

SERVANTS, LIKE THE SAVIOR

Mark 10:45

Today we're going to begin a new study of the gospel of Mark. And like I usually do with a new book, I'm just want to introduce us to it: to the author, to the background, and to the purpose of it, and the reason we're studying it - all to cultivate our hearts to take it in and spark some excitement about the book. First, we ask the reason: Why choose the book of Mark for us as a church? For one, we've been studying mostly Paul's formal letters to the Church and I wanted something a little different with a different personality. My heart was already set on studying one of the gospel accounts but Mark started to get my attention because it goes right along with the vision we have going for our church: bearing fruit by serving.

I. **THE VISION: BEARING FRUIT BY SERVING.**

If you're new or visiting, the vision is that of a fruit tree. We are using **the analogy of a healthy fruit tree, with deep roots and bearing fruit** to engrain in us a spiritual lesson that brings **balance** to our lives. We want to have **deep roots** in the Word of God and in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The roots element more our emphasis last year through the book of Galatians which stabilized us in the gospel of grace. However, having deep roots is really only half of it. We want to be balanced and bear fruit. To know it and to live it – the Word to bear fruit in our lives as we apply it. So lately, we've really begun to emphasize the **bearing fruit** element this year by studying the short book of Titus and a short study on spiritual gifts. Now we're going to continue running with the idea through the gospel of Mark because the gospel of Mark emphasizes service and servanthood, and how we should be **servants like our Savior**. Whether it be Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, each gospel record has a different theme to it. For example, Matthew emphasizes Christ as King, while Mark emphasizes Christ as Servant.

❖ **Mark emphasizes Christ as Servant.**

If there were ever a gospel written specifically for the churches in our culture today, I would think it would be Mark or a lot like Mark. **Mark writes mainly to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) like us and specifically Gentiles living in Rome.** And we're a lot more like Rome than we think, and increasingly so. One reason I say that is because they liked what was pragmatic – basically, if it works and gets the job done, do it. The end justifies the means in pragmatism. They were fast-paced and didn't mess around. Americans are go-getters. But they also liked action-packed entertainment. One wonders if they had as much of a hard time sitting still and listening to a speaking and teaching as modern audiences today... they didn't just want to hear or read it, they wanted to see it or visualize it, like our culture is attracted to movies and videos more and more.

Well, Mark is written to the Roman culture who had the similar desire for entertainment and action. **It is a fast-paced and action-packed book about the Christ the Servant who is always on the move.** The Greek word euthus, translated “immediately” or “at once” is used 42 times in this gospel. You can imagine Mark writing this gospel with the thought in mind that it was going to be read to gatherings of believers and he didn't want them to fall asleep. When you read it like that, it's like one man said, Mark sort of grabs you by the throat and thrusts you into the action. There's many present tense words used, making us feel like we're there with them, moving from one scene to another, rather abruptly. It seems to **focus more on what Jesus did**, than what Jesus said. The Scofield Reference Bible said this gospel shows Jesus as a **Mighty Worker**, rather than Unique Teacher... it's a **gospel of deeds rather than of words**. Jesus is constantly engaged in doing

something – be it teaching, preaching, healing or serving in some way. He’s always doing miracles of some kind, showing that He has authority over disease, nature, demons, and even death. And I think that Jesus’ power over disease in Mark is going to be a good reminder for us with the coronavirus concerns going around. I think it’s important to remember that He’s still sovereign and still in control, and can use it to draw people to Him and think about eternity.

In Mark, Jesus is so busy ministering to people through teaching and healing diseases that it became hard for Him to even find time to eat. He is always about the Father’s will actively, compassionately, and obediently, even to the point of death. It displays Jesus Christ as the greatest servant who ever walked this earth. And with that said, we’re kind of started into the purpose.

