UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

IS A MOTIVATION OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT FAITHFUL TO THE
TEACHINGS OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK?

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Abstract

Is a motivation of Reward and Punishment faithful to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark?

“If I do this, will I miss out on Heaven or go to Hell?” These questions are recurring themes in a Christian church context. Clearly, the motivation resulting in these questions is one of reward and punishment. The right thing must be done to gain what one desires, or to avoid a negative outcome. But is it Jesus’ intention that his followers be motivated by reward or punishment? And if not, what motivation did He intend?

This study uses a historical-exegetical approach to the text of the Gospel of Mark to determine if Jesus intends us to be motivated by reward and punishment. Mark’s Gospel was chosen due to the succinct nature of the gospel. It is expected that Mark will be the most difficult gospel in which to identify motivation since the author has gone into less detail and discussion. This will make what is found more significant.

This study considers all pericopes that speak to motivation in the gospel, beginning with the call stories where the Markan Jesus first calls followers. The way the Markan Jesus teaches is considered, as is the teaching on the amputation of limbs and avoiding “hell.” The rich man seeking eternal life, Jesus’ passion predictions, Mark’s use of temple imagery and most importantly the way of the cross are all explored. In all cases we seek to understand what motivation is presented by the Markan Jesus to follow Him.

Throughout the study it becomes apparent that reward and punishment are not the motivation the Markan Jesus intends, with few rewards promised, and what is promised usually containing a sting in its tail. Punishment is even less evident in the text. Rather, the identity, character, and purpose of Jesus Christ are time and again revealed, followed by an invitation to follow. Jesus’ purpose is to restore humanity to his presence and the world to its original perfection. The intended motivation will be seen to be: “This is who I am. Am I enough for you?”
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I guess I was every teacher’s nightmare. I was the kid that always came out with the difficult “why?” questions. I guess some things never change. Growing up in a Christian family, attending church, and working in vocational ministry I have often heard the same types of question; “If I do this will I miss out from going to Heaven?” or “You can’t do that or you won’t go to Heaven.”\(^1\) From my limited experience, motivation for many to follow Jesus, or at least to comply with the teachings of scripture, was a matter of reward or punishment. Even at a young age I would query why out of love for us God sent his Son to die, only to (dare I be so crude), bribe or threaten us into compliance. Since then my knowledge of God has greatly grown. I now know why I follow Jesus. But that still leaves two questions. Firstly, I still often hear the same sort of statements suggesting many are motivated to follow Jesus by reward and punishment. Secondly, if the heart is deceitful above all things (Jer 17:9), how does one know they are on track? What does scripture teach on this subject? Again I ask the difficult question: \textit{Is a motivation of reward and punishment faithful to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark?} And if this is shown not to be the case, what is the intended motivation? That is the topic of this thesis.

Validity of the question?

Before we begin, though, my perception must be tested. Are people actually motivated by reward and punishment? A longitudinal study into the faith development of youth in the Seventh-day Adventist church, within which I minister, surveyed 1,359 young people aged 11-18 across Australia and New Zealand. Of these young people, 64\% agreed to varying degrees that God wants their obedience more than anything else.\(^2\) Of those surveyed, 93\% agreed that God has given us the freedom to accept or reject Him, and 26\% feel that God is angry at people who disobey Him.\(^3\) Tragically 44\% felt God was distant and silent when they

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\(^1\) It is worth noting at this point that the denomination I am part of hold an annihilationist view of eschatology, hence “missing out on heaven” was loosely equivalent to, albeit more positive than, going to hell.


\(^3\) Ibid., p19.
needed Him. While this survey was not designed to shed light on their motivation to follow, there is a clear indication of an expectation of obedience first over faith or following, though some could consider the distinction is not justified. Given the high number who don’t feel that God is present, I would suggest that for many of the young people in my denomination, following God has been reduced to a future reward or a loss thereof. Is this right or wrong? This study looks to not only answer that question, but to do so in a clear and defendable way.

**Why the gospel of Mark?**

While all of scripture is divinely inspired and functions as a whole, for the purpose of this study we shall look at the teachings of Jesus. For Christians, all of scripture is of great value, but it is acknowledged that Jesus is the clearest expression of the person and character of God. Thus it is to the teachings of Jesus we turn. Of the gospels there are many arguments for one or other of the books. The gospel according to John paints beautiful pictures of the love of God for us and on the surface at least has a leaning towards a personal loving God. Should that be the outcome of this study, and if it were determined from John’s gospel, would it be considered valid or simply part of John’s bias? Isn’t that what you would expect when you look at the gospel written by the beloved disciple? Each gospel has its own emphasis and merits, with emphasis in different places. Mark stands out as the gospel with the least exploration and development of content. While a good number of motivations could be shown from the expansions of themes in each of the other gospels, to have them identified from Mark when considered alone adds more credibility. Of course, the author of Mark (who for the purpose of this study shall be referred to as Mark), recorded all that was considered necessary for their purpose, which is to grow disciples of Jesus. Thus, within this short, action packed account, there should be all that is required to be a follower of Jesus, including motivation. As the most succinct gospel, if it is found in Mark, it is sure to be found with greater ease in the other gospels as well.

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Methodology

The approach used in this study will be historical-exegetical criticism. The gospel is a historical document, and the awareness of this allows for a better assessment of both the meaning and truth of the text.\(^6\) While there are many wonderful methodologies available, many either have a specific agenda in mind\(^7\) or are very focused to a specific purpose.\(^8\) While the Gospel according to Mark is a narrative, we are looking to consider its meaning to individuals in a specific time and place. We will consider the nature of the narrative where relevant and the genre of various aspects of this narrative (e.g. parables, call or pronouncement stories, proverbs). Rhetoric used by the author will also be considered, as will the use and meaning of specific words or terms. But again, the study is looking broader than these specific forms of criticism. Thus, they are tools in our tool box as we examine the historical context to find what meaning was intended. After all, we are dealing with actual people (Jesus, the Markan author, the Markan audience) who all had a shaping influence over the testimony of the text. To understand these various influences enables us to better determine the theological importance of the text.\(^9\)

Further, as we focus on the cultural conditioning of both the New Testament text and of any potential interpretations we might develop, we are less likely to confuse the meaning of the text by using historical-exegetical criticism.\(^10\) Thus, we allow the text to speak for itself as far as possible without imposing our bias or agenda, and ideally to hear as clearly as possible the truth of Jesus Christ to which they testify.

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\(^7\) For example, Feminist Criticism aims to expose the misuse of scripture to restrict women according to F. Scott Spencer, or African American Criticism fundamentally explore ideas of liberation, resistance and survival according to Emerson B. Powery. While these very much have their place and make a valuable contribution to NT study, our purpose is to be opened to any themes that may emerge as the text is allowed to speak. Spencer, F. S., “Feminist Criticism” *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel Green, (2nd ed.. Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), p289; Powery, E. B., “African American Criticism” *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel Green, (2nd ed.. Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), p326.

\(^8\) For example narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism.

\(^9\) Barton, “Historical”, p38.

\(^10\) Ibid., p39.
Literature Review

On beginning the investigation of this topic, a sense of discomfort is fast encountered. Many speak of discipleship in Mark noting the centrality of the theme to the book. However, few ask why. Is this because everyone already knows? Or are we so politically correct that we wouldn’t presume to tell people what should motivate their most important of beliefs? Or is this a difficult question? In considering the call of Jesus’ first disciples in Mark, Collins writes “the text shows no interest in what motivates the four [to follow].”

It appears the body of work on the motivation to follow Jesus is very thin. We shall briefly consider four studies in this section.

The most relevant found was a doctoral thesis entitled “Biblical use of rewards as a motivation for Christian service.” In this thesis Korver, too, acknowledges how little has been written on motivation. Motivation is considered in the Old Testament and in the teachings of Jesus, Peter, John and Paul, before moving on to consider what these rewards might entail. In the Old Testament Korver concedes the focus to be on temporal rewards over eternal ones. In his examination of Jesus’ teachings he concludes:

“Jesus used rewards to motivate his listeners to take a stand for Him and not faint from persecution. His intent was clear, let future rewards motivate in present difficulties.”

However, the study is superficial and simplistic. In concluding it is suggested that the reward of a crown of righteousness, which is promptly cast at Jesus’ feet, is of little worth and motivation, where class distinction, authority and commendation are of greater value. Yet this undervalued crown is the righteousness of Christ, attributed to us by Christ Himself (cf. Rom 3:22) “who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20b). Surely there is little we can do or earn that would come close to the value of this eternal gift that allows us to have life itself.

13 Ibid., p34.
14 Ibid., p37.
15 Ibid., p145.
Eubank in his study explores rewards in the gospel of Matthew, particularly in Matt 6:1-19. He notes the use of παρά το πατρι ύμων which he contends should be translated “with your Father” as opposed to “from your Father.” He explores the financial language used in later Hebrew Scriptures and on into early Judaism and Christianity, demonstrating the shared assumptions across the three that righteous deeds (particularly alms giving) earned a heavenly treasure. This is suggested to be able to deliver one from death and punishment and enable them to take hold of eternal life. These “deposits” are held until the final judgement when all will be repaid for their actions, so they are purely eschatological in value.

This study is a very thorough examination. I would, however, take issue with the conclusion that these deeds earn the ability to “take hold of eternal life.” While financial language is used, it is also used of Jesus’ saving work. In his examination of financial language, “redemption” (ἀπολύτρωσις) is not considered. While not relevant to Matthew 6:1-19, it would certainly shape his conclusions related to the use of financial language in Christianity. As such, I do not feel Eubank’s conclusions are as wide ranging as they are claimed to be, despite the breadth of his initial investigation.

An enlightening study by Ahearne-Kroll looks specifically at the gospel of Mark and the author’s reason for writing it. Ahearne-Kroll argues convincingly that Mark’s purpose is to persuade and motivate the audience to become followers of Jesus. This goal is undertaken in part by the rhetorical device of audience inclusion and exclusion.

Audience inclusion and exclusion relates to the perception of the audience as to their involvement in the narrative and their identification with various groups within it. At times the audience is privileged to extra insight and knowledge, unknown to the characters from the omniscient insight of the author. Thus they feel a special place of privilege. They too are

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17 Eubank, “Storing,” p78.
18 Ibid., p84.
19 Ibid., p91.
20 Ibid., p84.
privileged on occasion to knowledge and understanding of the “inside group” of Jesus’ disciples (e.g. the explanation of parables in 4:13-20 or the discourse on the signs of the end 13:5-37), which includes them with the inside group. Other times they are excluded from the narrative, not receiving the insight or explanations of the disciples (e.g., the mystery of the kingdom 4:11-12). This leaves the audience identifying with those not privileged to be disciples, or worse, sometimes only receiving the insight and knowledge the opponents of Jesus receive.

Ahearne-Kroll writes:

“The level of inclusion of the audience in the content of the story shapes how the audience might be persuaded by the story and motivated to become part of the ingroup, namely, those who respond to Mark’s central tenet that Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah and those who seek to follow after him.”

The development is tracked as Mark draws the audience into a privileged position in the first three chapters with knowledge only the narrator knows. Chapter 4 undermines that expectation with Jesus speaking clearly to his followers of the mystery of the kingdom, but for outsiders and the audience everything is in parables. The mystery is not revealed to the audience, causing them to question their standing. This trend continues with the audience at best on the threshold between the privileged insiders and the outsiders held at arm’s length, or at worst, identified with Jesus’ opponents.

Ahearne-Kroll argues that from the very beginning, Mark writes in a way that demands a response. This is not a passive kingdom, and to understand and live in it requires following to the point of risking one’s life. To understand is to participate, and Mark’s purpose is clear, to motivate people to follow. It is clearly displayed that Mark is passionate about knowing Jesus, which can only come through experience. Thus, in the gospel of Mark, the first motivation to follow Jesus comes from the passion and conviction of the author. Here is the

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22 Ibid., p719.
23 Ibid., p720.
24 Ibid., p722.
25 Ibid., p723.
26 Ibid., p733.
testimony of one who is following, and their sole purpose is to bring their audience into the insider group of people who know and follow Jesus.

Achtemeier’s study considers Mark’s account of Bartimaeus’ healing. The study begins by clearly demonstrating that this is not a miracle story but a “call story.”27 The miracle does not result in following and faith, rather faith is the necessary basis for following and healing. As this pericope is more deeply investigated it is concluded that for Mark, discipleship is considered in relation to the passion.28 Many discipleship studies in Mark emphasise that to follow means to take up one’s cross, or to walk in the way of the cross, without ever considering why anyone would do so when it has been made to sound so unattractive.29 Achtemeier, on the other hand, points out that only at the cross does one know who it is they are following. It is the cross that draws one to follow Jesus.

