

Mark | The Making of Christ Followers

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I. Introduction

Following someone today is a bit weird. You basically click a button and now you magically follow someone. Social media has radically changed our basic understanding of following someone...It takes little commitment on our part to “follow someone.” Very little thinking goes into the implications of following this person or that latest trend. It is interesting with the amount of information we can have about someone, our following them takes less commitment than ever before.

When you look at the “followers” of Jesus, they could hardly be describe as mere observers from afar. They had no choice but to get up close and personal with whomever they were going to follow. It took work to know a person but that was only the beginning. No one dare say they “follow” a person until they understood them and what they were all about. A follower not only knew what the person they were following knew but they did what that person did.

The Gospel of Mark is a narrative of the life of Jesus, but undoubtedly it was intended to instruct those who are disciples of Jesus; then and beyond. The unfolding of the life of Jesus is set before the reader to marvel at its Savior and then follow with total commitment. Christ is the center piece and models through teaching, serving, and ultimately given of his life, of what it means to be a disciple—a follower of Jesus Christ.

My prayer over the next several months is that we would understand more about Jesus but also live more like him.

Read Mark 1:1

II. Mark

- A. Who? (Acts 12:12 / Col 4:10)...John Mark is mentioned throughout scripture on several occasion and is perhaps more famous for the rift he and Paul had in Acts 15. But we know they later made amends and Mark served along side Paul in his finally days. Paul actually ask for him in 2 Timothy to come to his aid because he was very useful to him in ministry. But the most interesting mention of Mark is 1 Peter 5:13, where Peter calls him, “Mark, my son.”
- B. Peter apparently had a parental like relationship with Mark and spent lots of time discipling him. This is well attested throughout church history. It is this relationship that brings about Mark’s Gospel. Mark was not a disciple nor an eye witness to Jesus, which are two major requirements for a book to be in the NT, but he wrote on account of Peter, who was a disciple—who was an eyewitness.
- C. Early church fathers over and over again affirm Mark writing on Peter’s account. The earliest coming from Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in 140 AD, which is quoted by Eusebius in his monumental work entitled Ecclesiastical History. Here is what Papias says about Mark, “*Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ.*”¹

¹ Eusebius of Caesaria, “The Church History of Eusebius,” in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine* (ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert; vol. 1; A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series; New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 1172.

- D. This is an unfortunate critique of the book itself because if he wrote what Peter spoke, which is well attested, well, as one scholar put it, “Peter must have been a lively preacher.”² Mark is writing the day-to-day teachings of Peter and writes in a fashion that was to be read out loud. Many scholars are starting to see the book of Mark designed to be read orally and become rememberable.

III. The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

A. Here we have the title to Mark’s gospel.

B. Purpose

1. *Christology* - to develop a right understanding of God the Son, Mark wants us to marvel at our savior. As he, Jesus, moves from place to place, we see a fast pace savior healing and teaching. But Mark is unique in that it does not shy away from the suffering Jesus felt from the authorities and at times from the lack of devotion from his followers. He, Mark, gives a real account of Jesus, the God Man who dealt with life in all its good and bad. As one commentator put it, “His portrait of Jesus emerges untidily and with a rich profusion of elements as the narrative develops...”³ His Christology, is not nicely tied to succinct statements but a portrait of our Savior to follow...which leads me to the other major purpose of Mark’s gospel.
2. *Discipleship* - to encourage followers then and now. Mark includes the disciples at every corner and Jesus is hardly alone at any moment.

² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p 8

³ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, p 23-29

He gives us a real look at following Jesus, with all its difficulty. The book of Mark has been criticized on its treatment of the twelve, the disciples, but yet that treatment makes this book most useful. Giving us examples to warn and instruct followers of Jesus. There is purpose behind pulling the curtain back and exposing the rawness of following Jesus to, as one scholar put it, “generate determination to avoid such failures.”⁴ Mark not only does this by showing us the warts of those who first followed Jesus, but, as we stated a minute ago, portraying “Jesus as the only adequate model of discipleship. He is both the basis for and pattern of discipleship.”⁵

- C. Which all hinges on the gospel about Jesus Christ, so what is the gospel
1. The term itself...it is believed that Mark here is using this term for the first time to describe what he is about to write. So throughout the years this becomes a suitable title for the story of Jesus.
 - a) εὐαγγέλιου
 - b) OT use of good news...the OT speaks of individuals who bring good news
 - (1) Is 40:9 / Nah 1:15 / Is 52:7, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”*

⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament: “Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark—and Beyond*, ed. by Richard N. Longenecker, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp 9-29.

⁵ Hurtado, *Patterns*, p 25.

