

Principles of Discipleship

a Devotional Study on “the Gospel according to Mark”

Using this Devotional: this study is written to help us grow in discipleship (believing in & following Jesus Christ the Lord). Pages 1 & 2 focus on Jesus Christ as Mark presents Him (Christian discipleship must include “fixing our eyes on Jesus”).

Page 3 gives a summary of Mark’s message & purpose for writing (identifying the flow of thought & the original intent of the author is important for understanding & applying Scripture to our lives). Page 4 lists some principles of discipleship gleaned from insights shared on pages 1 to 3. Page 5 includes additional information about “Mark” (author, date, etc.).

Author & Resources: this study is written by Marcus Johnson (after preaching a sermon series on “Mark”) © 2009 (revised December 2013). Along with Scripture, the primary resources used in this devotional are: *The Gospel of Mark*, by William Lane (NICNT); *Mark*, by David Garland (NIVAC); and lecture notes on “Mark” by Robert W. Yarbrough (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, May 2005). See also: *The Life* (songs about the life of Jesus Christ) by Michael Card.

Jesus as the Son of God: Following Christ the Lord

Listed below is a summary of Mark 1 to 8 understood in light of the OT (Old Testament) Scriptures (the portion of God’s word, the Bible, written before Jesus was born/came to earth). Mark is “showing” us Jesus and inviting us to journey with the disciples as God slowly reveals the Messiah to them. Mark emphasizes Jesus as a man of action, using the word “immediately” more than forty times. Mark also shows how Jesus’ divinity (He is God the Son) is veiled amidst His humanity and humility, yet it is revealed through His authority in preaching/teaching, His miracles, His presence, and His fulfilling of OT Scripture. All of this only makes sense, however, as God reveals it to us.

- **The Son of God** [Mk 1:1-11; Isa 40:3]
Jesus is God’s Son and “the LORD” whose coming was foretold by the OT prophets
- **The Faithful Servant in the Wilderness** [Mk 1:12, 35; Isa 35:1ff; 52:13, 53:11]
what Israel failed to be as God’s son, Jesus is...
- **The Teacher on the Mountain** [Mk 1:21; 3:13; 6:14; Exd 24:12; Isa 2:3, 11:2]
as God was to Moses, and as Moses was to Israel, Jesus is to His disciples...
- **The Personification of the Kingdom of God** [Mk 4:1ff; Is 9:6f; 35:5f; Dan 7:13f]
the reign of God has broken into this world through the coming of Jesus...
- **The Lord over Demons & the Sea** [Mk 4:35-5:20; Job 1:12; Ps 107:29]
the power of the LORD in the OT is found in Jesus of Nazareth...
- **The Healer of the Sick & the Dead** [Mk 5:21ff; Isa 35:5f; 65:20]
what the OT prophets said the Messiah would be and would do, Jesus is and Jesus does...
- **The Scandalous/Veiled-Revelation** [Mk 6; 8:21; Isa 6:9f; 52:13-53:12]
His humility is offensive and it hides His divinity...
- **The Shepherd of His Lost Sheep** [Mk 6:34ff; Ezk 34; Isa 40:10-11]
what the LORD in the OT promised to be Himself, Jesus is...
- **The Bread for a Hungry People** [Mk 6:42; 7:28, 8:8; Deut 8:3; Amos 8:11]
as God gave the law & manna to Israel in the wilderness, Jesus teaches & feeds the multitudes...
- **The Salvation [light] for the Gentiles** [Mk 7:28; 5:1ff; Isa 9:1; 49:6]
what Israel failed to be for the Gentiles, Jesus is for the world...
- **The Prophesied-Messiah of the OT** [Mk 7:37; 8:29; Deut 18:15; Isa 11; Ezk 34:11ff]
as promised by the LORD through the prophets, the Messiah has come and His name is Jesus...

Jesus as the Suffering Servant: Embracing the Way of the Cross

Listed below is a summary of Mark 8 through 16 understood in light of the OT Scriptures. Mark is emphasizing that “the way of the cross is the will of God” for Jesus as the Messiah, and for all who follow Him (Lane, 304). **The blind man being healed by Jesus who touched him twice (Mk 8:22ff) symbolically reveals how the disciples had their eyes opened in two stages:** 1st in “seeing” Jesus as the Christ (Mark 1 to 8); and 2nd in “seeing” that the will of God for their Messiah & their own lives was the way of the cross (Mk 8 to 16). The way that the kingdom of God would go forth and conquer the world was not through political & military power, but through the power of God manifested* through the weakness, shame, & humiliation of the cross (*the power of the word and the Spirit flows through disciples who embrace the way of the cross). The Roman Centurion confessed Jesus as the son of God by watching how He suffered and died, not by witnessing a miracle.

