

Series: The Gospel According to Mark

Theme: Discipleship

Text: Various

Introduction:

My deepest struggles as your pastor comes from encounters with you when you are deeply discouraged with your own walk with Christ. When you grow weary and get discouraged and contemplate throwing in the towel, I get weighed down. How can I encourage them? What can I say? What are they missing?

But the discouragement grows all the more intense when I too have become discouraged. “You’re right! What’s the use. I don’t understand it. This is too difficult.”

As disciples we are given a tall order – be like Jesus! Walk like him. Talk like him. Love like him. Live like him. I CAN’T!

I am supposed to know what he knows and understand what he says and love what he loves. I CAN’T!

The Gospel according to Mark is written for us.

What do I mean?

- I mean it was written for disciples of Jesus.
- I mean it was written for Gentile disciples of Jesus.
- I mean it was written for Gentile disciples of Jesus who don’t understand Jesus.

Let me briefly unpack those three sentences.

The book of Mark is very simple. It really is not concerned with a timeline or chronology of Jesus’ ministry. That is what Luke and John are concerned with, not Mark. In fact, he even gets the timeline wrong. Instead, Mark is concerned with themes and groups. That’s right! Mark wants you to understand the dynamics that existed between Jesus and three (3) groups of people: the disciples, the religious leaders and the crowds (outsiders).

Mark is also not at all concerned with what Jesus did in and near Jerusalem. He is only concerned with what Jesus did in the regions of Galilee, Gentile territory. He is writing to Roman Christians who are suffering persecution at the hands of Nero. Mark barely ever quotes from the OT; he has to explain Jewish customs that are unfamiliar to his readers. He translates Hebrew and Aramaic words into their Greek equivalents and even more, he transliterates Latin words into Greek. His audience evidently spoke Latin as their native tongue. Nearly all of the people that encounter Jesus’ ministry in Mark are Gentiles and not Jews. Mark is writing to Gentile disciples of Jesus who are undergoing intense persecution at the hands of the Roman government and who, like the early disciples don’t quite “get” Jesus.

Discipleship

Turn with me to Mark 3:13-19

Mark 3:13-19 (ESV)

¹³ And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.

This is an amazing sentence. Have you ever desired to be in someone's presence? Of course you have. But have you ever known the exhilaration that comes from knowing someone desires to be in your presence? That's entirely and all together different, isn't it!?

Here, it is clear that Jesus desired these men. At whatever level we read this passage, we cannot gloss over the fact that there was built-in to this relationship some kind of brotherly affection and desire. Jesus would spend three years wall-to-wall with these men. They would know everything about him. He would share with them; he would eat with them; he would travel with them. These are the men he most desired to be with. We will see that these are the men he vacationed with. When he needed to get away from it all and rest. He chose these men to go with him. In short, they did life together.

¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These are the first disciples.

Discipleship is repeatedly defined in Mark by simple proximity to Jesus:

- being with him (3:13),
- sitting around him (3:34; 4:10),
- him (4:1-20), and
- walking with him on the way (1:16-20; 10:52).

And here is where Mark is utterly profound:

The simple but all-important act of hearing and following Jesus precedes and is more important than the disciples' complete understanding of him.

Do you hear what I am saying? Mark thinks it is imperative that you and I learn this lesson: ***It is far more important that you be with Jesus than that you understand Jesus.***

I Don't Get It

The disciples, and especially the Twelve, are not infrequently shown to lack understanding and even to be hard-hearted (6:52; 7:14-18; 8:14-21; 9:23).

6:52

7:14-18

8:14-21

9:23

In spite of all of this – they sit around with him; they listen; they walk with him; they follow!

The surprising revelation from Mark is that this lack of understanding Jesus does not compromise their discipleship.

Why not?

1. Because what Jesus has to teach can only be taught in an apprentice relationship, which necessitates the disciples being with him more than their full understanding of him.
2. Because one's understanding can come only from the vantage point of the cross. For the 1st Disciples that meant a chronological gap. They had to get past the real veil. They had to come to the place in history where the temple curtain is torn sunder and the meaning of Jesus' divine Sonship is finally fully revealed. For us, we have to get past the spiritual veil where our eyes are gradually being more and more enlightened as to the fullness of Jesus.

We know a little bit about Mark. I can't help but wonder how much of his own story is represented in this theme of discipleship.

John Mark was the son of a woman named Mary. The early church gathered in Jerusalem met in her house (Acts 12:12). It was apparently the meeting place for the Last Supper, as well (Acts 1:13-14; Mark 14:14). He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (50 AD) and was responsible for travel arrangements, food and lodging. But at Perga he quit the journey for reasons that are silent in history (Acts 13:13). We don't know what happened. Whatever the reasons, they cast a cloak of question over Paul because he refused to allow Mark to join him on a second journey. Baranabas sharply disagreed with Paul and took John Mark, his cousin, with him back to Cyprus (Acts 15:37-41). Ten long years go by before we hear of Mark again. And these references come most favorably from the pen of Paul who had been reconciled to Mark (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). And in the year 65 AD, 15 years after quitting a journey, John writes the Gospel of Mark. (In fact, 1 Peter 5:13 discloses that Mark is working with Peter in Rome near the end of Peter's life. Tradition holds that Mark learned the gospel account by listening to Peter preach the gospel. The Gospel of Mark is really "Peter's memoirs.")

When the journey gets rough and you don't seem to get Jesus, just stick with Him. Being with Jesus precedes understanding him. (In a couple of weeks, we will see how the theme of journey is so crucial to Mark's gospel.)

Conclusion:

You will never understand Jesus fully, not in this lifetime.

Be with Jesus.

Commune with Jesus.