosted in the home of Mark's father.

Dipping the hand in the bowl (v. 20) was like an appetizer-it took place before the meal itself. In this first century Jewish culture, those you ate with were regarded as your closest friends. Jesus was claiming that someone allegedly very close to Him would betray Him.

Four cups were imbibed at the traditional Passover meal, each representing a different aspect of God's unfolding plan of redemption. The cup mentioned in our text was the third cup of the meal. Exodus 6:6-7 gives the four-fold outline for the four cups:

- a. "I will bring you out"
- b. "I will rid you of bondage"
- c. "I will redeem you"
- d. "I will take you for my people and I will be your God."

After singing a hymn, the group retires outside, where Jesus claims that all will "fall away" (Greek, *ὀπίσθια ἄβηται*, meaning they will desert Him because they are offended by Him; see Mark 4:17; 6:3; 9:42-47). The essential meaning, virtually every time this word is used in the New Testament, is that something happens that negatively affects one's walk with Christ, or reveals that there was no relationship to begin with. It is the same word used in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 on how to carefully handle your weaker brother so as not to cause him to stumble. With a scandal, we are offended and refuse to participate.

Peter takes issue with Jesus' prediction. Peter's pride blinded him from recognizing that Jesus was telling the truth. Jesus perfectly foresaw that Peter and John would find the arrangements for the Passover meal. Jesus had been right in everything He had foretold to this point. Peter had no reason to doubt Him, but his pride got in the way. You're right Peter. You will not deny me once; you will deny me three times. Probably, Peter thought that remaining with Jesus and not denying Him meant fighting for Him. Peter was ready to fight, but certainly not willing to be arrested. Previously, Peter refused to believe Jesus when Jesus told Peter that He would be killed. Here Peter once again mistrusts Jesus when he is told that he would fall away. You'd think he would learn. But he failed the test of overconfidence. In the previous test, they didn't know Jesus; here they don't know themselves.

Why do you think the Last Supper is couched immediately between Jesus' predictions of betrayal and abandonment by the disciples? What is the relationship? Jesus' sacrifice-symbolized in the Passover meal-

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is the solution to their problem of falling away. In fact, Mark 14:28 is a verse of ultimate forgiveness. Just as Jesus had predicted that all would fall away, with this verse He predicts that He will reunite with His deniers after He is raised from the dead. When it comes to trusting in God or yourself, which will you choose?

A Test of Preparation (14:32-42)

As hard as it was going to be, Jesus was thoroughly prepared to obey the will of the Father. Let's contrast this with the behavior of His disciples.

Jesus knows that it is impossible to cram for this type of a test. He knew He had to prepare beforehand. The disciples, on the other hand, were remiss in their preparation. The greatest test of their lives would take place the next day, and they could not stay up to prepare.

Cramming for tests can sometimes prove helpful in the short run, but dangerous in the long run. In college, I would occasionally stay up all night and cram for the next day's test. Sometimes I would actually do well, but in the long run I would forget virtually everything I'd learned during those wee hours of the morning. Fortunately, I was not a premed student! Imagine a medical student who crams for their tests and medical boards but forgets most information in the long run! The disciples fail their test of preparation, and they all fall away the following day.

A Test of Perseverance (14:43-52)

Peter (according to John 18:10) pulls his sword in an effort to defend Jesus. However, his demeanor changes when he learns that Jesus is going to go peacefully. Peter is willing to fight for Jesus, but he is not willing to go to trial for him.

Notice the contrast between the beginning of this section and the end. At the beginning, the disciples were confident by His side, enjoying a meal without a care in the world. At the end, Jesus is alone.

Even though they maintained the best of intentions, when put to the test every last disciple abandoned Jesus. What would it take for you to fall away (Greek, *óêáíääëßàù*, "scandalize") from Jesus? A "scandal" is an offensive thing in which we refuse to participate. What are you unwilling to do for God? What area of weakness would

prevent you from persevering in your faith and finishing strong? Fear, pride, lust, greed, money?

Three Encounters in Passion Narrative

Mark enjoys describing individuals who encounter Jesus. One person had known Jesus for more than three years; one never met Jesus, but nevertheless benefited from His death; one responded perfectly to Jesus after his first encounter with Him.

Peter demonstrates sin (14:53-72)

Two witnesses were required for capital punishment, according to Numbers 35:30 and Deuteronomy 17:6. Those who accused Jesus of claiming He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days were perhaps misunderstanding Jesus' statement in John 2:19 (mixed with Mark 13:2). Otherwise, Jesus never claimed to do such a thing.

Jesus had two trials, a religious one and a civil one. The religious one was overseen by Annas, then Caiaphas; the civil one by Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate again (Luke 23:6-12). Jesus had by-and-large veiled His messiahship until now. He first responds with "I am," but then lets them have it with a very bold-and obvious-claim to messiahship (v. 62; note especially the reaction of the Jewish leadership).

Apparently, Jesus and Peter were both undergoing interrogation. "Following" Jesus has been a recurring theme in Mark's Gospel. Those who "follow" (ἑῷῆῖῃῆῖῖῖ) Jesus in Mark's Gospel:

- Peter and Andrew (1:18)
- Levi (2:14)
- Tax collectors and sinners (2:15)
- A crowd from Galilee (3:7)
- Large crowd (5:24)
- His disciples (6:1)
- Any who wish to come after Jesus (8:34)
- Invitation to the rich young ruler (10:21)
- Peter et al (10:28)
- Those going to Jerusalem with Jesus (10:32)

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- Bartimaeus (10:52)
- Those at the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (11:9)
- Peter, from a distance (14:54)
- Mary, Mary, and Salome (15:41)

For the first time, however, someone is following Jesus “from a distance.” Sure, the literal meaning suggests a physical distance between Peter and the one he was following, but the notion of “following” in Mark’s Gospel almost always means more than merely walking behind someone. It suggests loyalty and allegiance. Peter was still following Jesus, but he wanted to distance himself from Jesus to ensure that he was safe from the danger. Notice what happens to Peter because he has permitted distance to develop in his relationship with Jesus. He denies his Lord... three times. He thought he was protected from the danger, but found that more danger lurks when distance separates us from the Lord. Does distance exist in your relationship with Christ?

Barabbas demonstrates substitution (15:1-20)

Who are Pilate and Herod? Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea (AD 26-36), where Jerusalem was located. His residence was in Caesarea, though he travelled to Jerusalem during festivals and stayed in the late Herod the Great’s palace. Herod Antipas was governor of Galilee, though he too enjoyed making the trip to Jerusalem for the festivals. Luke records that when Pilate learned that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent Him to Herod (the Galilean governor) since he was in town. Herod then sends Jesus back to Pilate, who ultimately sentences Jesus to crucifixion.

They chose to release Barabbas over Jesus. I find it ironic that when Jesus proved to be a different type of Savior than they wanted, they chose to replace Him with one who was what they wanted—a political insurrectionist. Many thought Jesus, as the Messiah, would lead a revolt and conquer Rome; Barabbas had done just that. Do you serve the Christ who is or the Christ you want?

Flogging was not necessarily a part of crucifixion. Pilate was probably trying to dissuade the crowd from crucifying Jesus (John 19:4-5). When they persisted, though, he had no choice.

Mark 15:16 describes the whole cohort, which comprised hundreds of soldiers. They struck him on the head with the staff after they had placed the crown of thorns on his head. Mockery ensued, beatings, etc. The crucifixion of Jesus was a lengthy, painful process, not a point in time. Perhaps the most painful part of the episode was their kneeling before Jesus in mockery, though it certainly foreshadowed everyone's kneeling before Him one day (Phil. 2:10-11).