It is acknowledged that these surveyed studies relate in varying degrees to the topic in question, that of a motivation of rewards and punishment in Jesus’ teachings in Mark. As noted earlier, few have dared to venture into the world of motivation as presented by Jesus, through wisdom, politeness or oversight. Whatever the reason, this is exactly where we shall go.

**Structure**

The study will begin with the Markan Jesus’ call of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Levi to follow Him. Once we have considered the motivation presented in these pericopes, we shall explore Jesus’ purpose for using parables. Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah implies it is to condemn (Isa 4:12), which is pertinent to our study of following and motivation. Chapter three of our study will consider Mk 9:33-50 which includes Mark’s only mention of rewards (μισθός). This section also contains Mark’s only references to what is translated “hell” (γέεννα with no

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28 Ibid., p136.
use of "ᾍδης). We will consider punishment as motivation and look for any other motivation that may be presented.

Treasure in Heaven will be explored in chapter four with the question of the rich man. We will consider rewards and look for the motivation Jesus presents to the man to follow. Jesus’ passion predictions will be considered together in chapter five as the three predictions function together. In each case Jesus makes a prediction, the disciples completely miss the point, and Jesus looks to correct their error through teaching. This section is important to our question of a motivation to follow with, among other teachings, the idea of taking up one’s cross. Chapter six considers the temple imagery in the Gospel of Mark, before finishing with the theme of the cross in chapter seven. It appears to be Mark’s intention that it is only through the passion, in which the temple image is prominent, that we can know and understand who Jesus is.\(^\text{30}\) As such, no study would be complete without considering both these themes.

Throughout this study the same themes continue to be seen. God is breaking into this world and revealing Himself through Jesus. Jesus demonstrates his love for us by being willing to die in our place, despite knowing in advance that He will suffer and die. Jesus time and again shows his character and invites a relationship with Him. He continues to show us what is right and valuable, at times even showing the consequences of the life that many choose. In the end, though, it is about a revelation of his character followed by an invitation to follow. If we want Jesus, we can have Him. If we don’t, Jesus won’t impose. Mark holds up Jesus Himself as the reader’s motivation, leaving them to decide for themselves if He is enough for them.

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When we consider the motivation to follow Jesus presented in Mark, an intuitive place to begin are the call stories of Jesus’ disciples. In Mark, these are Simon and Andrew (1:16-18), James and John (1:19-20), and Levi (2:13-14). When considering these call stories from a perspective of motivation we set ourselves a modest task, as “the Markan call stories are peculiar in the lack of motivation provided.” Yet these are our examples of a positive response to Jesus’ person and ministry and are therefore our starting point. In examining these call stories we shall consider other call stories that could have influenced Mark’s account. We shall consider both historic and contemporary call stories from Greek and Hebrew cultures that may have had a bearing on the understanding of either the disciples or the Markan audience. We shall then examine the Markan call stories and the peculiarities contained in them to determine what motivation is presented. To conclude we shall consider if reward or punishment features in the presented motivation.

Call stories with potential influence on the Markan call stories

When we consider call stories that may have influenced the Markan account we intuitively turn to the Old Testament tradition and to contemporary Jewish culture. It is here, with the influences that shaped Jesus and his disciples, that we shall begin. We shall then consider the influence of Greek philosophy on the Markan call stories. It is suggested that many of the pericopes within Mark are close to the literary form of a “Chreia” (χρεία), including the call stories. The use of this Greek literary form suggests a strong Greek influence over the writing, and according to Droge, also over the themes. As a result we shall also consider the potential influence of Greek philosophy that may have shaped the way the author represented the narrative. Each potential influence will be investigated and their suitability in describing a paradigm for the Markan call stories will be considered.

33 Ibid., p249.
Call stories within the Old Testament

The most prominently referenced call story from the Old Testament is that of Elisha by Elijah in 1 Kings 19:19-21. In this story Elijah approaches Elisha, throws his cloak over him in a commissioning gesture (v19), and Elisha follows him as his servant (v21). Josephus’ account is a little more romantic, adding additional details to the Biblical account. Elisha prophesies immediately upon having Elijah’s cloak cast on him (Antiquities 8:353), something not seen in scripture until the departure of Elijah recorded in 2 Kings 2:9-15. Josephus also describes Elisha as Elijah’s disciple, not just his servant. Droge points out a notable difference between the call of Elisha and that of Jesus’ disciples, that of Elisha’s “condition” to be allowed to farewell his parents (1 Kg 19:20). While not addressed in Mark, Luke records similar requests which meet with a scathing response from Jesus (Luke 9:57-62). Josephus interprets the request positively noting “Elijah gave him leave to do so” (Antiquities 8:354). This gives grounds to consider that the request to farewell his parents may have been interpreted positively in Jesus’ day. Hengel notes an essential difference when compared with the call of Jesus’ disciples, as in all Old Testament call-narratives it is God who ultimately called the person, not Elijah or other men of God. Best compares the stories of Elisha’s call with Jesus’ call of disciples and notes five essential differences, with the only similarities being the “general features which would appear naturally in any call of disciples.” Thus, the similarities are insufficient between the call of Elisha and Jesus’ call of his disciples to consider this a key shaping influence for the Markan call stories.

The call story of Elisha most likely influenced the call stories of the apocalyptic prophets and Zealot leaders, as Elijah was idealised by this group with his zeal for God’s honour, the power of fire and his ability to use the sword. These call stories are another cultural influence that has been suggested as shaping Jesus’ call of His disciples. These prophets and leaders are

35 Droge, “Call,” p250.
37 Ibid., p17.
38 These differences are: (i) the brevity of Mark compared to the 3 Kgdms 19:19-21 account, (ii) no parallel to Jesus looking at those He calls, (iii) a less specific description of the caller, (iv) the symbolic act of Elijah as opposed to the call of Jesus, and (v) the three arguments for the similarity (situational data, challenge to follow, and obedience) are the general features of any call. See Best, Ernest, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the gospel of Mark*, (Sheffield, GB: JSOT Press, 1981), p168.
known for their proclamation of doctrine and the “rule of God,” the strong theme of “following after” and their demand for faith. It is also interesting that the most successful Zealot leaders were not only charismatic but described as “teachers.” All of these groups shared a zeal for the law which is a major deviation from the Markan account of Jesus, with his claim of superiority to Moses and the law (cf. Mk 10:3-5). This makes the role of apocalyptic prophet and Zealot leader a paradigm that could not have had a primary shaping influence on the Markan call stories.

A last Jewish paradigm is that of rabbi, a title attributed to Jesus four times in Mark (9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45) as well as in Matthew and John. Hengel argues that Jesus was not addressed as rabbi in the later sense of rabbi, but rather the earlier use of the word. This was less a specific role or office and more in line with our use of “sir.” After much discussion he concludes that “Jesus stood outside any discoverable uniform teaching tradition of Judaism,” with one of the most significant differences being a deliberate desire to break down the divide between the scribal theologian and the “ignorant” masses. Jesus was not just a special sort of Pharisee which the title of rabbi would require in its commonly understood sense; rather He is diametrically different in principle.

Given that Jesus was not a rabbi in the commonly understood sense, one could still argue that Jesus followed the developing rabbinic paradigm or method of calling disciples and of teaching. If this was the case, rabbinical practice could still have influenced the Markan account of the call stories. However, there are no rabbinical stories of “calling” and “following after” that are analogous to that of Mark. This is most likely because entry to a rabbinical school was at the initiative of the pupil who sought out and attempted to convince a

40 Ibid., p21.
41 Ibid., p22-23.
43 Hengel, Charismatic, p24.
44 The commonly understood idea of Rabbi is a post 70AD title and the ramifications of this system certainly did not apply to Jesus. This is Hengel’s argument.
45 Hengel Charismatic, p42-42.
46 Ibid., p49-50.
48 Ibid., p50.
49 Ibid., p50.
rabbis to accept him.\(^{50}\) To be accepted was not to “follow after” but rather to “learn Torah,” with the New Testament equivalent (μανθάνω) only being found once in the Synoptics in an entirely different context (Mk 13:28). “Serving” the rabbi was the pupil’s duty, but it was a role Jesus clearly rejects with regard to his disciples (cf Mk 10:43-44). To “follow after” is frequently and concretely used to describe a pupil walking behind the teacher as a form of subordination but never in a more profound sense as Jesus uses it.\(^{51}\) While we could continue, clearly the title of rabbi attributed to Jesus is not something that defined, or can be used to interpret, Jesus’ actions or calls in the Gospel of Mark.

While there were a number of different traditions from the Old Testament and Jewish culture at the time of Jesus, none of these are satisfactory paradigms to describe Jesus’ call of his disciples, his teaching or actions. There are similarities which one would expect given the impact of Torah and other cultural influences within which they lived. However, none of these influences can be said to have a defining impact on the call stories as understood by the Markan author or audience.

*Philosophical and Wisdom Writings*

In examining the literary structure of the call stories in Mark, Droge notes the similarity to the Greek biographical tradition, specifically short maxim-like sayings describing an individual’s character called a “Chreia” (χρεία).\(^{52}\) He argues that the gospel call stories not only take on the standard form of the Chreia but also reflect the content of contemporary Greek Chreia.\(^{53}\)

To come to this conclusion Droge compares the following:

> As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mk 1:16-18)

\(^{50}\) Droge, “Call,” p250.  
\(^{51}\) Hengel, *Charismatic*, p52.  
\(^{52}\) Droge, “Call,” p250.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid., p251.
The story goes that Socrates met him [Xenophon] in a narrow passage, and that he stretched out his stick to bar the way, while he inquired where every kind of food was sold. Upon receiving a reply, he put another question, “And where do men become good and honourable?” Xenophon was fairly puzzled; “Then follow me,” said Socrates, “and learn.” From that time onward he was a pupil of Socrates. (Diogenes Laertius 2.48)\textsuperscript{54}

He [Zeno] went up into Athens and sat down in a bookseller’s shop, being then a man of thirty. As he went on reading the second book of Xenophon’s Memorabilia, he was so pleased that he inquired where men like Socrates were to be found. Crates passed by in the nick of time, so the bookseller pointed to him and said, “Follow yonder man.” From that day he became Crates’s pupil. (Diogenes Laertius 7.2-3)\textsuperscript{55}

In comparing the call stories of Jesus (Mk 1:16-18) with the call of Xenophon by Socrates and of Zeno by Crates, he observes they all: (1) take the form of a chreia, (2) report a sudden call from an engagement in ordinary life, (3) initiate an immediate response of “following,” and (4) have a common purpose to become something that they are currently not (ie, fishers of men, good and honourable, like Socrates).\textsuperscript{56} Thus, Droge suggests, some early Christian writers took on a Hellenistic form, and also the content, for portraying the way an ideal sage gathers disciples.\textsuperscript{57} They then applied it to Jesus.

The question that needs to be asked is whether the Christian writer took on the linguistic form to express most effectively in Greek culture an actual event, or if they took on both form and content separate from the reality of Jesus. In the case of Zeno seen above, Zeno is not even called by Crates, but rather enquires where to find “men like Socrates” and is told to follow Crates as he walks past. While there are the four common stylistic elements of a call story as identified above, they can hardly apply to the Markan call stories in terms of content. As Droge states, “one cannot decide to become a follower of Jesus; the initiative rests solely with

\textsuperscript{54} http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collections (17 Feb. 15).
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. (17 Feb. 15).
\textsuperscript{56} Droge, “Call,” p251.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p251.
This makes the story of Zeno’s “call” incompatible with those of Mark, despite linguistic similarities.

Xenophon on the other hand is called by Socrates. Shiner suggests his call functions as a protreptic, an exhortation to follow the philosophical life. While the argument is left unspoken, Socrates compares the value of securing physical sustenance to the greater value of becoming good and honourable, and implores him to follow and learn. In this way the story does not reflect the Markan call stories as Jesus’ calls do not involve a motivation, and even less, a “cleverly compressed protreptic argument.” This chreia seemed to gain currency because of the characterisation of the teacher-hero showing Socrates’ “brashness, his wit, his ability to point out people’s ignorance or basic moral understanding, and his dedication to the pursuit of the good and honourable.” Again, this is divergent from Jesus who didn’t seek praise from people, but rather honoured God in the most modest of lives. Thus, while again we can see common elements between the call of Jesus’ disciples and that of Xenophon by Socrates, the similarities are those elements essential to the act of calling, while the differences are fundamental to the character of those calling. We may conclude that while the art form of the chreia may have been used to communicate the actions of Jesus, the purpose and content are quite original.