- **Jesus and the Way of the Cross** [Mk 8:31ff; Isa 52:13-53:1ff]
Jesus “affirms that the way of the cross is the will of God” (Lane, 304)...
- **Jesus as the Rejected Son of Man** [Mk 8:31-9:13; 10:35ff; 13:1ff; Dan 7:13ff]
although despised in this life, Jesus will reign in eternal glory as Lord...
- **Jesus and the Call to Servanthood** [Mk 10:35ff; Isa 42; 49; 50; 52-53]
our Lord is the servant who gives His life as a ransom for many...
- **Jesus and the Temple** [Mk 11:15ff; 13:1ff; Jer 7:11; Ezk 11:22-23; Mal 3:1]
Jesus is greater than the temple and the coming judgment and destruction of it is foreshadowed...
- **Jesus’ Confrontation** [Mk 11:11-12:44 (2:1-3:6); 2Ch 36:15f; Ps 118:22f; Isa 5:1ff]
Jesus rebukes and is rejected by the religious leaders (who should be leading people to Christ)...
- **Jesus’ Call to Perseverance & Vigilance** [Mk 13:1ff; Isa 9:6f; 49:6; Dan 7:13ff]
Jesus calls all who are His disciples to follow Him through tribulation and unto eternal glory
- **Jesus as the Suffering-Servant** [Mk 14-15; Ps 22; Isa 52:13-53:1ff]
Jesus is rejected and abandoned by all...
- **Jesus’ Death on the Cross** [Mk 15:21ff (10:45); Isa 52-53]
Jesus embraces God’s wrath and gives His life as a ransom for many...
- **Jesus’ Triumphant Resurrection announced to Women** [Mk 16:1-8; Ps 22:29ff]
Raised from the dead, Jesus is out in front of His disciples; will we follow Him as Lord?

The Message & Purpose of “Mark”

(some observations are listed below)

- **A “pastoral” driven Gospel written to assure believers of the Lordship of Christ:**

Perhaps written to those suffering in Rome, emphasizing that this “Jesus of Nazareth” who was crucified is the resurrected-reigning Son of God, and is worthy to be followed and worshipped accordingly. As many have said, “Mark” is “a passion narrative with a long introduction” [over 40% of Mark focuses on the sufferings of Christ].

- **To show that the kingdom of God is present & advancing thru the coming of Jesus Christ:**

The kingdom (reign) of God and His glory is no longer centered in Jerusalem and the temple, but the kingdom has come in the person of Jesus Christ and is now manifest wherever the gospel is preached and within the community of believers themselves. The kingdom is realized as believers follow Jesus in discipleship and embrace the way of the cross in daily life: fellowshiping with Jesus, obeying His word in the power of the Spirit, walking in humility & servanthood, and embracing the shame & suffering of the cross as His witnesses and with gospel confidence (a resurrection hope & power at work in us now as we await the second coming).

- **To encourage believers to persevere in their faith:**

Mark shows his readers that the glory of the divine Son of God is manifest through the life of a simple carpenter, rejected by His family, hometown, the religious leaders, and in one who was crucified (death on a cross). He assures them that the kingdom of God will continue to spread throughout the world in mysterious and unrecognized ways (from a human perspective), in spite of the rejection, persecution and overall suffering of this world. [Note: Mark gives no formal ending to Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness: His entire public ministry is a battle with Satan, and against the temptation to abandon the journey to the cross amidst the popularity of the crowds or the rejection of the religious leaders].

- **To encourage believers to trust in the divine call and power of Christ:**

God’s power is at work in and through Christ’s disciples amidst their weaknesses and failures, as the gospel is preached to all nations until Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to judge the living and the dead. Mark highlights the failures of the disciples but also God’s grace and power to continue using those who keep following Jesus. He also highlights the loyalty and importance of women as disciples in the last three chapters, and it is three women who the resurrection is revealed to first.