Mark's details pertaining to Barabbas paint a vivid picture of what Jesus did for you and me. Barabbas had been judged and legally condemned. Barabbas was guilty. Barabbas deserved death. Barabbas could do nothing to free himself. Jesus took the place of Barabbas and died on Barabbas' cross. Barabbas was released. I am Barabbas.

The Centurion demonstrates faith (15:21-41)

Note the brevity in the passage -"And they crucified him." The event that all of history hinges on is given only cursory treatment. It is almost too sacred to elaborate upon; or too sacrilegious to consider that the second person of the Trinity was undergoing such cruelty. What they witnessed on the cross was a complete contradiction; it blew all of their categories. By definition, the Messiah was the furthest thing from a crucified criminal.

Cicero (106-43 b.c.), a Roman author, said about crucifixion: "Even the mere word, cross, must remain far not only from the lips of the citizens of Rome, but also from their thoughts, their eyes, their ears." He elsewhere conveys his opinion that crucifixion was the grossest, cruelest, or most hideous manner of execution. One of the privileges of being a Roman citizen was that you were exempted from the cruelty of crucifixion. They reserved it only for non-Roman citizens.

Mark records only one of Jesus' seven sayings from the cross. He quoted the first verse of Psalm twenty-two (much of this Psalm is victorious, leading some to speculate that perhaps He quoted the rest of the Psalm the moment He arose).

Mark customarily records an act or saying of Jesus, and then pans the audience to record their responses. Here, he merely records that Jesus was crucified, then he pans the crowd to record the response

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of the soldiers (15:24), the passers-by (15:29-30), the chief priests and experts in the Law (15:31-32), the criminals with Jesus (15:32), bystanders (15:35-36), the righteous centurion (15:39), and the women (15:40-41). He gets everyone's response.

The Centurion is one of only a handful of people in the Gospel of Mark that respond appropriately to Jesus. A Centurion in the Roman army has charge of one hundred soldiers.

In Mark, the right response to Jesus is described in the very first verse: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The Centurion nailed it. And the Gospel demands such a response of faith every day. We exercise faith in the Gospel the first time for salvation, but every day after that we must walk by faith.

Markan Resurrection Narrative

The “ending” of Mark is one of the most widely-known problems in New Testament studies, involving both text-critical and exegetical issues. It is almost unanimously agreed that none of the variant material after 16:8 forms an original part of Mark, and, although one still encounters the view that an original ending beyond 16:8 was lost, the more widely shared view today is that the author in fact chose to end his story of Jesus at this point. But, if on text-critical grounds 16:8 is widely accepted as the most likely original ending, this only highlights the difficult exegetical issue: How are we to understand the way the author of the Gospel of Mark chose to conclude this influential account?

In this paper, I hope to deploy good reasons for holding that 16:1-8 was intended as an entirely meaningful, encouraging, and positive *climax* to this influential story of Jesus, and not the somewhat anti-climactic and ambiguous scene so often posited in scholarship today.¹ This contention goes against what are now some widely-held views. To make my case, therefore, will require some sustained attention to a selection of important matters.

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One of the most crucial of these is how to understand the characterization and narrative function of the women disciples in the scene. Women are the sole human figures in Mark 16:1-8, and, as increasingly recognized today, they are also important in two key earlier scenes in the passion narrative (15:40-41, 47). But the question of what to make of these women awaits a widely-persuasive answer.² So, *en route* to an adequate analysis of Mark 16:1-8, we shall first consider Mark's deployment of women followers of Jesus in the final two chapters of his pioneering book about Jesus.

The Women Disciples In 15:40–16:8

There is now a considerable and still-growing body of scholarship on Mark's treatment of women, especially women followers of Jesus.³ The women in Mark 16:1-8 have received by far the greatest attention, and this scene will also be crucial in my analysis as well. Although Dibelius referred to the women as "superfluous" in 16:1-8, in more recent study we have come to see that they are important in the author's literary strategy.⁴ This particular group of identified women followers of Jesus appears in three crucial Markan scenes, and only these three times in Mark, in the passion and resurrection narratives (15:40, 47; 16:1). All three references to the women are significant for appreciating their prominence in the final scene.

In the first of these references, 15:40-41, the author suddenly throws the spotlight on three particular women, and also tells us that a larger number of women had in fact been followers of Jesus in Galilee all along.⁵ Thereby, in these two short verses the author introduces an unnumbered body of women followers of Jesus, and in effect, retroactively inserts them into the whole preceding account of Jesus' activities.⁶ Contra some interpreters, I contend that the previous absence of women followers in the narrative is not a case of simple disregard for, or lack of interest in, them.⁷ For in 15:40-41 the author emphasizes that these three women had been "there" in the story all along and that there were *many* women who had accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem. The invisibility of women followers in the preceding narrative in Mark seems to have been deliberate, but not out of simple negativity toward them. Instead, the previous narrative silence about women disciples was probably intended to make their sudden appearance here all the more noticeable to readers.⁸ In short, the identification of the women at this point is to be seen as a significant

development in the Markan story, and they must be intended as important for the narrative scenes in which they are featured.⁹

Named Women

In addition to their sudden appearance here, there is a second striking feature about Mark's treatment of these women. In the context of the preceding Markan narrative of Jesus' ministry, the *naming* of women followers in 15:40-41 strongly further indicates their emergence *at this point* as characters with special significance.¹⁰ Although several women characters appear in earlier chapters of Mark, the only women *named* previously to 15:40-41 are Jesus' mother, Mary (6:3), and the infamous Herodias (6:17-29).

Moreover, the naming of the women disciples in 15:40-41 and in the other two crucial scenes in the Markan passion-resurrection narratives is especially interesting if we note how elsewhere the author leaves nameless even some female characters who are in other ways given memorable visibility: e.g., Peter's mother-in-law (1:30-31), the haemorrhaging women (5:25-34), Jairus' daughter (5:21-24, 35-43), Jesus' sisters (6:3; cf. his named brothers here), the bold Syrophoenician woman and her daughter (7:24-30), and most remarkably the woman of 14:3-9, whose act of devotion to Jesus is portrayed as destined to bring her world-wide remembrance!¹¹

Once again, however, we should hesitate to judge this Markan pattern of female anonymity as simple misogyny. In the Roman-era setting of the first readers, there was a widespread view that the more respectful way to refer to women was to do so without mentioning their names, particularly in the public sphere. Instead, typically, one identified a woman respectfully by reference to her father, husband, or brother(s).¹² So, the Markan general pattern of unnamed women characters would not have seemed strange or particularly misogynist to readers familiar with the dominant cultural mores of the time. But this also means that the unprecedented appearance of three *named* women in 15:40 would readily have caught the attention of ancient readers, and would have suggested to them that these women were being brought into view for some special role.

In short, we should take the *naming* of women disciples, beginning at 15:40, as another key literary device of the author, further signalling

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the sudden elevation of these figures to particular prominence at this point.¹³ Also, the *repeated* naming of the women in three consecutive Markan scenes in 15:40–16:8 likely functions to *link* more emphatically these particular scenes. This means that we should take account of *all three* scenes in seeking to understand any of them.¹⁴ As Catchpole vividly expressed it, the women function as “the human thread binding the ‘crucified... buried... raised’ sequence into a three-in-one unity,” and he rightly noted “a special intensity of concentration” on the final scene at the empty tomb.¹⁵

Although my concern at this point is how to understand the women’s narrative function in these scenes, I do wish to note in passing that Mark’s named characters usually seem to be figures whom the intended readers are expected to recognize, either by direct acquaintance or (more often likely) from some previous report(s) about them in Christian traditions. So, it is fully plausible that the intended readers were also expected to recognize these women named in 15:40 and thereafter, and possibly (I would say probably) may even have known of their association with the events narrated in these Markan scenes.¹⁶ Indeed, several scholars have proposed liturgical/cultic usage and purposes as the originating “pre-Markan” situations in which these events were rehearsed in Christian circles, but this is not an issue requiring discussion here.¹⁷

The Women as Observers

The third notable feature in Mark’s treatment of these women is his consistent portrayal of them as *observers* of the key events in these three scenes. In 15:40-41, three women observe Jesus’ crucifixion through the moment of his death. In 15:47 two of the same women observe where Jesus’s corpse was entombed.¹⁸ In 16:4-6 they note that the great stone has been removed from the tomb-opening.¹⁹ Then, upon entering the tomb they see the “young man” seated there, and they are invited to observe for themselves that Jesus is “not here” and to take note that “the place where they laid him” is now vacant.