Iamblichus’ Life of Pythagoras or Pythagoric Life also gives some call stories worth mentioning. Pythagoras has only two call stories attributed to him. One sees Pythagoras in Samos where none would listen, so he pays a poor ragged little boy three oboli for each lesson he masters, more than he could make working hard in the hot sun all day. The boy is soon entirely captivated by the beauty of his studies, so Pythagoras pretends to be a poor man who can no longer pay the boy to learn. However, the boy is so keen to learn and has saved enough that he chooses to pay Pythagoras for his future lessons and becomes a follower of Pythagoras, even...
leaving his country. In the other story Abaris, a priest of Apollo sees Pythagoras and immediately knows he is Apollo in human form, and honours him as his god. Pythagoras takes him and teaches him esoteric mathematical knowledge. Obviously these call stories, while fitting Droge’s criteria, are fundamentally different from that of the Gospel of Mark. The first story provides an incentive to learn, as the boy will make more money with much easier work. While following is chosen in its own right willingly after the boy sees the value of following, Jesus calls for an immediate commitment without the foretaste. The second is also fundamentally different, as in Mark we often hear the question asked “Who is this?” of Jesus, even by the disciples (4:41). They do not immediately recognise Jesus as Messiah, even less, the Son of God. Thus, while the style of a cheria is followed, the content is again quite unique.

Even for the philosophers, however, these call stories are unusual with their disciples generally coming from one of two commonly quoted scenarios. The first is to simply “captivate” the occupants of a city as occurred on Pythagoras’ arrival in Italy, where he is said to have derived 2,000 disciples from a single lecture, then chose to form a great school instead of returning home. The second is seen in the stories of Damis, Demetrius, Menippus, Nilus, Thespeson, Timasion and Tielesinus. In all cases, these men already had a desire for the philosophical life and either admired and pursued Apollonius, or were philosophers who recognised Apollonius as having superior knowledge to themselves or their current teachers. Unlike Jesus, the majority of the philosophers’ followers sought out the philosopher they desired to follow. Jesus, on the other hand, calls. While similarities can be argued in a limited number of cases, the call stories of the Greek philosophical biographies are limited to similarity of literary style while the content is quite unique to Jesus.

65 Ibid., Ch XIX, p117.
66 Ibid., Ch VI, p55.
67 Shiner, Follow, p118-119.
The Markan call stories

As we examine the call stories in Mark we must first consider their position in the overall narrative. Mark begins by announcing “the good news of Jesus the Messiah, Son of God” (v1). Jesus is placed within the history of the prophets of Israel as their fulfilment (v2-3), and of the contemporary prophet, John the Baptist, who testifies of One soon to come (v4-8). At Jesus’ baptism He is identified by God as his beloved Son (v11), is One who overcomes Satan, and has angels at his disposal (v13). Mark’s audience are also personally linked into the story as those “baptised with the Holy Spirit,” the role attributed to Jesus (v8). No matter what responses the characters in Mark’s narrative may have to Jesus’ question “who do you say I am?” the reader can have no question as the prologue has so explicitly declared his identity with the highest authority.

There are numerous Old Testament echoes used in the prologue by Mark to give meaning and authority. Mark 1:10 at Jesus’ baptism has echoes of the cry for mercy in Isa 63:11-64:1:

Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock?
Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit,…
O that you would tear open the heavens and come down! (Isa 63:11 - 64:1 NRSV)

There is the common imagery of coming up from the water, the endowment of the Holy Spirit, the ripping of the heavens and the divine presence. This is part of the proto-apocalyptic section of Isaiah where the prophet prays for God to tear open the barrier between heaven and earth and pour out his Spirit to create a new heaven and earth. Mark is claiming this apocalyptic work has begun with his irreversible cosmic imagery of the heavens torn

68 There is debate over the title “Son of God” in this text. Some argue it is a later addition based on the unlikelihood of it being omitted by a scribe and the greater probability of it being added to enrich a Christologically lacking title. It is also omitted in some of the Patristic citations, most notably Origen, yet others like Irenaeus quote it selectively. Having said that, it is in all the uncial except Θ and the first hand of K but added by the original corrector. The omission can be put down to reasonable mechanical error, and given the strong theme of Jesus as God’s Son elsewhere in the gospel (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; and climatically in 15:39) appears to be a reasonable opening for the author. I am comfortable that there is sufficient reason for it to be considered consistent with the author’s intent and likely original. That will be the perspective from which this study considers the title “Son of God” in 1:1. See France, R. T., The Gospel of Mark (NIGTC; Eerdmans, 2002), p49.
69 France, Mark, p79.
(σχίζω), over Matthew and Luke’s milder “opened” (Matt 3:16; Luke 3:21-22). Marcus concludes this “new creation” is focused in Jesus, who is now singled out as God’s son.”

The language of God’s son (1:11) has echoes in Ps 2:7, a royal psalm celebrating the establishment of a new king who will triumph through the power of Yahweh. As Ps 2 was interpreted messianically in early Judaism, Mark is giving divine testimony to his assertion in 1:1 that Jesus is Christ, Son of God. There are also echoes of Isa 42:1 seen in the proclamation of God’s delight in Jesus, and the image of his Spirit resting on Jesus. This too has eschatological connotations with the Lord’s righteous One being chosen for an eschatological task. Mark is portraying Jesus as God’s Son, Messiah, the answer from God to the longing of his people over the centuries, and the in-breaking of God into our world to begin his eschatological work.

It is now, with Jesus’ credentials thoroughly established, that the Markan Jesus enters the human sphere of life to begin ministry. To this point Jesus is introduced through prophecy, is acknowledged by God and confronts evil and temptation. Now, through the proclamation of the kingdom, the narrative of Jesus enters common, everyday human experience. It is here that we have the first narrated interchange between Jesus and humans, the call of his first disciples. By starting with these calls, Mark emphasises their importance in representing the ideal human reaction to Jesus. Of note is the call of Levi which occurs in the next chapter. The first calls are in the context of Jesus’ identity and eschatological significance as proclaimed by Mark, John the Baptist, and God Himself. The call of Levi is in the context of Levi’s sin, and of Jesus’ authority to forgive and heal sin, and to restore any person. In this sense it serves to universalise the call to all people regardless of their current moral position. This is especially important given that Simon, Andrew, James and John were not simple, illiterate, lower class fishing hands but the owners and managers in a very profitable industry.

71 Ibid., p165.
72 France, Mark, p80.
73 Marcus, Mark 1-8, p166.
74 France, Mark, p80-81.
75 Marcus, Mark 1-8, p166.
76 Shiner, Follow, p118-171.
77 Ibid., p194.
owning boats and employing hired workers. It is Levi’s call that makes a call by Jesus a possibility for all.

The three calls in 1:16-20 and 2:13-14 are close in proximity and repeat a common structure and wording, suggesting these are typical of Jesus’ call and the disciple’s response. Shiner identifies seven parts:

1. a participle indicating Jesus’ motion to the location of the call,
2. the verb εἶδεν “He saw” and the name of the prospective disciple or disciples,
3. a participle describing the person engaged in their occupation,
4. a verb of address,
5. a quotation of the words of calling (missing in the second call),
6. a participle indicating the disciple leaving their earlier situation,
7. a statement that they followed Jesus.

Mark uses motion (as in point 1 above) to fracture the narrative and introduce each new pericope almost without fail. This serves to focus the attention of the reader on the rhetoric and on Jesus who is the link that ties each pericope together. The εἶδεν clause together with the constant motion indicates these are not extended exchanges; Jesus came, He saw, He called.

Jesus calls the prospective disciples to be “fishers of people.” Best notes that the Old Testament use of this metaphor is negative (Jer 16:16; Ezek 29:4; Amos 4:2; Hab 1:14-17), a catching for judgement and punishment rather than for salvation. While Jesus could be implying that his ministry personally and through his disciples would have implications for an eschatological judgement, it is likely that the location and vocation of the potential disciple played a primary role in the choice of metaphor. Marcus concludes that this is a multivalent image that likely includes future mission, teaching, and exorcisms.

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79 Shiner, *Follow*, p118-172.
80 Ibid., p118-174.
81 Ibid., p174.
82 Best, *Following*, p170.
The call of James and John repeats the pattern but with significant details added. Again Jesus “called them” and they immediately obey (v20). There is an escalation here as James and John not only leave their property and occupation but their father as well, reminding Mark’s audience that all disciples will face loss and need uncompromising dedication; they are not alone.\footnote{Ibid., p185.}

Levi’s call omits the vocational metaphor of fishing, but again follows the pattern of call including immediate obedience (2:14). There is again an escalation as Levi leaves not only occupation, but identity behind. Being a tax collector defined and ostracised him, something he was willing to do for money. He was called to leave his occupation and more importantly, his greed (which was powerful enough for him to betray his people) for a life of following Jesus.

\textit{Peculiarities of the Markan Call Stories.}

France points out “Mark gives no explanation for the ready response of these men to a total stranger.”\footnote{France, Mark, p97.} Typically, call stories are about elevating the power or superiority of the teacher, or to make the life of wisdom appealing and desirable.\footnote{Shiner, Follow, p118-183.} The absence of motivation provided for the calls is quite unique.\footnote{Ibid., p183.} Even within scripture Luke records miracles, preaching and the general acceptance of the masses before venturing to include a call story.\footnote{Ibid., p184.} The Fourth Gospel lacks a call story as such, and positions the commitment to follow (Jn 1:35-51) after a positive testimony by John the Baptist (Jn 1:29-34). Matthew follows Mark and leaves the calls unmotivated (Matt 4:18-22), but immediately goes on to outline preaching, healings and miracles along with Jesus’ fame spreading throughout Israel and Syria and the general acceptance by the masses (Matt 4:23-25). This tends to link with the call stories as if they are a part of that activity. For Mark however, these stories stand alone with no clear sense of “why?”
For Shiner, the main thrust of the prologue (1:1) is to establish Jesus as the beloved Son of God; the Son of God overcomes the temptation of satan (v13), the Son of God proclaims the kingdom (v14-15), and the Son of God calls disciples. Mark’s introduction is all about Jesus as God’s Son. In contrast, to try to define Jesus’ authority, Hengel examines the claims and words of Jesus. He concludes Jesus most certainly was not a teacher in the sense of the later rabbinical experts of the law and He was very much more than a prophet. As opposed to those who expounded the law and its absolute authority, Jesus for the first time in Judaism looked behind the law towards the original will of God. Hengel concludes that to challenge any part of the law was to challenge the entire law, thus Jesus’ message shattered the very framework of Judaism. The authority of Jesus can therefore be described as nothing less than “Messianic authority” to use Hengel’s term, his authority is none less than that of the Son of God to use Shiner’s. Yet both only see part of the picture Mark presents. For Mark, Jesus is the fulfilment of scripture as seen in the echoes and references throughout the prologue. Jesus is both Messiah and God’s Son, the eschatological in-breaking of God through the establishment of his kingdom and rule with the desire to draw to God all nations (Isa 42:1).

Given the authority of Jesus, the call stories in Mark can be seen differently. Just as God Himself called prophets in the Old Testament to leave home, work and family (cf Amos 7:15), so too Jesus calls people to Himself. We could therefore compare the call stories of the disciples to that of Amos (Amos 7:15) or Moses (Ex 3) or Gideon (Jud 6:7-23) or Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) or any other of the prophets, as in all cases it is God who is calling. As Hengel notes, “may we not suppose that Jesus called his disciples in an analogous way to participate in his mission and authority, in the eschatological event which, taking its beginning in Him, was moving powerfully towards the complete rule of God?” Attention must also be draw to Mark 1:8, John’s testimony that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit. When God calls and

89 Ibid., p184.
90 Hengel, Charismatic, p69.
91 Ibid., p70.
92 Ibid., p71.
93 Ibid., p71.
94 Shiner, Follow, p184.
95 Ibid., p71.
96 For the examples above, Moses received some explanation of God’s purpose (Ex 3), but Gideon was simply sent (Jud 6:7-23), as was Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and Amos (Amos 7:15). This is very much the trend. The call was based on the authority of God alone, the obedience based on their faith in God.
97 Ibid., p73.
people accept, they are filled with the Spirit (cf. Ex 35:31; Deut 34:9; Mic 3:8). The God of
the Old Testament called without explanation or motivation, and filled his servants with the
Spirit, something Jesus has also promised to do (1:8). This makes the acceptance of Jesus
by the disciples as possible, and as miraculous, as that of Amos or Moses or Gideon or
anyone else God called. As a result, the absence of stated motivation elevates the authority of
Jesus to that of God Himself.