- **To exhort believers to continue following Jesus Christ:**

Just as Mark gives no formal ending to Christ’s temptation in the wilderness, he gives no formal ending to his account of the gospel (the original ending of “Mark” was probably verse 8). As Christ’s temptations and battle with Satan continued even after His wilderness experience, so Christ’s work here on earth continues after His resurrection. Mark 1:1 probably serves as the title for the whole book: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (ESV). Christ’s resurrection is the end of “the beginning” of the gospel. [See Acts 1:1 where Luke references his first book (“Luke”) as a record of all that Jesus “began” to do and teach. Jesus is still working today as He reigns with the Father and through the Spirit, even as we wait for His return]. We are living out the fourth quarter of this pilgrimage so to speak, and Mark ends his gospel account abruptly. He leaves us hanging as a way to call us forth in pressing on by faith through following Jesus who is out ahead of us. Will we take the next step of faith and follow Him as Lord? Will we persevere against the temptations of sin and the attacks of the evil one? Will we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus through our wilderness experience in this world and the storms of life? Will we be found working, witnessing, watching, and waiting when the resurrected-reigning Christ returns in power and great glory?

Some Principles of Discipleship in “Mark”

(based on the insights shared on pages 1 to 3 about Jesus Christ and the gospel)

- **The Word:** Discipleship includes knowing, feeding on, and obeying the word of God, and understanding that the OT Scriptures are the foundation for the life-transforming message of Christ known as the gospel, thru which God reveals Himself and thru which we are saved. It's evident from the way Mark writes that he is well versed in the OT Scriptures, and that he expects his readers to be as well. See pages 1 & 2, which summarize how Mark shows us (in light of the OT) that Jesus is the Son of God and Israel's long awaited Messiah. Although Mark does not include a lot of Jesus' teachings, what he does share emphasizes the power and authority of God's word, and the importance of obeying it (Mk 1:1ff; 4:1ff; 6:34; 8:38ff; 12:28ff; 13:1ff; 14:49).
- **The Kingdom:** The reign of God has broken into this world through the person of Jesus Christ. The kingdom is present and continues to advance today through the ministry of the word, discipleship, and embracing the cross. God's kingdom is mysteriously present (from a worldly perspective) and advances thru unseen, ordinary, and despised means (thru the Word, humble people of faith, and the way of the cross, etc.), and its global-triumphant harvest/victory at the 2nd Coming will surprise the world, but not believers (Mk 4:1ff).
- **The Call of God:** The foundation of discipleship is based on Christ's call, mercy, and power, not on ourselves. Jesus chooses us, and as disciples we are to keep following Him even as our sin and failures are exposed & confronted. The call of discipleship often goes out to those the world looks down on or does not esteem. In Jesus' day this was fishermen, tax collectors, lepers, “sinners”, the Gentiles, women, etc. (Note: the resurrection was first announced not to the apostles but to women, whose testimony was not accepted in those days as binding). (See Mk 1:16ff; 2:13ff; 5:1ff; 12:41ff; 14:3ff; 16:1ff).
- **Faith:** Believe in and follow Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Lord of all, who died on a cross as a ransom for our sin, who rose from the dead, and who will come back in great power and glory as judge and to reign forever. Faith in Jesus also means we believe in His power to work miraculously in our lives according to the plan and will of God. Jesus is Lord over the storms of life, the demonic battles we face, sickness and death, and over those who reject Christ and persecute His followers. With that, true faith includes both the cost of discipleship and the coming glory – an embracing of the cross with a victorious-triumphant end in mind: perseverance thru trials, guarding against deception, & keeping vigilant (spiritually alert) until Jesus returns in power and great glory (see the last paragraph on page 3). (See Mk 1:18; 4:41; 5:28; 10:28ff; 13:1ff; 16:7).
- **Love & Servanthood:** Jesus came as a friend of sinners, who loved people from all walks of life (fishermen and Pharisees, the rich & the poor, lepers & tax collectors, the blind & the lame, women & men, children, the demon possessed, & criminals). Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to love God with all that you are, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Likewise, our Lord came as a servant, and we are to follow in His footsteps. Servanthood is greatness in God's eyes. At times the disciples were preoccupied with exalting themselves, while Jesus lived, taught, and showed them the way of servanthood. As Christians, we are servants of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, called to serve one another and love our neighbors as ourselves, and to be witnesses of His gospel. (See Mk 2:13ff; 10:35ff; 12:28ff).
- **Prayer:** Mark shows Jesus' prayer life centered around His journey to the cross. Jesus refused to let His popularity and miracles deter Him from embracing the cross. He surrendered His own will over to the Father through prayer, knowing that His journey would lead to suffering & death. In Mark, Jesus is found praying when he would be most tempted to abandon the way of the cross: as His popularity was increasing amidst His teachings and miracles (Mk 1:35ff; Mk 6:46); and in the night He was betrayed and arrested (Mk 14:32ff).
- **Embracing the Way of the Cross:** “... the way of the cross is the will of God” (Lane, 304) – see “Jesus as the Suffering-Servant” (Page 2). As believers, we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus as our Lord, embracing the shame and suffering that comes in discipleship, with an eye to the glory that we will share in, when Christ returns to save us from, and to judge, this wicked & adulterous world (Mk 8:31ff; 13:1ff).
- **Worship:** In Mark, we see the majestic and captivating glory of Jesus Christ. He shows us the glory and power of the Son of God amidst the humility of Jesus' humanity and the cross he bears. The people were captivated by Jesus and stood in awe of Him: 1) in light of His divine authority & power (Mk 1:22; 4:41); 2) at times simply by His majestic presence (Mk 9:15; 10:32); 3) amidst His righteous suffering & death (Mk 15:39); and 4) in light of His astonishing resurrection (Mk 16:8). So let us follow and worship Jesus Christ, the Son of God & Suffering-Servant, who embraced the cross as the Father's will, who rose triumphantly from the dead, and who, as the Son of Man, is coming back for us, reigning in glory, both now and for evermore. Amen!