Mark’s consistency in repeatedly referring to the observations by these women surely indicates further his own strong emphasis on their role in these scenes, and we can confirm this by comparison

with the other Synoptic accounts. Matthew mentions the women as observing Jesus' death (Matt 27:55), but in the burial scene he merely indicates that they were seated near the tomb (27:61). In his account of the first Easter morning, however, Matthew tells us that the women had come to view the tomb (28:1), and he retains the angelic invitation to the women to behold the vacant place where Jesus' body had lain (28:6). Luke places "all his acquaintances [pa, vntej oi` gnwstoi. autw//], including some women" (23:48-49) at the crucifixion-scene, which has the effect of lessening the particular role of the women as observers here (and also lessens the distinction between the women and the other disciples). On the other hand, in his scene of Jesus' burial, Luke specifies that the women saw the tomb and "how [Jesus'] body was laid" in it (23:55). Then, he relates that when the women returned to the tomb on the Sunday morning they discovered the stone rolled away, but could not find Jesus' body (23:1-3).

To reiterate the point for emphasis, in the Markan scenes the consistently specified role of the named women is as identified observers of three specific matters: Jesus' death, the place of his burial, and the subsequently vacant tomb. Mark attributes no other action to them.²⁰ It is clear that the author wished nothing to detract from this focus. Put simply, their sole task and literary function in these scenes is to witness what happens.²¹

Indeed, their silence (except for their discussion among themselves about how they will gain access to the tomb in 16:3), actually contributes to Mark's emphasis on their observational role. It is worth noting that in the ancient cultural setting generally, silence was a much-advocated virtue for women, especially silence in the public sphere.²² So, the depiction of women as silent observers would not have struck ancient readers as particular noteworthy. Indeed, the author would likely have been taken as depicting the women in a respectable way, and affirming their positive role and status in the narratives.

To summarize this matter here, the women in Mark 15-16 are introduced in a positive way, and the naming of them also indicates that they have some particular significance and function. The Markan emphasis on them as observers in all three scenes suggests that their significance and function probably has to do with being able to vouch for the things that they have observed.

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The author's more specific purpose in deploying the women in 15:40 and thereafter, and in particular the point of emphasizing their observational role, will become fully clear in the final scene where they are featured, in 16:1-8. Most obviously, at that point they are able to go directly to Jesus' tomb because they previously had observed where he was buried, having followed what happened to him from his death to his entombment. Later in this essay, we shall focus on this final scene and explore further how it caps the three appearances of the named women. But, as we shall now note, this emphasis that named women were observers of Jesus' death and burial also fits with another, more neglected feature of the Markan passion narrative.

The Reality of Jesus' Death

We now consider something that is often mentioned only in passing in studies of the women and the Markan ending: the curious and uniquely-expressed Markan emphasis that Jesus really died. I wish to show, however, that this distinctive feature of the Markan scene of Jesus' burial should be given more attention.

All four canonical Gospels have Joseph of Arimathea approach Pilate for permission to bury Jesus' body, so it is all the more noteworthy that there are no equivalents to certain interesting details in Mark 15:44-45 in any of the other three accounts. When he is approached by Joseph, Pilate is surprised to hear that Jesus is already dead, and he summons the centurion who presided at the crucifixion (and whose ironic statement in 15:39 has received so much scholarly attention in modern scholarship),²³ demanding confirmation. In fact, Pilate requires assurance that Jesus had been dead *for some time* (ei) pa/lai a)pe/qanēn, 15:44). Only then, after satisfying himself by official confirmation from his own officer, does Pilate hand over Jesus' remains (v. 45) for burial.

It should be obvious that the author's concern here is to underscore the reality of Jesus' death. The women have seen Jesus expire on the cross, and now Pilate (a hostile witness!) satisfies himself, and thereby the readers, that by the time of the handing over of Jesus' body he has been dead for an extended time. The intended effect of all these details was surely to emphasise a real (and, so far as the

characters in the narrative can judge, a permanent) death. The full significance of this will, of course, become apparent in 16:1-8.

This emphasis on the reality of Jesus' death is reflected in another unique feature of this Markan scene. Mark alone says that Pilate gave Jesus' "corpse" (to_ ptw~ma, v. 45b) over for burial, all the other Evangelists preferring the word for "body" (to_ sw~ma), probably because they saw it as less stark and harsh in connotation.²⁴ I propose that the use of "corpse" here further indicates a Markan concern to stress the forensic (even brutal) reality of Jesus' death. Moreover, the author used the same term in his reference to the burial of John the Baptist by John's disciples after his execution by Antipas (6:29). So, the use of the word in 15:45 may also be intended to make direct comparison (and, of course, forthcoming contrast!) with the entombment of John.²⁵ Jesus' "corpse" was entombed just as truly as was John's, which will make the events of 16:1-8 all the more striking.

The concern to underscore that Jesus was really dead, and had been dead for some time before burial, and this unique reference to his "corpse" surely combine to represent a notable interest of the author. It also seems reasonable to regard this emphasis as consonant with the previously-noted spotlighting of identified women followers of Jesus, who were likely known figures in the circle(s) for whom the author wrote, as having witnessed Jesus' death and his burial. Indeed, I contend that the reiterated role of the women as observers and the emphasis on the reality of Jesus' death are directly linked and important indications of the author's aims, and should not be ignored in seeking to understand the movement of the Markan narrative toward its intended climax.

It is an interesting question whether the emphasis on the reality of Jesus' death was intended to counter or correct some other idea. Was he, for instance, seeking to oppose or head off some early "swoon" theory from opponents of the Christian message, that Jesus had only seemed to die and had revived later in the tomb sufficiently to able to make himself scarce? Or was Mark opposing some early "docetic" idea within Christian circles, that Jesus (as a divine/heavenly being) only seemed to have died? We do not have sufficient corroboration of such ideas as early as the likely date of the composition of Mark to be sure of either possibility.

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From Matthew, of course, we hear of Jewish allegations that Jesus' body was removed from the tomb secretly by his disciples (Matt 28:11-15), so there may well have been other such counter-claims circulating. Also, although this is somewhat more debatable, it seems to me plausible that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is countering an interpretation of Jesus' resurrection (and that of believers as well) as a purely "spiritual" event, "resurrection" taken by some in Corinth as merely metaphorical of an inner transformation and not something to do with one's body.²⁶ So, if conflicting views of Jesus' resurrection were circulating in Christian circles as early as 1 Corinthians, it is entirely possible that the author of Mark may have sought to underscore the reality of Jesus' death here in order to prepare for, and help define, the declaration of Jesus' resurrection that comes in the final scene.

Later in this essay, however, I offer another view of why Mark placed this emphasis on the reality of Jesus' death. For now, it is sufficient to note that Mark's account of Jesus' death and burial underscores the women as observers of a real death.