II. **THE PURPOSE: WHAT EFFECT WILL THIS BOOK HAVE ON US? (Mark 10:45)**

That one of the things I always want to ask when we open a new book to study is, “**How is this going to change us and affect us? In the way we think, or do, or feel?**”¹ Mark isn’t just writing down a historical narrative of everything he knew about Christ. He is writing specific things about Christ’s life and Christ’s interactions with the disciples to communicate a purpose. There is a purpose behind his writing, and we’re basically asking the question now, “How is Mark trying to shape us? What in the world is Mark trying to do to us?”² And I think **the purpose of Mark can be best summed up in the key verse of this book, which is also our main text for today, Mark 10:45** – “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” There’s three segments to this verse I want to break down, to explain the effect it will have on us. It teaches us to **believe** something, to **do** something, and to **feel** something.

A. **Mark will teach us to *believe* a biblical definition of greatness.**

This world trains us to think that the people who are great, are people who are served by others. Basically, the higher up you are and the more people you have serving you, the greater you are – but **that’s a false definition of greatness because not even the Son of Man came to be served and He’s the greatest!** Greatness in God’s eyes is not by how many people you have serving you, but by how many people you serve. In His kingdom, the way up, is down.

One of the prime examples is right there in the context of our verse in chapter 10 and it’s the reason Jesus says this in the first place. In 10:37, James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, asked Jesus if they could sit with Him in His glorious kingdom, one on His right and one on His left – and they were still thinking only of the earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. They wanted the high positions. They wanted to be well-known, thinking only of authority and power and fame, and *they thought that this worldly type of thinking was fine*. And when the other disciples found out about what they asked Jesus, it obviously caused some conflict. Their definition of greatness at that moment was the world’s definition of greatness, and as Jesus was showing them through His example, greatness is not defined by ruling over servants, but through serving others and being a servant of all. First are last. Last, first. Jesus said, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served...”

Every single one of us has a little bit in us, of what James and John had in them at that moment. And Mark is going to pull that rotten fruit definition of greatness and replace it with the good fruit of **servant-hearted humility**. When someone is a humble and servant-hearted person like

Jesus, it's not important who gets the power, authority, credit, limelight. What's important is that God is glorified. So in our thinking, that definition will change which affects our doing.

B. In our *doing*, Mark will keep our faith from remaining mere theory.

Basically, what I mean by that is if something remains theory, it's still just a set of facts or principles that have only been analyzed – they haven't been acted upon. It's as if we've talked about doing something but haven't tested it yet or done it yet. It's still just theory. But we don't want our faith to remain theory. We want to live it out and prove the theory right. That's what disciples do. Their faith is more than theoretical. It is a lifestyle.

❖ **The key words in this book are: Immediately, Follow, Disciples, Serve.**

Disciples immediately follow Jesus and serve. They don't just talk about it. They live to serve, looking to Jesus as the prime example for how to serve. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, **but to serve.**" **Serving is a verb. It is action word.** It means we physically do something. We become a servant of all. We wash others' feet like Jesus did. Unfortunately, one of the many reasons why churches are ineffective today, is because they aren't doing a lot of serving. You know, I've got this digital assistant on my phone called **Siri**. And one day, I asked Siri a question, and she gave me an answer, and just for fun I said, "Thank you Siri." You know what she said? She said, "**I live to serve.**" And I thought, man, even Siri knows how to serve! All of us ought to have that same mindset for each other.

One of the neat chapters in Mark is chapter 8. It's the transition chapter. Jesus asks the disciples in verse 27, "Who do people say that I am?" They say that some think He's John the Baptist or Elijah or another one of the prophets... but He says to them, "But who do *you* say that I am?" And this is a big moment in the book halfway through it because the whole first part of the book is Jesus doing ministry – preaching and teaching and healing – and so by now they should have a pretty good grasp on who He is. They should know He is the promised Servant Isaiah and Zechariah wrote about. Everything has been working up to this very moment. What's Peter's response? "You are the Christ." Good job, Peter. And it's immediately after this in verse 34 where Mark says Jesus calls for a response to that claim. In other words, now that Jesus is clearly the Messiah, you must do something with it. And the appropriate response when you know Jesus is your Messiah and you've trusted Him, is that you now begin to become a whole-hearted follower of Him. Listen to what Jesus says. It says, "He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?'" **Jesus is calling people to make a decision.** What are you going to do with the Messiah claim? You're either ashamed of Him or surrendered to Him. To go after Him demands faith that is beyond theory: self-denial and a cross.