Background Information on “Mark”

Author: Unidentified; the testimony of the early church cites “Mark” as the author, most likely “John Mark”. Mark traveled with the Apostle Paul (see Acts 12-15), but left Paul at one point during their missionary journey, and therefore Paul no longer wanted to take Mark with him (which led to Paul and Barnabas splitting up). Later Mark would win the respect of Paul (Col 4:10-11; 2Ti 4:11; Phm v24).

Apostolic endorsement: One standard used by the church to accept letters or books as NT Scripture was whether or not they were written by (or associated with) an apostle (i.e. Luke was associated with Paul). It appears Mark relied heavily upon the Apostle Peter and his sermons. 1 Peter 5:13 implies Peter’s close relationship with Mark; and in Acts 2:22-24 (from Peter’s Pentecost Sermon), we see a general outline of the Gospel of Mark (this Gospel is also written like a sermon, blunt & to the point). [Note: Mark 14:51-52 might be referring to the author himself, although the main point in those verses is that Jesus was abandoned by all, not that we as readers should try to figure out the identity of this particular individual. Mark’s focus is on the person of Jesus Christ, not on himself as the author].

Date & Recipients: probably written in the 50’s to 60’s A.D.
Possibly written to (Gentile?) Christians living in Rome and abroad.

Outline of “Mark”

Taken & adapted from [Mark by David Garland \(NIV Application Commentary\)](#)

Mark 1 to 8: Jesus of Nazareth (the Son of God) is revealed as the “Christ”

(or “Messiah” which means “anointed one” – Jesus is Israel’s long awaited Savior & King)

- **Mark 1:1-13** ● The Coming of Christ is Revealed: by John the Baptist to the Jews
Jesus’ Baptism & Temptation
- **Mark 1:14-8:30** ● Jesus’ Ministry in Galilee (preaching, teaching, miracles)
The Calling and Appointing of the twelve disciples
- **Mark 8:29** ● **The Turning Point in “Mark”**
Peter (a Jew) confesses Jesus as the Christ (the prophesied OT Messiah)

Mark 8 to 16: “the way of the Cross is the will of God”

(ending in a triumphant-resurrection which includes salvation for the Gentiles/the whole world)

- **Mark 8:31-10:52** ● Jesus is “on the way” to Jerusalem/the Cross
Suffering and the cross are prophesied; and the Transfiguration takes place
- **Mark 11-12** ● Confrontation in Jerusalem with the religious leaders
The Triumphal entry; Judgment foreshadowed on the Temple
- **Mark 13** ● Jesus’ Farewell Discourse
The call to Perseverance & Vigilance as the gospel spreads globally until the 2nd Coming
- **Mark 14-15** ● The Passion of Christ
Anointed by a woman, the Last Supper, betrayal, abandonment, trial, scourging, crucifixion, burial
- **Mark 15:39** ● **The Climax of “Mark”**
The Roman Centurion (a Gentile) confesses Jesus as “the Son of God”
- **Mark 16** ● Christ’s Resurrection is Revealed
an Angelic Messenger announces the resurrection to three women (at the empty tomb)