The Climax of Mark's Gospel

To be sure, in appreciating the ending of any coherent story, the entire preceding narrative is in some way relevant. But we have seen that the threefold references to the named women followers of Jesus in Mark 15:40–16:8, plus the fact that all three settings where the women are mentioned deal with Jesus' death and entombment, combine to unify this larger body of material and to give it special relevance for understanding the conclusion to Mark.

We are now ready to consider the final scene where the named women appear, in 16:1-8.²⁷ To state the obvious, there are two main questions to address. How are we to understand the particulars of the passage? And how specifically might the author have intended this scene to function as the suitable conclusion or climax to his story of Jesus?

The Empty Tomb

First, let us note again that the author draws attention here to the *vacant* tomb. As they approach the tomb, the named women notice that the stone had been removed (16:4), after which they are invited to verify for themselves that Jesus' body is no longer in the place

where it had been laid (16:6). But, by itself, the empty tomb can only elicit bewilderment. The mysterious “youth” (commonly understood as angelic) whom the women encounter in the tomb declares, however, that the reason for the absence of Jesus’ body is that he has been resurrected (16:6).²⁸ Lindemann is correct to note that the Markan word-order in this mysterious figure’s statement places emphasis on Jesus’ resurrection, with the reference to the empty tomb subordinated to it: “He is risen; he is not here. Behold the place where they put him.”

The statement of the youth at the tomb in 16:6-7 is certainly the apex of this scene, and is the key theological assertion here. Indeed, it may well be the climactic declaration of the entire Gospel of Mark. In any case, this declaration that Jesus has been raised by the power of God (the “divine passive,” *hge/rqh*) is intended to account for and interpret the empty tomb. The empty tomb is not the basis for the kerygmatic claim that Jesus has been raised. Instead, the resurrection claim is announced authoritatively by the “youth,” and it is to be confirmed subsequently in the encounters of Jesus’ disciples with him in Galilee (16:7), Jesus leading them there (*proa/gei*), just as he promised (14:28). Bultmann cannot be followed in his assertions that in Mark 16:1-8 “the empty tomb proves the Resurrection,” that the messenger-figure has comparatively little significance, and that the whole story is “an apologetic legend” developed (probably at some secondary stage of first-century Christianity) to combat sceptical responses to the kerygma.²⁹

On the other hand, it should also be clear that the empty tomb, along with the preceding emphases on the reality of Jesus’ death and the named women having observed his death and the burial of his “corpse”, does function crucially in Mark to help *interpret* the resurrection claim.³⁰ In the context of Mark 15:40–16:8, the explicit reference to the vacant tomb vividly underscores the point that this Jesus who is now resurrected had suffered a genuine death and was duly entombed as a “corpse”. This is reflected in the order of the phrasing in the Markan form of the young man’s declaration: “You seek Jesus the Nazarene, *who was crucified*. He has been raised (from death); he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him.”³¹ In this light, the particular contribution of the empty tomb is to signal a genuine and *bodily* continuity of the risen and the crucified/buried person. The empty tomb vividly signifies *real, bodily resurrection*.

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We have already noted, however, that this does not necessarily mean that the author of Mark was primarily concerned here to engage in a disputation about the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus (and, thus, of the elect). There is nothing in 15:40-16:8 to suggest any such dispute, or that the author is directly opposing some other view of how to imagine Jesus' resurrection body. Were this the author's aim here, we should expect him to have made it more obvious, as he shows himself fully ready to do elsewhere, particularly in the straightforward warnings about deceptive teachings, and false messiahs and prophets in Mark 13.³² Moreover, beyond emphasizing that the same Jesus who was put to death was also raised *bodily*, the author offers no more precise analysis of Jesus' resurrected state. I repeat that Mark 16:1-8 is not obviously directed to some supposed intra-Christian disputation about the nature of the resurrection body. Instead, as we shall see, it represents more profound and more positive christological and ethical concerns. Toward clarifying further these concerns, let us now take account of another important matter.

The Intended Readership

We have seen that named women followers of Jesus are the Markan literary link and "signpost" that the material in 15:40-16:8, comprising the three scenes in which these women appear, is to be read as a cohesive narrative-complex. This comprises a set of scenes in which the body of Jesus is at the centre of attention: the crucified body, the entombed "corpse," and the risen body that has vacated the place where it had been buried.

To reiterate another point, however, the purpose does not seem to be a simple apologetic directed to outsiders and sceptics who resist the claim that Jesus is risen. As Matthew's report of a Jewish allegation that Jesus' disciples secretly removed his body from the grave shows, an empty tomb is rather easily susceptible to more than one interpretation! Moreover, as Adela Collins rightly observed, had Mark's aim in 16:1-8 been simply an apologetic assertion of Jesus' resurrection against unbelieving critics of the claim, it is odd to have featured only women as witnesses, given ancient stereotypes of women as more given to hysterical and foolish notions.

So, why would Mark have made so much of these scenes which feature these women and focus on what happened to Jesus' body?

What intended audience could be expected to grant respect to these named women, and also find meaningful the Markan emphasis on the bodily reality of Jesus' death and resurrection?

It is, of course, rather widely held that, as the case for the other canonical Gospels, Mark was composed for intra-Christian edification, instruction, and inspiration.³³ Also, it is also not terribly controversial to posit that particular religious concerns of each of the authors contributed heavily to the contents, shape, and emphases of these writings. The more precise questions, therefore, are what specific religious/theological concern(s) and what intended readers might be reflected in the Markan author's decision to *refer* approvingly to post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples, but to conclude his story without *narrating* any such incident.

Non - Starter Options

In addition to those already mentioned, I contend that several proposals either do not stand up to critical scrutiny or require some significant refinement.³⁴ For instance, the suggestion that there were no developed narrative traditions of Jesus' resurrection appearances available at the time of Mark's composition, nearly forty years into the Christian movement, is both implausible and, in my view, refuted by 16:7, which seems an overt and approving allusion to such traditions.³⁵ Likewise, Marxsen's proposal that the author of Mark avoided appearance stories because he wanted to direct attention away from Jesus resurrection and, instead, toward Jesus' imminent *parousia* requires us to disregard clear Markan evidence to the contrary. In particular, passages such as 9:9-10 make it clear that Mark vigorously affirms the importance of Jesus' resurrection.³⁶

Because yet another view of Mark 16:1-8 is so popular in some recent studies, I must offer more extensive statement of reasons for rejecting it. A number of scholars portray the ending of Mark as a rather sophisticated literary/rhetorical device intended to intrigue, disappoint, frustrate and "trap" the intended Christian readers, drawing them through a sophisticated process into some sort of existential completion of the story, thus compensating for the failures of the disciples in general, and the women of 16:1-8 in particular.³⁷ Were this Mark's intention here, however, this would be a curiously exceptional instance of such a rather modern-sounding literary device.

To be sure, Magness has shown that ancient books could have “open” endings (Acts being another NT example). But all the ancient instances noted involve the rather more simple technique of omitting further events/developments beyond those recounted, and *which the author expected readers to know and be fully able to supply*.³⁸ To my knowledge, we have no other example of an ancient work with an “open” ending intended to communicate the deep ambiguity that is attributed to the author of Mark 16:1-8 by some modern scholars. Petersen proposes a “softer” (but equally sophisticated and suspiciously modern-looking) version of this view, proposing that readers were expected to over-ride the ending of the “plotted story” on the basis of “unplotted times represented only predictively in Mark 13” (which is to be taken as the true closure of the Markan “narrative world”). In short, readers are to grasp that “our narrator does not mean what he says in Mark 16:8.”³⁹

The “Silence” of The Women

Essential to all such views, however, is the notion that this scene concludes with the women followers directly disobeying the command to convey their experiences at the tomb to the other disciples. This is a crucial issue. In much current scholarship, Mark is read, not simply as ending without recounting the women’s fulfilment of the mandate to pass news of Jesus’ resurrection to the other disciples, but as denying that these women did so. Most scholars simply take this as the self-evident import of the concluding words of 16:8, *kai\ ou)deni\ ou)de\n ei]pan: e) fobou~nto ga/r*. Some allow, however, that readers could reasonably be expected to know that the women did in fact eventually communicate their experiences to fellow disciples. Otherwise, of course, readers would be hard pressed to imagine how the author could relate the incidents in question! Nevertheless, so far as it goes explicitly, Mark’s narrative is often taken as ending with an apparent note of failure and disobedience.

