
Mark: Every Man's Gospel

Theme: Faith

Text: Various

Introduction:

American evangelicalism is in danger of reducing faith to a formula. If you hold to certain creedal facts, or follow religious rituals, you have faith. But faith is also reduced to a certain kind of ambition. It is often a blind leap of good intentions that we call faith.

Faith is no formula to Mark; faith is an encounter with a living person.

Here is how Charles Spurgeon said it in the late 1800's:

Our faith is a person; the gospel that we have to preach is a person; and go wherever we may, we have something solid and tangible to preach, for our gospel is a person. If you had asked the twelve Apostles in their day, 'What do you believe in?' they would not have stopped to go round about with a long sermon, but they would have pointed to their Master and they would have said, 'We believe him.' 'But what are your doctrines?' 'There they stand incarnate.' 'But what is your practice?' 'There stands our practice. He is our example.' 'What then do you believe?' Hear the glorious answer of the Apostle Paul, 'We preach Christ crucified.' Our creed, our body of divinity, our whole theology is summed up in the person of Christ Jesus.¹

For Mark, faith depends on repeated hearing of Jesus' Word and a participation in His mission. Faith is inextricably linked with discipleship. Faith comes from being *with* Jesus as you listen to what he says and follow in what he does, like an apprentice.

But what is most remarkable to Mark's treatment of faith as a topic is the way he makes it clear that there are two different faith responses. This observation will also overlap with another of Mark's themes, "insiders and outsiders," as we shall see.

Faith from the Outsiders

- Nearly all of the examples of stunning, spontaneous and simple faith come from those who are (1) from outside Jesus' immediate circle of followers; and (2) from those who are outsiders. When Jesus encounters most of these individuals, they are either outside the community in the wilderness or somewhere they are not supposed to be (Consider the leper, the "Blind Bartemaeus," the Syrophenician woman, the woman with the 12-year long hemorrhage, etc.). These all represent, to Mark, people who are outside the circle of "Faith-advantage." Notice a couple of these instances.
 - Leper (1.40-42) – "If you will, you can make me clean." This is drastically different from saying, "If you can, will you make me clean." (contra 9:24). This is a demonstration of magnificent faith. Faith begins with the will of God.

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "De Propaganda Fide," in *Lectures Delivered before the Young Men's Christian Association in Exeter Hall 1858-1859*, pages 159-160.

- Four friends of a paralytic man (2.5) – Faith is linked with seeking him out.
- Hemorrhaging woman (5.35) – power encounter v. personal encounter; miracle v. meeting; answer to problems; confront her with respect to her faith. “I-it relationship” (things) v. “I-thou relationship” (persons). She was kind of caught, thought she was in trouble.
- Syrophenician woman (7.24-30)
- Father of an epileptic son (9.24) – Faith is no formula. There was still belief though the prayer was less than perfect.
- Blind Bartimaeus (10.52)
- Widow with no money (12.41-44) – “Faith” is not mentioned
- Woman who anoints Jesus (14.3-9) – John 12 identifies this woman as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. – Faith is linked with the affections.
- Above all, the centurion (15.39)

Unbelief from the Insiders

- From those inside Jesus’ immediate circle of followers who have a faith advantage:
 - Jesus’ family (3.31-35)
 - Jesus’ hometown (6.1-6)
 - Religious experts (11.27-33)
 - Even the disciples (8:14-21)
 - These groups were the least understanding and the most resistant
- 1. Faith is the result of a “touch” from Jesus who makes all to see (8.14-21; 8:22-26). Everyone is spiritually blind (pervasive). Why does Jesus’ touch not work the first time?
- 2. Faith is a recognition of God, his will, his person, his power (3:35; 1:42)
- 3. Faith is a response that flows from an estimation of value (6:5; 14:9) – requires affection.
- 4. Faith reveals our core (11:30; 15:39) – no fear of man

Conclusion:

In all of these cases faith is marked by desperation.

In all these cases faith is met with a personal encounter.

Not simply getting needs met.