There is also literary value in a lack of stated motivation. As a Christian audience heard or
read Mark’s account, the lack of presented motivation would have an additional benefit given
their self-identification as followers of Jesus. They too could readily identify with the call
story and read themselves into the narrative, and the work and mission of Jesus. The
succinct narration emphasising setting, call and positive response are common elements to all
who have positively responded to the call of Jesus. This has the effect of universalising the
motivation for the audience, even though it is not clearly articulated in the narrative. At the
very outset, the reader is drawn in to reaffirm their own commitment to follow Jesus, and in
this way Mark prevents a disinterested hearing of the message.

The call stories of Mark are firmly built on the foundation established in the prologue that
Jesus is the Son of God breaking into human history, overcoming evil, proclaiming the
Kingdom and the good news of salvation, and acting with the authority of God Himself. The
disciples, as the first humans to interact with Jesus, demonstrate the only way to respond
when the Son of God calls. As Droge points out, one cannot decide to follow, it is for Jesus
to invite. Of great comfort is the pattern that Shiner identifies in Jesus’ calls. Jesus is the
One coming for people. Jesus sees each individual. People are busy and distracted by
whatever it is they do, yet Jesus addresses them personally and calls the individual to follow.
It is then up to each person whether they leave what they are doing and follow. The
motivation for the disciples to follow was that God cared enough to break into their world for
them personally.

98 e.g. Moses (Ex 3), Gideon (Jud 6:7-23), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and Amos (Amos 7:15).
99 Shiner, Follow, p118-185.
100 Ibid., p186.
101 Ibid, p186.
102 Droge, “Call,” p256.
Reward, punishment and motivation.

As we have considered the call stories as recorded by Mark it is clear that there is no promise of reward nor is there any threat of punishment. While it could be possible to read these into the stories in terms of ultimate consequence, this is not presented by Mark. What Mark presents is God breaking into human history, defeating satan in a preliminary skirmish, and coming after humans individually. There is a motivation presented, God’s Son has broken into our time and space in an eschatological event to restore creation and establish his kingdom, into which each individual is called. It is the personal nature of God’s salvation in Jesus that makes the difference, the fact that each individual is seen, known and called personally. What motivation does the text give for following Jesus? Mark discreetly holds up the power and authority of Jesus who cares enough to see the individual and call them by name, then invites a response that is as positive as was those of Jesus’ disciples.
Chapter 2. Seeing but Not Perceiving (Mk 4:11-12)

As we consider the motivation the Markan Jesus intended for his followers, we must consider how Jesus taught and why, especially his use of parables. This is directly addressed by Jesus in Mark 4. When questioned about the constant use of parables, Jesus tells his disciples,

To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that

‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’ (4:11-12 NRSV)

This passage is described as one of the most difficult in the New Testament, firstly to understand with certainty and secondly to accept. However, if it defines Jesus’ teaching it also defines the expected outcome of that teaching. What the Markan Jesus is trying to achieve will have a fundamental impact on one’s motivation to follow. A consideration of this passage should result in greater insight into the motivation the Markan Jesus presents to us to follow Him.

We shall begin by introducing the mystery (μυστήριον, translated “secret” above) of the kingdom and the meaning of parable (παραβολή). We shall then consider the two groups visible in the verses, “you” and “those outside,” who for simplicity will be described as “insiders” and “outsiders.” Of each group we will endeavour to determine who they are, and the purpose for or outcome of teaching this way. We will then consider whether we see a motivation of reward or punishment in this section, or any other insights into Jesus’ intended motivation for us to follow.

The Mystery

A mystery to the English reader is something that confounds. This sets an initial tone and bias in the mind of the reader as we assume there is a need for unusual cleverness to unravel

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it, if that is even possible. The better understanding of μυστήριον (mystery), as translated above, is “secret.” μυστήριον primarily related to a secret, a secret teaching or a secret rite of religious or political groups in the Greco-Roman world; secret due to their reluctance to divulge them. The more likely background for the Christian use is found in the Aramaic word rāz from Dan 2:18-19, 27-30, 47 translated in the LXX as μυστήριον.

Daniel is clear that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream has been revealed by God so that it may be known (Dan 2:28). Likewise, the kingdom of God (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ) is something so paradoxical to human thought that it takes nothing less than divine insight to understand.

Not only is μυστήριον used in the gospels, Paul also relates this sense of secret knowledge which, unlike the mystery religions of his day, the Christians were very keen to share. While it was a divine revelation in that no human mind could devise or discover it, it was now known and intended to be shared. The mystery was the disciples knowing that they lived at the collision of the ages, enabling them to know and endure the eschatological tribulations, according to Marcus. This knowledge wasn’t just to comfort them, but as in Jewish apocalyptic writings (e.g. Wisdom 2:11, 22; 3:3), it was literally to save their lives (cf. 13:13b). Thus the mystery is not just something to know, but to participate in.

The Parable

A parable (παραβολή) is simply a “narrative or saying of various length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile.” For Jesus to speak in parables then is not for Jesus to be obtuse or unhelpful, but rather to give illustrations to simplify the complex

104 France, Mark, p196.
106 France, Mark, p196.
107 Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 1551; Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Tim 3:9; 16.
108 France, Mark, p196.
111 BDAG., p759.
things of God. As France notes, as long as these illustrations are helpful there is no need to see a threatening or negative tone in Jesus’ insistence on teaching everything to outsiders in parables.\(^\text{112}\) Obviously, given Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom, everything would be done to encourage the outsider to become an insider. However, given the contrast between outsiders and insiders and the inclusion of the ominous v12, the purpose and value of these parables must be questioned.

In considering this passage Marcus notes the difficulty of “everything is in parables” (τὰ πάντα γίνεται ἐν παραβολαῖς). Clearly not everything is in the literary form of a parable, so either “everything” must be limited or “parable” must be broadened. He suggests that parable should be broadened to include an event where there is an “element of the marvellous or obscure,” bringing it more in line with the LXX (Deut 28:37) and New Testament (Heb 9:9; 11:19), and the broader Hebrew meaning of mashal.\(^\text{113}\) For example, the death and resurrection of Jesus, like his parables, brought a clearer perception and understanding to some, but blindness and deafness to others. Just like the word of Yahweh in the Old Testament, Jesus’ words are filled with power (δύναμις) which brings life to some but destruction to others.\(^\text{114}\) The parable had the purpose of bringing a divine revelation through literary means, but also through actions. Whether by word or action, some understood and found life, and others did not.

“Insiders” and “Outsiders”

Mark’s writing is very intentional with a strong theme of inclusion and exclusion.\(^\text{115}\) In 4:11 there is the group described as you (σοῦ) and also those outside (ἐκείνως τοῖς ἑξὼ). As noted above, these will be described as those “inside” and those “outside.” We shall begin with the insiders. Those to whom the “you” is addressed are described in verse 4:10 as “those around Him [Jesus] with the twelve.” There is little surprise there are more than just the Twelve included in this status, as Jesus has just called the Twelve out of a larger group of followers for a specific purpose (3:13-15). Again in 3:31 we see Jesus with a larger group. Of specific

\(^{\text{112}}\) France, Mark, p198.  
\(^{\text{113}}\) Marcus, Mystery, p109-110.  
\(^{\text{114}}\) Ibid., p119.  
\(^{\text{115}}\) Guelich, Mark, p214.
interest here is the description of those “around Him” (περὶ αὐτῶν); a crowd in 3:32, and “those” plus the Twelve in 4:10. “Those around” are contrasted with those standing outside, including Jesus’ biological family (3:31). Again, it is not only the Twelve who are insiders, but those of the crowd who are drawn by Jesus’ teaching and who direct their attention to the word and will of God (3:35).116 Between these two sections is the parable of the sower, and by enquiring further as to the meaning (4:10), the insiders have shown that they are in fact the good soil.117

The “outsiders,” on the other hand, are those excluded from the mystery of the kingdom and who correlate to one or other of the bad soils. In 4:10 Jesus has secluded Himself with his disciples, so the natural assumption would be the outsiders are those of the crowd just left behind. They are the ones Jesus’ teaching has not impacted to the point of inquiry as it has done with those regarded as the insiders. We have just seen Jesus reveal that his own family can be outsiders (for a time anyway), and the link with 3:21-22 further reinforces this idea by identifying them with his opponents the scribes, since both groups thought Him insane.118 They are the ones who hear but fail to understand. These are described both as bad soil (4:15-19) and those outside (4:11), clarifying what it means to be an outsider. It would certainly cover the crowd who heard without substantial impact, Jesus’ family, and those more antagonistic to Him, including the Scribes and the Pharisees of 2:23-3:6.

The effect of the Parables

As we begin to consider the effect of parables it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the parable of the sower. Obviously the sower has every intention and purpose of producing a good crop. The variable that dictates the crop is not the intention of the sower or even his technique of sowing, but rather the condition of the soil. As France points out, “the focus throughout is not on the aim of the teacher so much as the receptivity of the hearers.”119 As demonstrated in Table 2:1 (below), the difference is not in hearing a parable, but in not inquiring as to the meaning. Neither group understood the parable of the sower, yet only

116 Marcus, Mystery, p89-90.
117 Ibid., p90.
118 Ibid., p94.
119 France, Mark, p198.
some asked and sought to understand. This does not diminish the apocalyptic function of parables as they are essential in the revelatory process of God. The parables are a divine gift, as indicated by the divine passive of “has been given” (διδωμι), and because the disciples have been with Jesus this divine gift will continue through their teaching.\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
& \textbf{Insiders} & \textbf{Outsiders} \\
\hline
3:23-27 & & Jesus’ enemies seem to understand importance of parables. \\
4:1-2 & \textit{Jesus teaches the crowd in parables.} & \textbf{Outsiders} \\
4:10 & In private, “those about Him with the Twelve” ask Jesus about the parable. & \\
4:11-12 & Same group as above given the mystery of the kingdom of God [in parables]. & To those outside all things are in parables so that they may look but not see, hear but not understand, lest they turn and be forgiven. \\
4:13 & Same group rebuked for not understanding Parable of Sower. & \\
4:14-20 & Same group given explanation of Parable of Sower. & \\
4:33-34 & In private, Jesus’ own disciples given explanation of all things. & Those who are not Jesus’ own disciples are taught solely in parables, “as they were able to hear.” \\
7:14-15 & \textbf{Crowd exhausted, “Hear me all of you and understand,” and given a “parable.”} & \\
7:17 & In private, Jesus’ disciples ask Him the parable. & \\
7:18a & Disciples rebuked for not understanding the parable. & \\
7:18b-23 & Disciples given explanation of the parable. & \\
12:1-12 & Jesus’ enemies understand import of parable; this increases their hostility. & \\
13:28 & In private, four disciples exhorted to “learn the parable” from the fig tree. & \\
13:29 & Parable explained? & \\
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\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{120} Marcus, \textit{Mystery}, p98.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p97-98.
It is important to note at this time the chastising the disciples semi-regularly receive for not understanding. There are grounds to question the “insider” status of the disciples at times, for example after 8:17-21. But it must be remembered that without the passion Jesus cannot be properly understood. Thus the disciples are caught in a position of receiving divine revelation, but not yet being fully able to understand. It is only after the passion with the guidance of the Spirit that the disciples can truly perceive and understand. The willingness to ask questions by the disciples is positive, but it is also a time for them to be encouraged to gain a deeper understanding of Jesus and the things of God. So for the insider, the parable is a divine gift from God given to reveal his kingdom and bring life.

For those outside, instead of revelation, parables make them blind, deaf and hard-hearted (4:11-2). One could object that Jesus’ enemies did understand his parables (3:23-7. 12:1-12), however it is doubtful Mark would consider their superficial interpretation as “understanding.” On the contrary, they look (βλέπω) but fail to really see (εἶδον), hear (ἀκούω) but don’t really understand (συνίημι). If we consider the words Mark has used, βλέπω is to look, see, to take in a sight, and to pay close attention. The emphasis is very much visual. εἶδον on the other hand is not just to see with the eye but to feel, to take special note, or to experience. There is a deeper level of perception which Jesus’ enemies never achieve. I would suggest they are so sure they already know what matters that they miss the revelation of the God they claim to serve. Likewise, ἀκούω emphasises the ear; hearing, reception of news, paying careful attention by listening or heeding, or to hear and understand a message. συνίημι on the other hand means “to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one’s thinking or practice, to understand or comprehend.” Again, Jesus’ opponents hear and respond, but they fail to hear what Jesus is actually saying and to understand both who He was and his purpose in bringing the kingdom of God. They refuse to have their thinking or practice challenged, but stick to what they value and hence miss the revelation of God.