This sort of view of 16:8 is, however, by no means held unanimously. In recent years, increasingly, another understanding of the final phrasing has won some favour, and it seems to me also considerably more plausible.⁴⁰ I cite two main reasons.

First, there is the syntactical argument, which has not received the attention that it deserves. In the context of Markan usage, the phrasing

kai\ ou)deni\ ou)de\n ei]pan quite readily can be taken as indicating, not a complete failure to communicate, but that the women spoke to *no one else* beyond those to whom they were directed. That is, they did not communicate their experience beyond fellow disciples. They did not “go public”.⁴¹ As some previous studies have noted, it is significant that Mark uses very similar phrasing in 1:44 and 7:36.⁴² In 1:44, Jesus orders the cured leper not to speak to anyone (mhdeni\ mhde\n ei2phlj), *except the priest to whom Jesus orders the leper to show himself*, “for a witness to them.” In 7:36, Jesus directs those who witnessed the healing of the deaf-mute not to speak about it to others (i3na mhdeni\ le&gwsin) beyond themselves. That is, in each case, the phrase represents a *restriction* on communication, not a total prohibition. These other Markan uses of parallel phrasing mean that it is not as obvious as many suppose that 16:8 portrays the women as totally silent and disobedient. Instead, I submit, the phrase indicates that they did not broadcast their experience beyond those to whom they were sent.

In further support of this view of 16:8b, I point to the kai\ consecutive which introduces this statement about the women’s silence. Had the author intended to depict their silence as disobedience to the direction to convey the news of Jesus’ resurrection to the other disciples, a conversive particle, de/ or even a0lla/, would certainly have served better.⁴³ As it is, the Greek syntax by no means requires us to take the women’s agitated departure and silence as in conflict with the mandate that they have been given.

Instead, the basic thrust of 16:8 reinforces the numinous significance of the scene, by focusing readers’ attention on the powerful impact of the experiences of these women (as indicated by the several words to portray their emotional responses, tro/moj kai\ e@kstasij, and e0fobou~nto, in addition to the e0ceqambh/qhsan earlier in v. 5).⁴⁴ The final words, e)fobou~nto ga&r, are not the author’s parting shot at the women, but a concluding reference to their agitated state brought on by the numinous “youth” and the astounding news of Jesus’ resurrection. Still reeling from the revelatory encounter at the tomb, they very understandably did not broadcast the news of Jesus’ resurrection or gossip about their experience. I further contend that the verse also confirms that and how the women’s testimony was known *within Christian circles* as part of the tradition associated

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with the resurrection of Jesus, and yet did not feature *in the public witness* about Jesus' resurrection to those outside the circle(s) of Christian disciples.⁴⁵ In Mark 16:8, the women themselves set the precedent for this restricted role of their testimony in their discrete silence toward anyone *other than those to whom they had been sent*.

Nevertheless, to invoke an observation made earlier, the narrative dynamics of 15:40–16:8 present the women as crucial to the storyline. I submit that this is another strong reason for rejecting the view that they fail in the end. They are *the* followers of Jesus who observe the three key phenomena of Jesus' death, the place of his burial, and the vacant tomb, and these women are, thus, uniquely able to vouch for all these things. In 16:1-8, moreover, they are the first ones to receive the startling notice of Jesus' resurrection, and are specifically given the special role of conveying this news to the other disciples, along with the re-affirmation that Jesus' resurrection brings with it their own restoration, just as Jesus had promised in 14:28.

Although a good many scholars conclude that in 16:8 the author then deliberately torpedoed the very figures whom he had so obviously made crucial to the whole final section of this story of Jesus, this seems to me a completely unprecedented and curious move for Mark, to say the least.⁴⁶ Indeed, one might even say that it would have been a disastrous move!⁴⁷ For, to discredit these women, the sole witnesses to the very events that are so obviously crucial in Mark, and to portray them as disobeying the directive to pass news of Jesus' resurrection to Peter and the other disciples, would amount to the author discrediting himself as well. It would raise rather serious questions about the basis for his knowledge of incidents if he says they were never reported! Indeed, it would also clearly amount to the author discrediting *Jesus*, Jesus' promise of a post-resurrection rendezvous with and renewal of his disciples vitiated in the end by a small clutch of disobedient women.

The scholarly claim that readers were expected to over-ride the supposedly plain sense of 16:8, knowing that in fact the women did actually report the news of Jesus' resurrection, represents an obvious effort to deal with these rather serious implications of what Mark is

widely thought to have done.⁴⁸ But I contend that we do not require such an intriguing but curious proposal, if 16:8 does not portray the women as disobedient.

It should also give us further pause that both of the earliest two key readings of Mark from the first century, represented in Matthew and Luke, reflect a very positive understanding of the ending of Mark. Each author independently represents the women as going immediately, *and only*, to the other disciples to deliver the news of their surprising and unsettling experiences (Matt. 28:7-8; Luke 24:9). What *basis* is there for us to take their accounts as rejections of Mark 16:8, rather than as independent testimony to how they understood the Markan scene?

In sum, I propose that we have very good reasons for dissenting from the common assumption that 16:8 portrays the women as disobedient and failing. Readers do not have to *imagine*, against the supposed grain of this verse, that the women actually *did* do, perhaps eventually, what the verse supposedly says that they did *not* do. Likewise, we have reason to dissent from seeing Mark's ending as some sort of rhetorical/literary trick, a kind of story-line *cul-de-sac* in which frightened and silently disobedient women complete a supposed story of total failure that is intended to frustrate readers' expectations and conflict with their traditions. Mark is not some kind of first-century *film noir*, presenting every follower of Jesus as failing, and with no restitution offered for any of them, his narrative a supposedly "grim picture" emphasising "the dark side of his particular vision."⁴⁹ I contend that this is anachronistic, and that we ought to realize more readily that it strains credibility to portray the Markan author as an early existentialist author. More importantly, I submit that we have reviewed here substantial reasons for taking another view of Mark's ending.

So, if the women are not in fact portrayed in 16:1-8 as dismal failures and disobedient followers of Jesus, and if the "open" ending at 16:8 is not one of the rather modern-sounding literary devices proposed variously by some scholars, how then are we to read this passage as a suitable and positive conclusion for the powerful story of Jesus that precedes it? In the final section of this paper, I propose answers for the several questions that we have considered.

Towards an Appreciation of 16:1-8

I contend that Mark 16:1-8 is properly read as a powerfully triumphant scene, the highpoint of which is the annunciation that Jesus has been raised from death and that he now summons his disciples to a Galilean rendezvous, just as he had promised (14:28).⁵⁰ This annunciation also confirms as fulfilled Jesus' three-fold (for emphasis!) predictions of *his suffering and resurrection* that feature so prominently in Mark (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Furthermore, it signals that the predicted time has now arrived for Jesus' disciples to break the previously sustained secret of his divine status (9:9-10), Jesus' death and resurrection being the key developments that now authorize the proclamation and give it the crucial content. As well, of course, Jesus' resurrection retroactively validates his entire ministry, his teachings, directives, and prophecies, among which Mark 13, with its focus on preaching the gospel to all nations, and its summons to faithfulness amidst persecutions and other troubles, will be particularly germane for the post-resurrection situation of the intended readers.