The last part of the verse brings some serious encouragement we need to do that. It's not easy.

C. Mark will make us *feel encouraged* to serve.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and **to give His life as a ransom for many.**" He gave Himself for us. He went to the cross for us, suffering the worst type of death imaginable on the cross and not only that, one of the worst scourgings ever. I mean, by the time He was on the cross, He was hardly recognizable it was so bad. Crazy thing is, He knew it was going to happen, but He did it anyway for us. And when we reflect on that He sacrificially gave His life as a ransom for us, we ourselves are encouraged to sacrifice as

well. He is our example. 1 John 3:16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.” We are encouraged by Christ’s example and Mark knows that. He actually spends 40% of this book telling us about the Savior’s last 8 days, with His preparation and suffering and sacrifice because he knows how much we need it for encouragement! And I say that because I think Mark himself had been highly encouraged to persevere by hearing of Christ’s suffering and perseverance in his own life through his own struggles and failure.

1. **Mark’s failure and perseverance.**

Mark had a failure that is recorded in the book of Acts. In Acts 12:12 and 12:25, we also discover that Mark’s name was also John. He is known as John, who was also called Mark – so it’s John-Mark, whose mother’s name was Mary. There were a lot of people named Mary at this time, but Mark’s mother Mary lived in Jerusalem and was likely pretty wealthy, for she had a house large enough for the church to gather in. The church in her house was some of those who had been fervently praying for Peter’s release from prison when it miraculously happened. After Peter got out, he went straight to John-Mark’s mother’s house. So Peter was likely already acquainted with Mark and his family.

And Mark at one point had been on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas to the island of Cyprus, but when it came time to go to Turkey, Mark refused to go with. Instead, he left them at Perga and returned to his mother’s house in Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). The reason why John-Mark departed isn’t known to us, but Paul seemed to think it was unjustified (15:38) and Mark was looked at as a deserter. We know this because later on when Paul and Barnabas had returned home, and Mark was ready to go on mission with them again, Barnabas (Mark’s cousin according to Col. 4:10) was willing to give him another chance but Paul wasn’t. It says, “Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.”

2. **Peter’s failure and perseverance.**

All of this goes to say that after Mark returned home in defeat, it’s likely that he met Peter there sometime and Peter invested in Mark by telling Mark about his own failure and perseverance through Christ’s encouragement. Having denied the Lord three times himself, Peter knew what failure was all about, but Peter strengthened Mark like Jesus told Peter to do (Luke 22:32). Jesus told Peter he would be sifted by Satan and fall but when he turns, to strengthen his brethren – and that’s exactly who I think strengthened Mark. Peter would later affectionately call Mark ‘his son’ in the faith and became a companion of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). Early writings outside the Bible affirm this as well. Eusebius, an early church father, wrote about how early Christians were enthralled with Peter’s experiences and Mark was the one who wrote down those experiences for everyone.

So when it comes to the gospel of Mark, it’s hard not to see it as written by two men: Mark and Peter. Mark is writing these things from Peter’s stories and perspective. It’s written by two men who knew failure, but knew what it means to persevere. Their stories teach us that **one failure like this does not mean you are useless**. A failure like this will actually

make you more useful! When you interview someone for leadership in the church, one of the most important questions to ask a man and listen closely to their answer is the question of, “What experiences have you been through that make you who you are today?” What you want to hear is not glamorous stories of great victories, but stories of heartbreak and setbacks and failures, desertions and perseverance. You want to know this man has had to walk with God through difficult times. God uses those moments to make us effective, like John-Mark and Peter. Those people who have failed but persevered will be fully devoted followers who can counsel others without pride. Even Paul had to later say in his last letter, “Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service” (2 Timothy 4:11). In this gospel, that’s what we will learn. Disciples are not perfect. They have fears, failures, feelings of ill-prepared – but they persevere and become useful.