122 Carroll, J. and Green, J., Death, p29.
123 Marcus, Mystery, p102.
124 Ibid., p103.
125 BDAG., p179.
126 BDAG., p279-280.
127 BDAG., p38.
128 BDAG., p972.
The purpose of parables, as Mark 4:12 appears to state, is to blind and deafen to destruction those “outside.” Much debate has occurred over this phrase, and particularly around ἵνα which denotes the purpose or goal. Some suggestions are that ἵνα is a quotation formula or a mistranslation from the Aramaic dē- which should have been “who” rather than “in order that.” Another is to suggest it reflects the result rather than the purpose, but Mark never uses it this way in any of his sixty uses. Lastly, there is a suggestion of Semitic thought which tends to suppress secondary causes, effectively making human decisions attributed to the overriding providence of God. Each suggestion reflects a discomfort with God intentionally hardening people to destruction. When we consider that Jesus’ enemies did understand to a point, but were denied the explanation that allowed the disciples to more fully understand, it could be argued that there certainly is a purpose of hardening to destruction for those outside.

In his thesis, Marcus addresses this from two angles. First, those outsiders are already hardened, illustrated by their limited understanding which made them even more hostile to Jesus (3:23-27; 12:1-12). Secondly, outsiders were further hardened by being deprived of the explanations. Thus Mark includes two different hardenings, initially through a divine-willed negative reaction and further through exclusion from the interpretation. In concluding, Marcus suggests Mark’s point is that parables are active speech that, to outsiders, are effective weapons of blinding in the apocalyptic war.

When we look at both France’s and Marcus’ theories, there is the notable oversight of the desire by those insiders to know and understand. They asked questions because they wanted to know and understand. Already Jesus’ enemies had rejected Him for eating with sinners (1:16), devaluing Jewish traditions (2:18), and breaking the Law of Moses (2:24). By verse 3:2 they were actively looking to accuse Jesus and plotting to kill Jesus (3:6). The progression continues as they consider Him insane (3:21) and demon possessed (3:22). There is already a hardness that prevents them from being willing to see or hear, so they do not care

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129 BDAG., p476.
130 France, Mark, p199.
131 Ibid., p199.
132 Ibid., p199.
133 Ibid., p199.
135 Ibid., p108.
to ask. While none would wish harm on anyone, this is a group actively opposing the redemptive work of God in their own lives, and in many cases, in the lives of others. We can understand why Mark suggests God is right to oppose them. The bigger question is the nature of the initial hardening, and whether they have an opportunity to turn around.

The nature of this initial hardness is not clearly articulated by Mark. Since the Markan Jesus persisted with speaking to those outside with parables, Jesus must have seen some value in what He was doing, much like the sower discussed above. He spoke as those outside were able to hear it (4:33) suggesting that perhaps some of what Jesus said stuck, making a difference; or at least that was his goal. The implication of Jesus speaking in parables as they could hear it (4:33) appears to be in opposition to the goal of hardening to destruction (4:12). Yet I would argue that these ideas are not contradictory. While a hardening to destruction was often the outcome, could not there have been some who were able to hear as implied by 4:33? Could not, then, their hardening be due to pride, self-sufficiency, greed for power or wealth, or any other number of ailments of fallen humanity? Could not some aspect of a parable convince them to enquire by the parable being far enough removed from their own ailment to see its teaching, while close enough to shed light on their predicament with less offence? For some it could bring life even to outsiders, where for most outside it clearly did harden even further as their sinful self was further provoked.

Disciples as outsiders? (Mark 6:52; 8:17-21)

The hope held out for those who fail to see and perceive, hear and understand is further supported by the disciples’ continued failure to do so, specifically seen in Jesus’ rebuke of 8:17-21 and also 6:52. In 8:17-21 Jesus asks a series of rhetorical questions, the most startling being “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?” (8:18a). This was how an outsider was defined (4:12), and it is now directed squarely at the disciples. Jesus’ statement which the disciples misunderstood could not be described as explicit, so the seemingly harsh rebuke for not understanding seems a little extreme. The answer appears to be in the miracle of the multiplied bread. Likewise, in 6:52 they are amazed at Jesus walking on the water because they again “fail to understand the bread” due to hardened hearts. Both these passages shed light on how to understand Jesus’ teaching style as described in 4:12. As
such we shall briefly consider 6:52 first, followed by the common themes in 8:17-21 before drawing conclusions relevant to Jesus’ style of teaching as described in 4:12.

In Mark 6:30-44 we read of Jesus multiplying bread for the five thousand. Immediately afterwards Jesus insists his disciples leave before dismissing the crowd, taking the opportunity to be alone in prayer. Later Jesus comes to the disciples walking on the water. It is of note that Jesus went out to them after seeing their difficulty. Their fearful response is understandable, and when Jesus joins them the wind died down which would be even more startling. At this point the reader would likely be amazed and enthralled at this miraculous and powerful act, yet Mark immediately directs the reader to understanding and the loaves. To quote Hooker, “The disciples have watched Jesus feed the people and should therefore not be surprised to see him walking across the water.”

Yet this is not immediately apparent to the modern reader. In Scripture, God is the only one who can “tread on waves” (Job 9:8), and it is God who made a path through the seas for Israel (Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16; 51:10). This Exodus imagery is also seen in Jesus’ ability to provide bread, revealing that One greater than Moses was here. The manna and crossing of the Red Sea are the central miracles to the Exodus story and provide the means for the disciples to understand Jesus. Like Moses, Jesus will lead his people out of captivity, but Jesus is greater than Moses. Thus the suggestion is made that Jesus did not go to the disciples to rescue them from the wind; rather, they were there to witness an epiphany. Instead, they are hard hearted, not just thick headed and faithless like Israel in the wilderness, but identified with their primary opponent, Pharaoh.

Mark 8:17-21 also features a boat on the sea and a failure of understanding about bread. Again, the key to understanding is the miracles of feeding the five thousand and the four thousand (8:19-21). There are obviously parallels to Isa 6:9, but also Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2 and Ps 115:5-6. However, Moses’ words in Deuteronomy are also significant:

136 Ibid., p169.
137 Ibid., p169.
138 Marcus, Mark 1-8, p434.
139 France, Mark, p317.
You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, ...the great testings which your eyes have seen, the signs and those great wonders. But the Lord has not given you a heart to know, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, to this day. (Deut 29:2-4 LXX)

Marcus points out the themes of an insensitive heart, blind eyes and deaf ears reflect the order of Mark 8:17-18, as well as the motifs of testing and signs (8:11-12). Again, the disciples are being identified with the Israelites in the wilderness and the slowness of their understanding. Again the Markan Jesus is reminding them that He is the One who provides, and through the context reminding them of what they should have learnt in 6:52.

In both these pericopes we see the disciples charged with being no better than the “outsiders” of 4:12. Their privileged position as “insiders” with insight into the mystery of the kingdom has escaped them. Yet Jesus asks “Do you not yet understand (συνίημι)?” συνίημι is the same word used of understanding in 4:12 and 6:52. However, Jesus, while clearly a little frustrated, is clear that this is temporary. They don’t understand and their hearts are hardened, but they will yet understand. This is Jesus’ purpose in teaching them. There is hope.

Marcus further points out an authorial purpose in 8:17-21 to create solidarity between the reader and the disciples. Both the reader and the disciples are given an enigmatic saying that, given the human constraints of both, is frustrating to understand. This creates a commonality of position between the reader and the disciples as opposed to the transcendence of Jesus. It has a purpose of not only elevating Jesus, but also of encouraging a searching for the clues Mark provides in his allusions to the Exodus language and symbols. It also reminds the reader that they will misunderstand and be hard hearted at times too. This is not an immediate relegation to “outsider” status, but another case of “not yet understanding” (8:21), and this too will be followed by another attempt by Jesus to clarify and enlighten the reader as they continue to seek to be a disciple of Jesus.

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140 Marcus, Mark 1-8, p513.
141 France, Mark, p317.
142 Marcus, Mark 1-8, p512.
143 Ibid., p513.
Mark’s Audience

One aspect not considered thus far is the Markan audience. We have been very much focusing on those interacting with Jesus, yet this was also written to a specific audience. We therefore need to consider Mark’s rhetoric and purpose. Obviously Mark is presenting being blind, deaf and hard hearted as a negative thing. When you consider that the “μὴποτε + subjective” construction of 4:12 is interpreted as something quite negative to be actively avoided,¹⁴⁴ a picture emerges of a group opposed by God. But this is not the entirety of Mark’s rhetoric. As noted earlier, Mark’s writing is intentional with a very strong inclusion / exclusion theme. Mark appears to build an expectation among his audience of inclusion over the first three chapters by the audience being privileged to receive knowledge far beyond that of the characters in the story.¹⁴⁵ However, in chapter four Mark confounds this expectation. There is a mystery understood only by insiders, a mystery Mark never reveals to his audience without ambiguity.¹⁴⁶ The audience are now left with a question as to where they stand. As the narrative continues the standing of the audience continues to shift, with them sometimes being privileged with greater knowledge and insight (for example, Jesus’ transfiguration of Mark 9 and the apocalyptic discourse of Mark 13), and at other times given no explanation or elaboration at all (for example, referring to a fulfilment of a scripture that is not disclosed in 14:49). By the conclusion of Mark’s narrative the standing of the audience is never clearly defined, floating somewhere between the status of “insiders” and “outsiders.”

Guelich suggests that Mark sees the purpose of the audience’s ambiguous standing in status in the teachings of Jesus and intentionally strengthens it.¹⁴⁷ But Mark does not consider the lines of those who are “insiders” and “outsiders” as being ultimately drawn. Instead, he leaves the final response of both scribes (3:28-29) and Jesus’ family (3:35) undefined.¹⁴⁸ It seems Mark is not interested in judging who are insiders or outsiders, but holds out hope. Consequently Mark does not have Jesus cease teaching crowds or contending with the scribes and Pharisees just because they fail to understand.¹⁴⁹ This is vitally important for our audience to prevent them from becoming alienated. Instead, Mark’s motivation is to “create an audience

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p722.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p214.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p214.
motivated to become insiders." The ambiguity experienced by the audience throughout the narrative is intended to create maximum participation in the narrative in order to provide the greatest potential motivation for them.

Further, the audience is reminded that what matters is recognition of and a positive response to Jesus. This is shown by Mark’s inclusion of Jesus’ rebuke to the disciples in 4:13. It isn’t special knowledge or understanding that makes an “outsider” or an “insider.” The mystery is Jesus Himself as God’s eschatological servant. Should one fail to understand a teaching, this is no reason to question one’s standing. Rather, Mark is enticing his audience to maximum participation in Jesus’ revelation of the kingdom with the specific goal of encouraging participation in a lifestyle of discipleship, not initiating people into a mysterious understanding.

**Reward and punishment**

In the above exploration, we have considered Jesus’ teaching technique. For those inside it is divine revelation. While there is a need for Jesus to further explain at times, those inside have received a gift that will lead to life. It is something they desire and seek and are rewarded with. For those outside, it hardens and pushes those opposed to God further away. While Jesus continued in the hope that those outside would hear and understand, the reality was that the majority were not willing to see or hear. As Jesus revealed more of the reality within which they lived, their hearts were embittered and they further opposed Jesus. Still Jesus tried, as does Mark to present the divine revelation, and through rhetoric Mark continues to motivate his audience to become insiders.

Are there rewards promised? Both Mark and Jesus hold out the divine revelation to all who would seek it, and through this revelation there is life. Yet it is not presented as a reward or something to entice. Rather, it is assumed that it is already desired if one is an insider. For

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153 E.g. Mk 2:5-11 describes Jesus forgiving the sins of a crippled man. For those who see Jesus as the Son of God this forgiveness is hope and brings life, yet for those “outside” the result was hostility.
those outside Mark makes it clear that their enemy is God who is actively breaking into this age to bring his kingdom. To be on the wrong side of God is presented as something to be actively avoided, yet there is nothing more said than this. Mark’s Jesus does not show any interest in threatening, coercing, or even warning what the consequences of being an outsider might be. There are no rewards or punishment stated in this passage. The only motivation given is Markan rhetoric which gives the audience a taste of insider status, a glimpse of the explanations the outsiders of Jesus’ day despised, and invites the audience to take the next step.

Conclusion

Through the teachings of Markan Jesus we see a polarisation. If one desires to know Jesus they will receive the revelation of Jesus and his kingdom. Should one be hostile to Jesus, they will be further deafened, blinded and hardened. The Markan Jesus is working for the salvation of all, yet many “soils” are un receptive. The Markan Jesus’ desire is to bring life, but life will not be received if Jesus is not wanted. Mark too holds out hope and uses his gospel to try to motivate outsiders to become insiders. To those inside, Mark passes on the secrets of the kingdom so they too can have life.