Furthermore, if the argument that I have laid out in the preceding section is correct, the positive thrust of 16:1-8 is not diminished in the final verse. The women's troubled and frightened departure after the epiphanic experience at the empty tomb, and their understandable and (for the intended readers) culturally recognizable reluctance to spread news of this experience publicly *beyond those to whom they were directed*, form a brief but effective dénouement to this climactic episode. The final verse is intended to allow these women to step back quickly out of the public limelight (joining the other disciples, who have been on the sidelines all through the crucifixion-resurrection narratives), so that the news of Jesus' resurrection in v. 6, and the promise in v. 7 of Jesus' renewal of living fellowship with his followers (among whom these women are implicitly included) can remain for readers the dominant notes of the passage.⁵¹

The women's sudden emergence at 15:40-41, and their key presence in the next two scenes as well, however, combine to indicate that they have an important role in this body of material. Probably reflective of what the intended readers knew already through Christian tradition, the women function here to emphasise that there are identifiable Christian witnesses to Jesus' death, burial and empty tomb, their

testimony known and respected *within the Christian readership*.⁵² Nevertheless, as true for all of Jesus' followers in Mark, these named women are completely subservient to the main focus of the three scenes in which they appear, which is Jesus: his genuine death, his burial as a "corpse," and his full, bodily resurrection and renewed status as authoritative leader of his followers.

But these women are no *more* subservient to Mark's emphases than the male disciples. Indeed, these women are portrayed in a somewhat less negative light than Peter and the rest of the Twelve, whose obtuseness, cowardice, and even outright apostasy (Peter's three-fold denial in 14:66-72) are so well known to readers of Mark.⁵³ Actually, the women's quiet and unassuming presence in the three scenes in 15:40-16:8, in distinction from the cowardice of the male disciples, implies that the abandonment of Jesus by the other disciples is not to be excused as having been inevitable.⁵⁴

Moreover, although 16:7 likely anticipates the important future role to be taken by Peter and the other disciples as public witnesses to the risen Jesus, Mark 16:1-8 also gives these women their own distinctive significance.⁵⁵ Indeed, in Mark's presentation, the intended readers' faith that Jesus has been raised does not depend totally on Peter and the others. These key women do not receive news of Jesus' resurrection mediated through Peter and those who function as "official" witnesses, but instead directly from the numinous figure at the tomb. Thus, their distinctive testimony to Jesus' burial and the empty tomb also plays a role in helping to guide Christian understanding of what speaking of Jesus as "risen" should be taken to mean.

Additionally, as *women* characters they show that the divine plan to vindicate Jesus, restore the fallen apostles, and then through them to launch the proclamation of the gospel to all nations (as foretold and commanded in 13:10 and 14:9) was not finally derailed by the actions of the male figures who had been invested with so much significance (e.g., 3:13-19; 6:7-13), and whose failure in the passion narrative seemed there so fatal.⁵⁶ For the author, Jesus is the key subject, and his story (not that of any of his followers in Mark, male or female) is the basis and the pattern for Christian existence, and the content of Christian proclamation.

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So, to reiterate the key question, how was 16:1-8 judged by the Markan author as the appropriate and sufficient way to *conclude*? In particular, why is there no resurrection-appearance scene? We have noted that the author affirms post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples in Galilee in 16:7, alluding to them also earlier in 14:28. So, neither an ignorance of resurrection appearances nor a discomfort with them is a sustainable option for interpreters. This leaves us with the likelihood that the omission of a resurrection-appearance scene was deliberate, and yet did not reflect hostility or embarrassment about these appearances.⁵⁷ I propose that the positive reason that the author did not attach a resurrection-appearance scene is suggested particularly in the themes and emphases of the material that we have been considering here.

As we have it, the final section of Mark's story of Jesus culminates in the triumphant annunciation of Jesus' divine vindication and his renewed status as leader of his followers. But more specifically, the distinctive Markan stress on the reality of Jesus' death, the burial of his "corpse," the empty tomb, and the ability of certain known women to vouch for all this combine to underscore the real, bodily continuity of the risen Jesus with the crucified and buried Jesus. The primary concern, however, was probably not to assert one theory about the nature of the resurrection body over another for its own sake. Instead, the author aimed to emphasize that the *kerygma* must include *both Jesus' cross and his resurrection*. The Markan narrative stresses that the crucifixion of Jesus is not simply overcome in his resurrection, as an ordeal that could now be regarded as a temporary setback like the trials of a Greek hero.⁵⁸ Instead, Mark insists that the risen Jesus remains the same Jesus who was crucified (16:6), and that the events of death, burial and resurrection together are essential in mutually interpreting one another.

To be sure, the stress on the burial of his corpse and the empty tomb stress that Jesus' resurrection was a real, full, bodily victory over death. But this emphasis was profoundly purposeful and that purpose deeply practical. Writing for Christians whom the author warns must prepare themselves to suffer arraignment, beatings, and even death for Jesus' sake (most vividly in 8:34-38, but also 13:9-13), the author's stress on the real, bodily suffering and resurrection of Jesus

provided the vivid example and empowering encouragement to face their own sufferings.⁵⁹ Perhaps especially in this story of Jesus that is directed toward Christians whom the author portrays as likely to be already (or to become) familiar themselves with suffering for Jesus' sake, the author deemed it fully appropriate, even preferable, to conclude his account of Jesus with 16:1-8, with its climactic proclamation of Jesus' own bodily vindication.

This passage is not an "end," however, for the author presents his whole account of Jesus as actually "the beginning of the gospel" (1:1), which is to be continued in an all-nations proclamation by his followers (13:10). Mark 16:1-8 is a powerful "climax" to this "beginning," a fulcrum-event for the subsequent proclamation.⁶⁰ This final scene is an "open" ending, but it is by no means "dark" or ambiguous. In this crucial climax, the annunciation of Jesus' resurrection is the keynote, and the vacant tomb signifies that his vindication was just as real, full and bodily as was his suffering. For the readers, an important part of the message in 16:1-8 was that their suffering for the sake of Jesus could be endured in the assurance of their ultimate vindication, just as Jesus also was vindicated through his resurrection.

Seen in this light, Mark 16:1-8 was a fitting climax to this pioneering and influential story of Jesus, whose ministry, death and resurrection form the avrch., of the gospel-message. As Philip Davis cogently proposed, the Markan story of Jesus was probably shaped to present Jesus as the model and "blueprint" for the intended readers, and this purpose best explains the limits and contours of Mark. Jesus' paradigmatic story commences with baptism and proceeds on in mission, opposition and suffering through to vindication by resurrection. These Markan narrative contours also reflect the shape of Christian existence, and this was not coincidence. The basic shape of the Markan story of Jesus was designed to make it more directly applicable to the lives of readers as those who *follow* Jesus as their sole reliable and authoritative model.⁶¹

In 16:1-8, readers have a climactic episode that takes them through Jesus' resurrection, the divine act which both vindicates Jesus and gives his followers readers assurance of own vindication by resurrection as well. The passage includes the paradigmatic expression of the Easter *kerygma*, "He is risen," and the empty tomb

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and the preceding scenes where the named women are featured combine to focus climactically on Jesus' resurrection as the full and bodily triumph of the readers' Lord.

Actually, for such narrative purposes, a resurrection-appearance is not so obviously necessary. As John Alsup showed, the earliest accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances mainly functioned for other purposes, such as authorizing figures for apostolic roles (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:1), and as apologetic confirmation of the resurrection claim (e.g., Acts 1:3; 3:15; 10:39-42). It is most likely, therefore, that "Mark" declined to add any such appearance-narrative because he judged it unnecessary for addressing his emphasis on Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the model for believers. Indeed, the author may have thought that an appearance-narrative would have detracted from the sharp focus that he intended to place on *Jesus* as the sole valid model, as well as the basis, for Christian existence. The restoration of the cowardly disciples is assured, having been promised by Jesus in 14:28, then reiterated in 16:1-8, and powerfully grounded in Jesus' resurrection. But, for Mark, Jesus' mission, suffering and vindication form the centre of attention.