And that’s exactly what Mark’s audience needed. Remember, Mark is writing to encourage believers in Rome who were undergoing severe persecution. Rome liked action-packed entertainment and at the time the action-packed entertainment was watching Christians die. These believers needed to be encouraged to serve unto death like Christ.

3. **Jesus’ prime example of sacrifice and perseverance.**

Mark encourages his readers by showing that Jesus’ death not some accident. As one man said, Jesus’ death in Mark is not shown to be some “...tragedy, an example of how things can take an unfortunate turn or how the best laid plans can go awry. One the contrary, in the death of Jesus all things go exactly according to the divine plan.” Jesus willingly accepted the cup God had for Him and we should accept His cup for us, whatever it is. Even if it’s dying as a martyr in ancient Rome. I’ve always been encouraged by the saying, ‘Ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing.’ It’s not easy to serve. It’s not always bright skies and fluffy clouds in ministry. It is hard. It will cost you. Think of what it cost Jesus. But it’s worth it, just like Jesus was worth it. I don’t know about you but I’d rather lose my life and find it. I’d rather lose this whole crazy world, than lose my soul. You find your life and find your soul when you lose it and let go. **Mark extends to us all the call of Jesus to become serious and devoted disciples He can use to bring the saving and life transforming news of the gospel to others.** Doesn’t require perfection – just a willing obedience and perseverance.

One story I read this week really highlighted what this gospel is all about. In 1878, men began to enlist in William Booth’s Salvation Army and one of them was an old minister from America named Samuel Brengle, who left his fine pastorate to join this bunch in England. The founder, William Booth, however, accepted Brengle’s services reluctantly and grudgingly. Booth said that Brengle had “been his own boss for too long.” And in order to re-instill humility in Brengle, Booth put him to work cleaning boots of the trainees. Brengle asked himself while cleaning boots, “Is this why I left America to come to England? To clean and blacken boots?” But then he thought of Jesus kneeling down to wash the rough and weary feet of the disciples and said, “Lord, you washed their feet; I will black their boots.”³ That’s the heart of a servant. That’s the heart of Mark: Servants, like the Savior. I look forward to growing through this book with you.

Mark

MARK, THE SHORTEST AND SIMPLEST of the four Gospels, gives a crisp and fast-moving account of the life of Christ. With few comments, Mark lets the narrative speak for itself as it tells the story of the Servant who is constantly on the move preaching, healing, teaching, and finally dying for sinful men. A ministry that begins with the masses soon narrows to the twelve disciples, and finally culminates on the Cross. There the Servant who “did not come to be served,” makes the supreme sacrifice of servanthood by giving “His life a ransom for many” (10:45). And that pattern of selfless service becomes the model for those who follow in the Servant’s steps.

MARK	Focus	To Serve			To Sacrifice		
		1:1	10:52	11:1	16:20		
Divisions		Presentation of the Servant	Opposition to the Servant	Instruction by the Servant	Rejection of the Servant	Ressurrection of the Servant	
		1:1	2:12 2:13 8:26	8:27 10:52	11:1	15:47 16:1	16:20
Topics		Sayings and Signs			Suffering		
Place		Galilee and Perea			Judea and Jerusalem		
Time		c. 3 Years		c. 6 Months	8 Days		
		C. A.D. 29–33					

¹ Mark Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 205-206.

² Howard Hendricks, *Teaching That Changes Lives* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press and Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, 1987), 60.

³ Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2015), 18.