Through Jesus’ teaching style we can conclude that reward and punishment are not key features in the presented motivation. Should one desire to follow Jesus, they will receive the secrets of the kingdom and find both Jesus and life. Should one be hostile to the kingdom they will remain outside. Reward and punishment are not present and can be ruled out. It seems an openness to be moved by Jesus is what matters. However, a clear motivation to follow cannot be decisively suggested through the study of this passage regarding the method of Jesus’ teaching in Mark.

154 Mark presents Jesus as God’s Son by all who have the foresight to know (1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62; 15:39), whose purpose is to tear apart the things separating God from humanity (1:10; 15:38). It is the Kingdom of God being ushered in by God’s Son who brings access to God Himself.
155 See footnote 141 above.
Chapter 3.  Amputation and Hell (Mk 9:33-50)

When we consider reward and punishment in Jesus’ teachings as recorded by Mark, a fundamental chapter is Mark 9.  Rewards (μισθός) are only mentioned once in Mark (9:41), and the word commonly translated hell (in this case γέεννα, with no occurrences of ᾍδης) is referred to by Mark only in this chapter (9:43, 45, 47).  The only other explicit comment related to rewards and punishment is found in Mark 10:21, namely “treasure in heaven,” which shall be considered in the next chapter.

In this chapter we shall consider verses 33 – 50.  The collection of sayings is framed by the disciples arguing about greatness, and is concluded with a command to “live at peace with each other” (v50).  We shall consider this section by looking at four smaller blocks of teaching which I have dubbed, the way of greatness (v33-37), a continued desire for greatness (v38-42), the responsibility for self (v43-47) and closing remarks about salt (v48-50).  We shall then conclude by considering motivation specifically and determine whether a motivation of reward or punishment is presented in these teachings.

Structure

The structure of Mark 9:33-50 is suggested to be artificial, with Mark creating the setting and scene to provide an opportunity for the sayings that follow. 156 Marcus notes awkwardness in the section, seemingly linked by catchword associations to aid in memorisation. 157 However, as Evans points out, some aspects we find awkward must have seemed harmonious to the author, or he would likely have constructed the passage differently. 158 Many see as incongruent an argument about greatness immediately after the teaching of Jesus’ passion, the teachings about accepting children, allowing outsiders to perform exorcisms in Jesus’ name, not offending children, and amputating body parts. However, I will argue that there is a far greater continuity of theme through the three distinct sections. In contrast with Jesus’ expression of love and sacrifice, the disciples begin to fight over power and control (v33-37),

156 Collins, Mark, p443.
only to be told that they too must serve each other as Jesus does. In a bid to retain some status, John looks for approval for his use of power over outsiders (v38-42) which meets with a solid rebuke. Jesus uses the “two way” motif to show just how far one should go as a servant, and how seriously Jesus takes his disciples’ exhibition of a Christ-like expression. Finally, Jesus reminds them of the importance of this teaching, with a gruesome illustration to highlight how seriously they should strive to live without sin. This forms a natural progression: serve each other, serve all people, and be especially sure not to be the one harming another’s faith. The progression starts with responsibility to those “inside,” then to all who honour the name of Jesus, and finally to the impression one’s life gives to all people. Most commentators argue that portions of this teaching are post-Easter or even Early Church issues and therefore either not Jesus’ teaching or at best not his primary context and intent. Whether this is the case or not, I would suggest that the teaching is intentional on Mark’s part and therefore is valid in its present form for determining motivation presented by Mark for following Jesus.

The way of Greatness (v33-37)

Immediately after Jesus teaches his disciples of his impending death, Mark describes an argument over greatness. While questions of rank were not uncommon in the Mediterranean world, the change from Jesus’ teaching about his death to arguments over greatness seems out of place. Collins suggests that they neither wanted to hear of a suffering Son of Man, nor did they want to suffer themselves. Instead of denying oneself, their thoughts immediately turn in the opposite direction to elevating oneself, or to greatness. Another perspective is that the disciples understood Jesus’ teaching in v31 as an indication that Jesus wouldn’t be with them forever, and the question of a replacement leader arose. Whatever the case, the disciples know this was not something that they should be discussing (v34).

159 Collins, Mark, p 444; Marcus, Mark 8-16, p686.
160 Evans, Mark, p61.
161 Collins, Mark, p444; Marcus, Mark 8-16, p444.
162 Cf. Gos Thom. 12:1. – The disciples question Jesus as to who will be their leader when He goes. In Thomas’ Gospel James the Just is identified (12.2).
In response Jesus “sits down” and “calls the twelve” to whom He is already speaking (v35). By doing so Jesus indicates He is giving formal instruction. The topic of Jesus’ teaching is not whether one should strive to be great, but rather the manner in which one achieves greatness. Jesus teaches that to be first (πρῶτος) you must be last (ἔσχατος) and a servant (διάκονος). First (πρῶτος) in Jewish thought during this period referred to rulers, aristocrats, ruling priest and the like, while the last (ἔσχατος) or a servant (διάκονος) were those with no authority or influence. In the disciples’ minds what mattered was power and authority. Jesus on the other hand saw value in serving and lifting up others.

To further illustrate his point Jesus takes an unidentified child. The use of a child is a specific comment on status as opposed to taking on a child’s character traits, with the child representing the lowest status in the ancient world. παιδίον is described as a “very young child up to seven years,” but could also refer to a slave. Jesus calls the disciples to serve everyone, even those like children or slaves from whom they can receive no personal gain, instead of just those who could provide them with a personal benefit. His visual parable reminds them of the heart of service that desires the good of the other without focusing on oneself.

The question is, what does it mean to receive (δέξηται) a little one? Collins notes the practice of “exposing” children who were unwanted, or of taking unwanted children and raising them as slaves. In this context, she offers an understanding that parents are to accept their children, and a prerogative for Christian couples to accept or welcome exposed infants and raise them as their own instead of for gain. However, for Mark the idea of the first being last and servant of all is parallel with the idea of welcoming a child. This would suggest a more symbolic understanding that to be great in the kingdom of God is to serve others and to value the unimportant; that is, simply to be like Jesus. There is the stipulation that one acts “in...
Jesus’ name.” This is not an act of charity or philanthropy; rather it is an act of service to God, a recognition of lordship, an act of worship.

Of special interest to this study are Jesus’ final words in this pericope. To welcome a child and by inference, to be a servant of all, is to welcome both Jesus and the One who sent Him (v37). Marcus suggests this is encouragement to practice hospitality, and notes that compared with the honour of hosting God Himself, relative superiority becomes quite insignificant. Surprisingly the focus of Collins, Evans and France is on suffering and not the joy of the presence of God. In Torah the idea of presence (תבנית) with God is very strong, expressed throughout the tabernacle symbolism with the desire for God and value of his presence very clearly articulated. Likewise, the Psalms celebrate the joy and desire for the presence of God. Jesus is teaching that to serve others as Jesus does is to welcome the presence of God. This is the great incentive for the life of humility and service that Jesus holds before them: to deny oneself in order to obtain the presence of God.

A Continued Desire for Control (v38-42)

On hearing that a disciple must serve those who are also disciples, John is immediately recorded as raising a question about an exorcist unrelated to their group. It is suggested that v41 originally followed v37, with v38 and v39 being included based on the association of ἐν τῷ ὅνόματί σου with ἐπὶ τῷ ὅνόματί μου in v37. It could also be an inclusion based on its relationship to the disciples’ failure in exorcism (9:14-29) highlighting a raw nerve. Certainly, whether it is John’s initial reaction or not, of interest is what the inclusion by Mark is intended to teach us.

Having said that, John’s response is less out of place when one considers the issue of status. France points out exorcisms were a special feature of the authority given to the Twelve by

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173 Eg. Ex 33:14, 15.
175 Collins, *Mark*, p449, 446.
Jesus. Especially after their failure at an exorcism, to have an outsider succeeding in the name of Jesus was a “severe blow to the disciples’ sense of identity, and undermines their special status.” On being told he must not try to exhibit power over other disciples, John is still looking to exercise power and enjoy higher status. If it can’t be over disciples, it will be over everyone else. After all, they are Jesus’ appointed ambassadors and the only ones with a right to use his power and authority. The way John words his concern is of particular interest – “he was not following us” (οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν) as opposed to not following Jesus. Collins notes this wording likely indicates a post-Easter situation rather than the actual words of Jesus. However it could be less about follow “us” as individual disciples and more about following “our group,” with “us” indicating a group identity and group purpose as seen in Jesus’ use of ἡμῖν in v40.

In response, Jesus is suggested to have referenced a maxim attributed to Cicero by stating “whoever is not against us is for us.” In doing so Jesus indicates his purpose is far more important than trivial power plays. So unimportant is personal power or greatness compared with serving in Jesus’ name that Jesus illustrates it with the giving of a drink of water, the most basic courtesy in Eastern society. The inclusion of ἄν allows this statement to cover a particularly varied range of people with the only qualification being the name of Christ. The result of such a trivial act in Christ’s name qualifies one for a reward. This is the only mention of rewards in Mark (although they are implied in 10:28-30). Reward (μισθός) can be literally “wages,” though here it carries the idea of divine recognition and recompense for the moral quality of one’s actions. The unaffiliated exorcist had shown far greater kindness than providing a drink of water and therefore qualified for his reward, something John was trying to stand in the way of.

176 France, Mark, p376.
177 Ibid., p376.
178 Collins, Mark, p448.
179 France, Mark, p377.
180 Evans, Mark, p65.
181 France, Mark, p378.
182 BDAG, p653.
In v41 and v42 Mark uses the widespread ancient motif of the Two Ways. As Marcus explains: “the ‘way of life’ is set forth first, with its eschatological reward held out as an enticement (9:41), followed by a description of the ‘way of death’ and its eschatological punishments as a warning (9:42).” Both ways described by Mark relate to the possible response given by followers of Jesus. The “way of life” is to serve in the name of Jesus with even the tiniest acts of kindness noticed. Marcus notes this teaching would make the most sense in the context of persecution, where such a small act of outlawed kindness took great courage. However, there is nothing in the text to indicate anything other than a simple act motivated by the recognition of Jesus.

The way of death consists of causing the “stumbling of one of these little ones who believe” (σκανδαλίσῃ ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστεύοντων). σκανδαλίζω, hence scandal, speaks of causing one’s downfall, with a connotation of idolatry, apostasy and / or eschatological ruin as seen in other uses in the OT prophets and in the NT. There is much one can do to qualify for this charge, both by acts and omissions. The μικρός (“little one”) is suggested as relating to the παιδίον (“child”) of v35-37 by some commentators. However, the focus has shifted to the treatment of those identified by the name of Christ (v41). The idea of “little ones” referring to the people of God is seen in OT and Jewish tradition as well as being consistent across the synoptic gospels. The use of “little ones” in Zech 13:7 is of special interest as Jesus quotes this verse in reference to the fate of his disciples. Given the specific qualification that these little ones believe (τῶν πιστεύοντων), it is reasonable to conclude they are disciples.

The warning presented is to have a μύλος ὄνικος, the millstone driven by a donkey, “placed around” (περίκειται) the neck like a collar, as opposed to just “hung” (κρεμασθῇ) as in Matthew 18:6, and be thrown into the sea. An act or omission that results in the downfall of a

183 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p694.
184 Ibid, p694.
185 Ibid., p695.
186 BDAG, p926.
187 e.g. Wisdom 14:11; Matt 13:41; Rev 2:14. See Marcus, Mark 1-8, p309.
188 Ibid., p688.
follower of Jesus meets with a similarly structured verdict to that received by Judas for the betrayal to death of the Son of God.\textsuperscript{189}

In response to a continued desire for personal power, a divide in the road is presented. One is the way of life and the other the path to destruction. One sees a disciple of Jesus and humbly serves them because of Christ. To these Jesus promises a reward. On the other hand, to those who are unconcerned for others (and by inference for Christ) because of the status they seek for themselves, the result of their choices meets with the very verdict given to the man who betrayed Jesus.

But what is the reward by which the serving disciple is to be enticed? I would suggest it is found back in \textit{v37} and Jesus’ concluding remarks about serving in his name. To serve Jesus’ disciples because they belong to Jesus and to welcome a child in Jesus’ name is to welcome Jesus and the One who sent Him. I suggest Jesus is promising himself to those who honour Him as the greatest and most desirable thing, and emphasising that inhibiting others from receiving Christ and life will meet with the greatest of condemnation.