The other Evangelists clearly pursued distinguishable emphases in their own "Jesus books," and obviously saw post-resurrection appearances as fully appropriate, indeed, as vital to their purposes.⁶² But, although some ancient and many subsequent readers have judged Mark 16:1-8 deficient, or darkly ambiguous, in comparison to the endings of the other Gospels, We hope to have shown that this is a wrong judgement. Mark does not really end on a note of failure and uncertainty. Instead, Mark 16:1-8 forms a fully satisfactory climactic episode that was designed to thrill and empower intended readers to follow Jesus in mission, through opposition and even their own potentially violent death, confident in an eschatological vindication by resurrection for which Jesus' resurrection was the inspiring model.

L. W. Hurtado, University of Edinburgh

Footnotes

- 1 In this essay, I revise markedly some of my own earlier judgements about the Markan conclusion. Cf. Hurtado 1(1989, esp. 279-86).
- 2 Cf., e.g., Danove (1996), but I take a very different view of matters.
- 3 Among the many publications focused on women in Mark, the following are particularly relevant: Malbon (1983), and *id.* (1986); Kinukawa (1994); Aquino and McLemore (1995); Fander (1992).

The most recent book-length study is Miller (2004), who, after surveying previous work judges that it has produced “conflicting interpretations of Mark’s attitude to women” (5). I cite other recent publications subsequently in this essay at various points. A good many of these studies are concerned mainly with the place of, and attitudes toward, women in first-century Christian circles. My focus here, however, is more on the *textual/literary* question of how the author of Mark deploys the women identified in the passion-resurrection narratives.
- 4 Dibelius (1935, 190) referred to the women as mentioned “superfluously” after 15:47, and saw no important connection among the three named references in 15:40–16:8.
- 5 A variant reading supported by Vaticanus and a number of other manuscripts posits a fourth, unnamed woman, identified as “the mother of Joseph” (h(Iwsh~toj mh&thr), and Pesch (1977, 506-8) strongly preferred this reading as original. But I support the judgement reflected in the Nestle-Aland 27th ed. text here.
- 6 The imperfect verbs in 15:41 (h kolou & qoun and dihko & noun) portray the women’s discipleship in Galilee as repeated/extended activities. The omission of kai\ dihko&noun au) tw~| in C, D, D, 579, *et al.* is almost certainly the result of homoioteleuton. Decades ago, C. H. Turner showed that in Mark there is an interesting fluidity to his use of the term “disciples,” which in some contexts seems to refer specifically to the Twelve, but in other cases appears to take in a larger and undefined group. Turner’s articles on “Marcan Usage” appeared originally as a series in *JTS* 25-29 (1924-28), and are now reprinted in Elliott (1993); see esp. 82-89.
- 7 Cf., e.g., Kinukawa who sees Mark’s treatment of women throughout as intended to downplay the role of women in early Christianity.
- 8 So also Miller, 169.

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- 9 Cf. the Lukan introduction of women disciples of Jesus (including three named women) much earlier in the story of Jesus' activities in 8:1-3, with the comment that they provided financial support.
- 10 This has been noted, e.g., by Munro (1982, 225-26); D'Angelo (1999, 137-38). Cf. Horsley (2001, 205-8, 225-29, and 279 n. 3).
- 11 There are, to be sure, also memorable but unnamed male characters in Mark: e.g., the demoniac in the synagogue (1:21-28), the blather-mouthed leper (1:40-45), the man with a withered hand (3:1-6), the demoniac of Gerasa (5:1-20), the deaf-mute of the Decapolis (7:31-37), and the father of the demonized boy (9:14-29).
- 12 Schaps (1977).
- 13 Matthew follows Mark in naming the women in all three scenes of Jesus' death (27:55-56), his burial (27:61), and the empty tomb (28:1). Luke, however, (who introduced women disciples in 8:1-3) withholds their names until the end of the final scene (24:10), where their report of their experiences at the empty tomb is met with disbelief (24:10-11).
- 14 "In the larger Marcan picture... the women by their presence at the crucifixion, the burial, and the empty tomb interrelate all three scenes," Brown (1994, 2:1276).
- 15 Catchpole (2000, 3).
- 16 For a recent, strong defence of this line of reasoning, see now Bauckham (257-310); and among previous studies, Bode (1970); Hengel (1963, 243-56); Schottroff (1982). Cf. Brown's proposal that pre-Markan tradition sited certain women followers at the cross and empty tomb, and that Mark then inserted them at the burial scene (1994, 2:1275-77).
- 17 E.g., Schille (1955); O'Collins (1973, 41-42). For further references and comments on this sort of proposal, see Perkins (1984, 109-10 n. 73, 119, 142-43 n. 36). Soards surveys opinions on whether there was a pre-Markan passion narrative and if so what it may have comprised, in Brown (1994, 1492-1524).
- 18 The imperfect indicatives in 15:40, 47 portray their observance as continuous, and thus as taking account of the whole of the events in these scenes. So also, e.g., Brown (2:1251).
- 19 Setzer (1997) surveys the important role of women disciples in canonical gospels and makes interesting comparison with their treatment in the *Gospel of Peter*.

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- 20 Van Iersel's (1998, 488) characterization of the women in Mark 15:40 as doing nothing and saying nothing, underestimates the Markan emphasis on the importance of these women as observers, and thus as eyewitnesses, in all three scenes.
- 21 Brown (2:1251) notes that "Mark does not have them involved in the burial, or lamenting as women of the time were wont to do, or even expressing sympathy; he is interested only in their observing."
- 22 Corley (1993, 43-44); Neyrey (1994, esp. 81). Women's silence is also noted by Cotes (1992, esp. 155-59). But in my view she misjudges the women's actions in Mark 16:8 and thus misconstrues the author's theological purpose in his ending. Cf. my discussion of the matter later in this essay.
- 23 E. g., Johnson (1987). But see below for further comments on this.
- 24 The scribal preference for *sw~ma* in Mark 15:45 in A, C, W, Y, fam. 1, fam. 13, the bulk of Byzantine/Medieval manuscripts, and Old Latin, Coptic and Syriac Peshitto and Harklean versions as well, reflects either an aversion for the harsher term or a harmonization with the more familiar texts of the other Gospels.
- 25 The variant reading *sw~ma* in some witnesses in the account of John's burial in Matt. 14:12 likely reflects a scribal preference for the more gentle term. But both here and in Mark 15:45 *ptw~ma* is the more "difficult" reading and is to be preferred as the original reading.
- 26 On 1Cor. 15, I remain inclined toward the sort of analysis offered, e.g., by Fee (1987, 713-86), in which Paul is taken as dealing with objections to the idea of a *bodily* resurrection. Cf., e.g., Conzelmann (1975, esp. 249-63).
- 27 Among the numerous helpful studies of this episode, Lindemann (1979-80) is particularly valuable. But, in my view, it also illustrates the failure to take adequate account of the wider body of material that I point to in this paper, and so reaches conclusions about Mark 16:1-8 that seem to me inadequate.
- 28 Cf. Phillips (2001), who takes the young man as some otherwise unknown "interested [human] party" (232, n. 30), and asserts that the women came to the tomb expecting to meet the risen Jesus (231). I see no basis in the text for either view.
- 29 Bultmann (1968, 290).
- 30 Consequently, C. F. Evans' statement (1970, 78) that in Mark "the empty tomb interprets the resurrection, not *vice versa*", and Wright's directly opposing statement (2003, 628), "The resurrection interprets the empty tomb, not vice

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versa,” both seem to me over-simplifications of matters. Collins (136) rightly notes that the annunciation by the “young man” interprets the empty tomb, and that the narrative of the empty tomb also interprets the early Christian proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection, but I am not so confident that she is correct to see the report of the empty tomb as a creation of the author of Mark (cf. *ibid.*, 145). Cf., e.g., Perkins (94), Bode (171).