- (2) They announced victory, they brought good news that God reigns. Then NT writers begin here with Mark to see Jesus as the good news of salvation.

2. How Mark uses it...8 times

- a) 1:1 - The content of the gospel is Jesus Christ
- b) 1:14 - Jesus **proclaims** the gospel of God—a strategic use of words right after we see it in verse 1—What does he proclaim...
- c) 1:15 - *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* Jesus proclaims the gospel and then is directly quoted saying, “Repent and believe in the gospel.” He does not necessarily tell us exactly what the gospel is per say, but it is definitely a message that he calls people to 1) repent from other messages/their sinful way of life and 2) believe the gospel message, which we know already from verse 1 that the content of the gospel message is Jesus!
- d) 8:35 - One **loses** his life for the gospel...Jesus is telling his disciples and the crowd that had gathered to count the cost of following Him. So in doing so he uses the term gospel as something that becomes so central to a follower of Christ that it becomes central above all other possessions. This message that earlier in the book had caused people to repent and then believe, it became their everything. It was to become so central to their thinking that it overtook other messages around them, so much so they would lose everything to follow it.

- e) 10:29 - One **leaves** everything for the gospel...on a similar note as 8:35 Jesus gives more clarity on what it means to lose one's life for Jesus and the gospel. *“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive hundred fold now in this time”*
 - f) 13:10 - The gospel must first be **proclaimed** to all nations
 - g) 14:9 - Wherever the gospel is **proclaimed**...
 - h) 16:15 - Go to all the world and **proclaim** the gospel
3. Observations
- a) The gospel is about ***Jesus***, make no mistake about it there is no other content of the gospel, the good news is that God became man and took the penalty for our sins. The gospel ceases to be the gospel when it is not focused on Jesus! Things that masquerade around as the gospel are deadly because it does not point towards Jesus. Jesus is the deciding factor if indeed what is being shared is truly the gospel.
 - b) The gospel calls one to ***repent*** and then to ***believe*** it...
 - (1) Why does it call a person to ***repent***?...Well what we learn from the message about Jesus, the good news is that God reigns, that God has victory and we are accountable to him—this is

why Jesus says the “Kingdom of God is at hand.”

Now, though this is called good news, well it could be bad news if someone hears the gospel, the message of Jesus, and refuse to repent. Lets be painstakingly clear here, repent is a *heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere resolve to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.*⁶

- (2) ***Believe*** what?...Mark throughout the entire book gives us Jesus to marvel at; to see him as Savior, as the only adequate sacrifice for sin.

Perhaps Mark 10:45 makes it most clear what the gospel tells us to believe, ...*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* His life is a substitutionary death for those who would repent then believe that He, Jesus, is *a living person that we trust for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God.*

Faith is turning towards Christ and repentance is turning away from sin. This is what the gospel calls us to do...the gospel is not a stationary message that we listen to but one we respond to!! When this is not called for the gospel has not been proclaimed.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology: Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013)

- c) The gospel is be *central* in our lives...When Mark, rather Jesus, uses the term gospel, twice he indicates loss of something or leaving something for the sake of it. He said that the gospel will become so central that it perhaps would cause one to willingly put their desires aside for the sake of the gospel. They would put aside fame, fortune, or even safety for the sake of the gospel. Here is what the gospel would do in someones life...
- (1) That when they think about career they first think of how that career will help them in gospel engagement. Gospel then career.
 - (2) When they think about where to live, they become strategic and move into the most needy places.
 - (3) When they purchase cars, they avoid costly payments in order to be freed to give their finances towards gospel work.
 - (4) They suffer loss of reputation around the water cooler because they remain faithful to their wives in speech and action. They don't belittle others or think themselves superior to their co-workers.
 - (5) They painstakingly meet up with that friend consistently in order to love them like Christ has through the gospel.
 - (6) Lastly, and most relevant for us today, is that when the gospel becomes central, there is no

room for racism. If you feel superior in any way to another race, ethnicity, economic background, nationality...repent and hear the gospel, it is central not your race, the gospel tells us that we are only special because of Jesus not you. We are accepted by God because of Jesus. The gospel is central!!

- d) Last observation is that the gospel is to be ***proclaimed***...we have no other message, no gimmicks, nothing to sell, no fluffy promises, no heretical promise of your best life now, no bait and switch tactic, no health and wealth, just the gospel of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection!

IV. Therefore...

- A. Followers of Christ believe the gospel, loss everything for it, and proclaim it.
- B. The gospel about Jesus Christ, fuels discipleship.
- C. LITD will be so radically gospel centered that it will be our message, our hope, our aim, and will drive everything. It will be the motor that powers the car to move.