\textbf{The Responsibility for Self (v43-47)}

Verse 43 introduces a very confronting section regarding sin. There are two potential understandings of this passage offered by scholars. One considers the limb to be amputated as such, and the other considers it to be a euphemism.\textsuperscript{190} Deming champions the idea that the σκανδαλίσῃ sayings of Mark 9:42-10:12, Matthew 5:27-32 and a passage from the Babylonian Talmud, originate from a common tradition.\textsuperscript{191} Deming concludes that both Mark 9:42 - 10:12 and Matthew 5:27-32 can be understood sexually, and further sees the beginning of male accountability for monogamy in marriage.\textsuperscript{192} While Deming acknowledges that both

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., p695.
\textsuperscript{190} Collins, \textit{Mark}, p449-450; Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p695.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., p139-140.
Matthew and Mark likely saw the hand and foot in their general function, based on his work Collins takes it to a whole new extreme with only a slight suggestion of hyperbole.

At the end of the day, pederasty is not the topic of this thesis. However, if the only mention of γέεννα is the Gospel according to Mark is directed at those who sexually offend against children, masturbate, or commit adultery, then it is something we need to consider. The conclusion in this case would have to be that punishment, at least in terms of γέεννα, is not for the “sexually healthy” individual. However, there are very good reasons to reject this hypothesis.

Firstly, there is a question about the phrase “one of these little ones” (ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων, 9:42). Collins and Evans suggest they are the literal children of v33-37. Evans goes on to note the danger of failing to consider the weak and vulnerable due to being self-absorbed. For France there is no question or justification, instead it is warning of the danger of damaging another’s faith. Marcus highlights the juxtaposition of verses 41 and 42 concluding that it is unlikely pederasty is in view; rather this speaks of Jesus’ disciples. Demings reluctantly notes that ἕνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων is masculine in this case as in v41 and Matt 18:14 when referring to the disciples over literal “little ones.” The only ambiguity he can find comes from the parallel passage in Luke 17:2, which is masculine but lacks the comment of faith. Secondly, there is an inconsistency with the interpretation of “hand” and “foot.” Those advocating a euphemism interpret “hand” literally, albeit in conjunction with the penis, while “foot” is understood as referring to the penis. Marcus points out that even in b. Nid. 13b the interpretation of adultery by hand or foot as masturbation and penile intercourse respectively is difficult, and neither Rashi nor the Tosaphot interpret it this way. Thirdly, the context is of vital importance. While in b. Nid. 13b hand and foot are linked with
things sexual, in other passages hand and foot are linked with murder (Jellinek, Bet ha-
Midrasch 6.45) or human action in general (IQS 10:13).204 Finally, and most importantly, the
man who cuts off his foot is described not as a eunuch, but as lame. This seems the clearest
indication that Mark had in mind literal feet, hands and eyes.205

Now we have established the actual hand, foot (or leg) and eye is in sight, we must consider
whether this is intended to be literal, hyperbolic or something else. The cutting off of one’s
hand is noted in Jewish law with the command:

If men get into a fight with one another, and the wife of one intervenes to rescue her
husband from the grip of his opponent by reaching out and seizing his genitals, you
shall cut off her hand; show no pity. (Deut 25:11-12, NRSV)

In discussing this passage, Philo is in support of the punishment, although his concern appears
more focused on propriety, modesty and decency. In discussing the woman who “out of her
affection for him carried away by love for her husband” goes to aid him, she must still behave
as a woman not a man, not being overly bold, uttering abuse or foul language, or striking like
a wrestler, rather than one with hands practiced in the loom or spinning (Spec. Leg. 3:31 §173-
176).206 He then speaks of the audacity of grabbing at genitalia and the example to be made of
her, before moving on to praise judges and managers of gymnastic games who have kept
women out based on modesty (Spec. Leg. 3:31 §176-177).207 Clearly his concern is propriety
and modesty.

Philo does, however, offer a non-literal understanding of this passage, treating it as an
allegory. While he attributes the interpretation to “persons of high character” (θεσπέσιοι
ἄνδρες), he certainly appears to approve of this as a valid interpretation. The allegory teaches
that we should have a masculine soul devoted to God alone, as opposed to a feminine soul
that grabs at whatever it comes across instead of clinging to the divine nature. Philo
concludes that “very naturally” the law commands the removal of that which lays hold to

204 Ibid., p697.
207 Ibid., p585.
The teaching of this allegorical understanding is that if we do not value God first we are in great spiritual danger. Should this understanding of the amputation of limbs be applied to the teaching of Mark 9:43-48 we learn that being ungodly results in destruction. While an undeniable fact, an allegorical interpretation along the lines of those Philo proposes is clearly inadequate as there are no indications in the original text to support such an understanding.

The question of a literal interpretation is worthy of consideration. Van Iersel suggests the story of the Maccabean brothers provides the best background to this passage. Given the potential persecutions when the gospel was written there could be reason to suggest a high level of devotion was demanded of disciples of Jesus, leading to a more literal interpretation. Tertullian certainly held open the idea of a literal interpretation when speaking of idol makers who were allowed into church ministry. He states:

A whole day the zeal of faith will direct its pleadings to this quarter: bewailing that a Christian should come from idols into the Church ... should raise to God the Father hands which are the mothers of idols ... should apply to the Lord’s body those hands which confer bodies on demons ... Oh hands to be cut off! Now let the saying, “If thy hand make thee do evil, amputate it,” see to it whether it were uttered by way of similitude merely. (italics supplied)

The biggest challenge to this literal interpretation though is the paired nature of each member. While both eyes are likely to be equally as guilty of looking lustfully, should only one be punished? When one considers this, the removal of one or even both eyes will not assist a person in seeing others through Jesus’ eyes, or treating them with the respect and dignity of being a child of God. The loss of one’s eyes would prevent further lustful looks, but it is the state of the heart that truly matters (7:15). An impure heart would remain an impure heart with or without the eyes; it would simply express itself differently. A literal interpretation would be unlikely to have any real benefit other than to plant a seed for spiritual pride in one’s own devotion.

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208 Ibid., p585.
211 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p690.
The last option is hyperbolic, which Evans suggests is obvious beyond question both for us and Mark’s readers.\textsuperscript{212} He points out that in the kingdom there are no blind or lame, quoting the rabbinic teaching of the day (cf. Midr. Tanh. Bērēʾšīt. 11.9 and Gen. Rab. 95.1 on Gen 46:28). This makes a literal reading impossible. But at the same time Jesus is teaching a literal truth, just not telling us to do it. If, like one of my friends, you have breast cancer you will amputate it. If, like another friend, your mother drank DDT polluted water for the entirety of your in utero life and your legs are deformed and a painful liability, you too may choose as he has to have them amputated and receive mobility through prosthetics. There are worse things in life than losing a limb! And life in the kingdom is worth so much more than physical life. Jesus is giving a glimpse of how important life (ζωὴ) is; worth an arm, leg, our very life (βίος). In that sense the statement is not true hyperbole as it is not an exaggeration of truth, but it is hyperbolic in the details of how we are to respond.

Jesus is not asking for amputation. In addition to hyperbole, there is also symbolism. Marcus clarifies the use of the three members noting that in many biblical contexts the hand is the instrument of committing sin, the foot transports us to commit sin and the eye is the means by which temptation enters.\textsuperscript{213} This forms the elegant rhetorical progression:

- Hand – Do not commit sins
- Foot – Do not go anywhere where you may have opportunity to commit sins
- Eye – Do not even allow yourself to be tempted or think about sin.

This idea reflects the Markan Jesus’ discussion on what is clean and unclean in Mark 7. Jesus taught that uncleanness comes from the heart – evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (Mk 7:21-22). The reader is warned that to focus on or be exposed to sin and temptation will shape them. It may enter through the eyes, but it is the heart and the mind that are made unclean. To go places that bring or allow sin results in the heart and mind being made unclean, or invites choices that result in uncleanness. To do things that are sinful makes the heart and mind unclean, and that is expressed uncleanness. The evil is not in the hands, feet or eyes. The

\textsuperscript{212} Evans, \textit{Mark}, p71.
\textsuperscript{213} Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p697.
need is not to remove our hand, foot or eye, and to do so would still leave the uncleanliness. Should an individual struggling with lust remove both eyes, they would not be able to look lustfully. Still, the uncleanliness in their heart would still prevent them from “seeing” or loving others as Christ. The loss of eyes would not change the problem of the heart, only the way it is expressed. In this sense a hyperbolic and symbolic interpretation is the only reasonable interpretation.

The Markan Jesus gives a hyperbolic jolt to remind the reader of the importance of their choices. If they value and would have life, there are things they need to do. Those readers who don’t desire life can simply carry on unchecked. But stop, be aware, make a choice. The challenge for the reader is not to cut off their hand if they have a habit of committing sin. Instead they are challenged to consider what is of value, to avoid temptation, and to avoid opportunity for sinning. The meaning of amputation in this passage is simply to be aware of the importance of the choices that are being made regarding what is done, where they are going, and what is being seen; and to take it very seriously.

It is in the context of intentional choice, and a call for ownership of our choices, that Jesus opens the conversation about life and destruction. The result of either heeding or ignoring this directive is life (ζωὴ) or Gehenna. The goal clearly is life. ζωὴ in this context is defined as that of the believer which proceeds from Christ as a result of the final consummation of the last judgement.214 Likewise, life is interpreted in an eschatological sense by Evans and Collins.215 France on the other hand sees it as “the ultimate state of the faithful disciple.”216 While there are eschatological implications, it is a present reality also. Foster discusses a view of life (ζωὴ) which restricts it to a future reality and the opposite perspective of life being wholly for the here and now. He demonstrates that salvation and life are synonymous and essential realities now, but that it will also be perfect in time.217 However, he develops much of his concept of life (ζωὴ) from the gospel of John and the writings of the Apostle Paul. While there is much in the writings of both to add light to the question, our question relates to the motivation Mark presents in his gospel.

214 BDAG, p430.
215 Evans, Mark, 71; Collins, Mark, p452.
216 France, Mark, p381.
Life (ζωὴ) in Mark is limited to the two references in chapter 9, and two in chapter 10. In chapter 10 the question relates to ζωὴ αἰώνιος. αἰώνιος relates to life in the reign of God, as well as to a period of unending duration. During the later Jewish tradition the development of an eschatological aspect of Abraham’s promised inheritance (Gen 15:7) came about (e.g. Isa 60:21; 1 En 5:7), suggested by Marcus to be in part due to disappointment at their failed fulfilment. Thus an idea of “this age” and “the age to come” was developed. This is also seen in Jesus’ construction of “entering life” (εἰσέλθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν), reflecting Jewish tradition and its emphasis on pursuing “the life of the world to come.” It appears the goal of entering life is being used as a motivator, and Jesus is calling his readers to do everything up to and exceeding what is reasonable to ensure they achieve it. However, what this life is, is not clearly articulated.

Life and “the kingdom of God” (or “God’s kingship” as France interprets the phrase) are paralleled in verses 43 and 45, and verse 47. While the kingdom of God (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ) is deserving of a chapter in its own right were this a longer thesis, we shall briefly consider it as it relates to our context. Firstly, in Mark the phrase “the kingdom of God has come near” (1:15) is expressive of the present eschatology not a future one. As it refers to God’s kingship it does not have a singular realisation like “the day of Yahweh” in Old Testament scripture. It is a present and ongoing reality, albeit one that will completely define all reality at the end of the age (cf. 13:26-27). As France points out, Jesus’ ministry began a new era of fulfilment which called for a response from God’s people. That era revealed God and his mind through Jesus. Mark has recorded this revelation to a small group of disciples, and their subsequent struggle to transcend human thoughts and to allow the seed of God’s kingship to flourish in them. Life, the kingdom of God, and salvation are about God with us as a present and ongoing reality, even in Mark, the most succinct of the gospels. We are called by Jesus and reminded by Mark to give up everything that stands in our way to experiencing life in the presence of God; hand, foot, eye, and most importantly, the sinful self that misuses them.

218 BDAG, p33.
219 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p720.
220 B. Ber. 28b; Gen. Rab. 9.8 [on Gen 1:31]; b. ’Abod. Zar. 18a.
221 France, Mark, p30.
222 Ibid., p92.
223 Ibid., p93.
224 Ibid., p30.
The price of clinging to that which is not of God is γέεννα. The word γέεννα came about through the transliteration of ἱννῶμ “the valley of Hinnom” (Josh 15:8). The Valley of Hinnom was infamous for paganism and especially child sacrifices. Jeremiah prophesied the valley would become known as “the valley of slaughter” where God would judge and punish his people (Jer 7:30-32; 19:2,6). By the time of the Maccabees, it represented the eschatological place of judgement or hell itself. Much of the imagery of γέεννα is derived from Isa 66:24;

And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh. (Isa 66:24 NRSV)

This image is not a description of hellfire but the literal judgement of the enemies of Israel. From this, the concept of γέεννα was developed as seen in Mk 9:48 to a well-known concept of judgement.