- 31 Matthew echoes Mark here, with only minor differences (28:5), but the parallel passage in Luke has very different phrasing, the only connection being “He is not here, but has been raised,” and there is no reference to Jesus as the crucified one (24:5-6).
- 32 These warnings (esp. 13:5, 21-23) seem to be directed against invalid claims of authority and mischievous teachings that generate misguided eschatological excitement. See, e.g., Hengel (1985, 14-28), who seeks to relate Mark 13 to known events and developments leading up to and during the Jewish revolt of 66-72 CE.
- 33 See now Incigneri (2003), for a sustained (and in my view largely persuasive) case that Mark was directed to Christian circles in Rome. Cf., however, Marcus (2000, 25-39), who continues to defend a Syrian destination. My argument does not, however, depend upon any one geographical destination for Mark.
- 34 Cf. the critical review of proposals by Lindemann (300-2).
- 35 Contra, e.g., Aland (1974, 469), and Fuller (1972, 66). Cf. critique by Lindemann (301).
- 36 It should also be noted that the three “passion predictions” in Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32-34 all actually predict *both* Jesus’ suffering *and* his resurrection.
- 37 For various versions of this sort of view, see, e.g., Petersen (1980), Kermode (1979), Juel (1994, 115-21), Fowler (1991, 243-53), Hester (1995), Cotes (1992), Lincoln (1989), Danove (1996), Mitchell (2001).

See also Boomershine and Bartholomew (1981), also Boomershine (1981), who echoes the more common view that the women disobey the mysterious youth, but tries valiantly to salvage a positive view of the women. Miller (174-92) more recently continues the effort.
- 38 Magness (1986).
- 39 Petersen (162-66), phrasing cited from pp. 162, 164, 166 respectively.
- 40 I confess that I had not considered this option when I wrote my commentary (cf. Hurtado 1989, 283-85). Curiously, some more recent commentators still

seem not to know of this other view, or else regard it as not worth mentioning. E.g., Hooker (1991, 387).

- 41 As Phillips rightly observed (2001, 230, n. 26), these women are told to carry their message to other disciples, which would mean speaking “in a domestic context.”
- 42 The difference in mood of the verb-forms in these two instances is not significant.
- 43 See, e.g., BDF §§442, 447-48. Cf. 1:45, where Mark represents the leper’s disregard for Jesus’ direction by using *o(de*, and 7:36, where Mark indicates action contrary to Jesus’ instructions by *o#son de*.
- 44 As, e.g., Pesch judged (535), this is traditional language descriptive of human reactions to theophanic-type experiences.
- 45 Whether the women’s fear in 16:8b is to be taken as part of their response to the events at the tomb or as concern about the consequences of speaking publicly about them, in neither case does it signal a negative characterization of them. The claim that 16:8 originally functioned to explain why the intended readers had never heard of these women and their experiences before, e.g., Hamilton (1965, esp. 417), is both implausible and also rests upon the dubious reading of 16:8 as indicating that the women did not communicate with anyone at all. Cf. Osiek (1993), who argues that this is tradition so old and widely-known that it could not be suppressed.
- 46 E.g., Miller (174) notes that the favorable treatment of these women in the preceding scenes leads readers to expect “a positive conclusion to their visit to the tomb,” but she then follows majority opinion in portraying Mark as ending with their “terror and silence”.
- 47 So also O’Collins (1988, esp. 498).
- 48 E.g., Petersen (197-98).
- 49 The phrases quoted are from Perrin (33). See also, e.g., Barton (1992, 63-64), who contrasts Mark’s “dark, strenuous spirituality” with Matthew and Luke, and portrays Mark as ending on a note of joyless “absence”. More recently still, Miller reflects the continuing popularity of this view that Mark ends with “terror and silence” (174), the women “aligned to the old age, unable to respond to the power of the new age” (175), disobedient to the youth’s directive (181), Mark’s “bleak” ending intended to express “the impassable gulf between God and human beings” (182).

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- 50 The basically positive tone of the final Markan scene was caught by Lightfoot (1950, 80-97, esp. 95-96). Nevertheless, with many others, he read 16:8 as depicting a total (but, in his view, completely understandable) silence/failure of the women.
- 51 I take the words $\kappa\alpha\omega\upsilon\ \epsilon\iota\ \pi\epsilon\upsilon\ \alpha\ \mu\iota\sim\ \text{in v. 7}$ as implicitly inclusive of those to whom they are spoken here. This also appears to be the way that the author of Luke took the phrase (Luke 24:6-8).
- 52 “The women, not the disciples, constitute in St. Mark’s gospel the connecting link in the witness of the threefold event of the death, burial and resurrection, which formed so important a feature of the church’s testimony” (Lightfoot 1938, 27).
- 53 Among the many studies of the Markan portrayal of the disciples, it is particularly appropriate here to mention Freyne’s article (1982).
- 54 Miller astutely notes that Mark’s reference to the women at Jesus’ crucifixion as observing “from a distance” ($\alpha\ \rho\omicron\ \mu\alpha\kappa\rho\ \kappa\epsilon\ \nu$, 15:40) probably functions to make them present but not noticed by Jesus. Thus, they witness Jesus’ death, but do not obscure Mark’s emphasis on Jesus’ solitary suffering.
- 55 As Freyne noted (1988, 68), the role of these women in 16:1-8 is “to ensure that their fellow-Galilean disciples will be restored with Jesus in Galilee.” His literary analysis of Markan geography is a model of sensitive reading.
- 56 For a fine discussion of how the Gospel writers deploy the women in their resurrection stories, see esp. Bauckham (257-310), and in particular 293-95 for a judgement about the function of these women in Mark that is similar to what I propose here.
- 57 Cf. Stemberger (esp. 435-38).
- 58 Bolt (1996) contends that the Markan story of the empty tomb differs in important ways from pagan traditions of the “empty” graves and/or heavenly translation of heroes, *contra*, e.g., Hamilton (1970), and Bickermann (1924), their views repeated by others subsequently. E.g., Collins (138-43), echoes Hamilton’s claim that Mark created the empty tomb narrative to present Jesus as translated to heaven, and she sees this as “a culturally defined way for an author living in the first century to narrate the resurrection of Jesus” (147).
- 59 Note, e.g., Incigneri’s discussion (208-52) of the situation of Roman Christians as “traumatised” through Neronian persecution and subsequent events.

- 60 With a good many others, I take the opening words as the title for Mark, the historic ministry of Jesus thus referred to as $\alpha\rho\chi\eta\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \epsilon\upsilon\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\omicron\upsilon$. See, e.g., Wikgren (1942). Cf. Guelich (1982). I also now consent to the argument that “Son of God” was more likely a scribal addition in 1:1. See Head (1991). So also Marcus (141).
- 61 Davis (1990). See also Hurtado (1996), and now also Incigneri (262).
- 62 Alsup (214-65), surveyed the history-of-religions background, concluding (1) that the Gospels appearance narrative *Gattung* is distinguishable from supposed pagan counterparts, and seems to reflect OT theophanic traditions, (2) that the *Gattung* did not arise incrementally and late, and (3) that the appearance traditions served a complex of theological intentions beyond simply asserting that the crucified Jesus was alive again.