Many identify γέεννα as a rubbish dump and thus an “unclean” location, meaning should one go there they could not go into the temple and before God due to their unclean status. This gave it the meaning of evil and separation from God as well as punishment and destruction. The idea is consistent with the original concept seen in Isaiah as this was the punishment for those “who rebelled against me” (Isa 66:24). In using this image it appears Jesus is equating γέεννα as a place for those who are tantamount to rebels against God, which justifies the grotesque hyperbole in order to avoid it. France points out this is intended as an awful deterrent with its particularly evocative language, which is far more than a literal image to analyse. Thus, in our question of motivation, this image certainly is intended to motivate, but not in a literal sense or one defined by eternal torment. While Marcus acknowledges future punishment is clear in the teachings of Jesus, he also notes that this passage cannot be taken literally given the context and background of the passage. What certainly can be concluded is that Jesus’ teachings, as recorded by Mark, place a huge emphasis and priority

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225 2 Kg 23:10; 2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31-32; 19:6; 32:35.
226 BDAG., p191.
228 Marcus, J., Mark 8-16 (London, GB; Yale University Press, 2009), p697.
on entering Jesus’ kingdom instead of choosing the evil and destruction of separation. Hyperbole and rhetoric is used very powerfully to this end in Mark 9:43-48.

Closing Remarks regarding Salt (v48-50)

After a graphic appeal to avoid evil, Jesus concludes his teaching with sayings about salt. In the first saying, Jesus warns everyone will be salted with fire. This introduces an eschatological element announced by John the Baptist of the purification by fire, to be administered by Jesus who will baptise with the “Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Salt was linked with temple sacrifice (cf. Lev 2:13) which makes the association of salt and fire less surprising. Salt has implications of preservation and enhancement, while fire can be either purifying or consuming. Together, they paint a vivid picture of the person who through the sacrifice of Jesus is lastingly purified, or who without Him completely destroyed. Marcus particularly notes this in relation to the use of fire in scripture, and compares the statement with the suggested double entendre of a “baptism of fire” which can be either destructive or purgative in effect.

The image alluded to is that of Isaiah 33 and the trials they were enduring. The question is asked in Isa 33:14b “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?” The answer is as expected: “Those who walk righteously and speak what is right, who reject gain from extortion and keep their hands from accepting bribes, who stop their ears against plots of murder and shut their eyes against contemplating evil” (Isa 33:15). As Jesus has noted, all will be salted with fire. Should one follow the teaching of Jesus in Mark 9:43-47, which reflects the teaching of Isa 33, they will be righteous and able to dwell with the consuming fire which is God Himself. For others who act like the disciples did in seeking personal gain (9:33-34, 38), when they are salted with fire the result will be destruction. The warning is to expect and be ready to pass through the fire so that readers will be preserved not consumed.

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233 Evans, Mark, p73.
234 Collins, Mark, p454.
235 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p698.
The next saying is purported to be linked to the previous one based on the word association of salt. Salt is established as good in order to allow the point to be made, yet what good is it if it loses its saltiness? Collins reads this as a metaphor to guard oneself against corruption and avoid sin. France describes a more complete picture seeing the salt as the beneficial influence of the disciples on society. After describing how salt can lose its saltiness due to the high level of impurities in Dead Sea salt, France notes “it is ludicrous to think of trying to season that which should itself have been the seasoning.” A disciple without salt is no longer effective, and in reality is no longer a disciple. Marcus suggests that it is a call for the disciples to now make the critical decision based on the former teaching (9:35-49) that will determine the outcome of the eschatological fire for them. While all the teaching of Jesus up to this point has been a rebuke to the disciples, the disciples are now called on to ask themselves the hard question: have they lost their saltiness? Are they acting as humble servants like Jesus, who actively controls Himself and avoids evil and temptation at all costs? Or are they bowing to temptation because they have compromised themselves in the pursuit of personal gain?

Jesus concludes with a reminder of the right answer – “have salt in yourself” (ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἅλα). There can be no question as to where Jesus stands or what He expects of them. They are to be purified and enriching to their world. When they do this, they will be the humble servants of all who love others as Jesus does. This will result in them being at peace with each other and all people. The additional comment to be at peace with each other ties the teaching back to the original question that provoked the chastisement – their disunity based on selfishness (9:33-34). Jesus reminds his disciples that this isn’t just an extended tangent of teaching but a specific, practical response to their failing. Their action was “salt-less,” their values would cause others’ downfall, and they need to take some very serious action to rid themselves of wrong in their lives.

236 Collins, Mark, p455.
237 Ibid., p455.
238 France, Mark, p385.
239 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p698.
Motivation

The question of this study relates to the motivation for following Jesus. What motivation is presented in this passage (Mk 9:33-50)? Certainly personal power and status are not. Instead, service and humility are expected which would naturally be a disincentive. In this world’s values this is a backward step so the presented motivation must be that much greater. The expectation of humility and service is called for with the promise of welcoming Jesus and the One who sent Him. The motivation presented is the promise of the presence of Jesus and God the Father.

In the later sections (9:38-42) we read of a reward for welcoming Jesus’ followers or a severe punishment for hindering them. The reward is not elaborated, but given the consistency of context I believe this also refers to God’s presence.

The final teaching (9:43-50) emphasises the seriousness with which we must approach the pursuit of God’s presence. Jesus emphasises that there isn’t any middle ground when it comes to following or desiring God. It must be a single-minded pursuit, or our thoughts and actions will likely drag us down to a place that is deserving of severe punishment. That punishment which we are motivated to avoid is separation from God. Whether by much or by little, a less than committed desire for God is tantamount to rebellion and will lead to destruction.

From what we see in this passage, based on this passage alone, we can conclude that Jesus’ presented motivation can be summarised by the question “do you want me?” All are promised they can have Him if they truly value Him above everything else. If Jesus isn’t wanted, the reader is reminded that without Jesus there is no life. Thus while a motivation of reward and punishment is in view in this passage there is certainly no coercion. The motivation for or against following is simply whether or not Jesus is desired, and the reader is promised to receive what they truly want.
Chapter 4. Jesus and the Rich Man (Mk 10:17-31)

In Mark 10:17-31 we find a pericope of fundamental importance to our study. Jesus calls a man to follow Him. He also instructs the man to sell everything and give to the poor in order to gain treasure in heaven. Towards the end of the pericope the followers of Jesus are promised a hundred times compensation for their losses in this age, albeit with persecutions, and in the age to come, αἰωνιόν ζωήν. When considering if a motivation of reward and punishment is faithful to the teachings of Jesus in the gospel according to Mark, this pericope is one that justifies careful consideration.

We shall begin by considering the opening encounter Jesus has with the man (Mk 10:17-22). Of particular interest will be Jesus’ instruction to the man, and what that entails. Next, Jesus’ interpretation of the event to his disciples will be considered (Mk 10:23-27), before moving on to the application of this teaching to the disciples as provoked by Peter (Mk 10:28-31). We shall conclude with an exploration into the teaching of Jesus as a whole in this pericope regarding a motivation for following Him.

Jesus and the Rich Man (10:17-22)

Our passage finds Jesus on his way (ὁδὸς), both at the beginning (10:17) and the end (10:32), framing the pericope and discussion of following in light of Jesus’ mission and passion.240 On his way the journey seems to be interrupted before it even begins when a man “runs up” (προσδραμὼν) and “falls to his knees” (γονυπέτεω). Luke (Lk 18:18) calls this man a ruler (ἀρχων), and Matthew (Matt 19:20) portrays him as a “young man” (νεανίσκος), however Mark simply identifies him as “one” (ἕς). It is suggested that the man in Mark’s story is no longer in his youth, given the implication of his claim to Torah observance “from my youth up” (ἐκ νεότητός μου, 10:20).241 The speed of approach indicates the urgency and importance of his question, the posture his reverence and belief in Jesus’ ability to answer his question.242

240 France, Mark, p401.
241 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p722.
242 Ibid., p725.
The man addresses Jesus as “good teacher” (διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ), an unusual address without known contemporary Jewish parallel.243 France suggests that there may have been a little flattery in the bold address and hence Jesus’ resistance to it, yet he also acknowledges the man’s question and reverence seem sincere.244 Evans sees no reason to suggest the title is ostentatious, but acknowledges an extraordinary show of respect.245 The man’s question is simple, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (τί ποιήσω ἵνα ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω).

Jesus initially responds to the title of “good teacher” (διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ) in the man’s address. Jesus’ seeming objection to this title in 10:17 has baffled Christian interpreters and raised questions as to the divinity of Jesus.246 France is quick to remind us, however, that questions of Jesus’ sinless nature and divinity, and development of dogma, were not concerns in the time of Mark or Luke. They should not be read into this passage, although they may have had some bearing on Matthew’s wording of the reply (Matt 19:17).247 One reason for Jesus’ objection could relate to the authority claimed by the priests and scribes in their official priestly role, and objections they had raised to Jesus and his forgiveness of sin (2:5-11).248 Evans suggests Jesus is emphasising a need to focus on God rather than to draw attention to Himself, and therefore points to God’s law.249 While this sounds reasonable, there has been so much debate over Jesus’ response through history it has done quite the opposite. The title is generous, yet unlikely to be pointing to perfection, so this is unlikely Jesus’ concern.250 The best suggestion, and the one favoured by France, is a challenge to the man’s perception of goodness.251 By the man’s question there is a recognition that he has not yet found peace and confidence in his current means of seeking eternal life, and by inference his goodness. Jesus points to God’s absolute goodness and invites him to reassess what goodness really means, and then seek that.

243 Evans, Mark, p95.
244 France, Mark, p401.
245 Evans, Mark, p95.
246 Ibid., p96.
247 France, Mark, p402.
248 Collins, Mark, p477.
249 Evans, Mark, p96.
250 France, Mark, p402.
251 Ibid., p402.
Jesus takes for granted that this man was familiar with Torah and points specifically to the later portion of the Decalogue, the section relating to human interactions. It is suggested the reason for quoting these commands is their relatively objective nature, unlike the commands relating to one’s interactions with God which are somewhat more subjective. The commands stated by Jesus reflect the Hebrew order with the exception of the tenth command and the position of the command regarding one’s parents, although the wording is closer to the LXX.

The tenth command of the Decalogue given in Mark 10:19 is “Do not defraud” (Μὴ ἀποστερήσῃς) rather than the expected “Do not covet.” One suggestion for this alteration is to emphasise objective behaviour over the subjective realm of thought. Marcus likewise notes the emphasis on the behaviour the craving may lead to, but further the type of exploitation common among men of his stature. The command to sell everything and give to the poor could support this suggestion if seen from a compensatory perspective. Evans notes the commonality of withholding wages (cf. Deut 24:15), but adds a suggestion about how one treats their wife should they marry another. Exodus 21:10 commands one not to “defraud” (LXX: ἀποστερήσει) her of her rights to food, clothing and conjugal rights. This may be in view given Jesus’ strict teaching on marriage just a few verses earlier (Mk 10:2-12). Collins suggests the practice of korban could be alluded to. This may account for the placement of the command regarding parents directly after a command about defrauding. It is fair to say that all commentators agree the variation is to make the command impact more directly on the man, whether by identifying a more relevant temptation or by removing subjectivity.

The second variation is the position of the command to honour one’s parents. As noted above, this could be to link the command about defrauding with the treatment of parents.

252 France, Mark, p402.
253 Ibid., p402.
254 Collins, Mark, p477.
255 France, Mark, p402.
256 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p727.
257 Evans, Mark, p97.
258 Collins, Mark, p479.
regarding the korban vow. France suggests the positive one is left till last, presumably because it is different. There is the promise of long life attached to this command which could be significant, since it is life the man has come seeking. After just blessing the children (Mk 10:15-16), Jesus could be giving an indication of paternal affection and concern for this man as an indication of acceptance and an invitation to teach and guide him. While it is challenging to determine with certainty Jesus’ reason for this change, the man’s love of money was clear (10:22) and is likely the key. By changing the command to defraud and placing it immediately after the command regarding his parents (10:19), it is most intuitive to conclude this man was not living up to the expectation of generosity towards his likely aged parents.

The man replies by stating “I have observed all these things since my youth up.” The man believes this is something that he has achieved and continues to do well. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the man given Jesus’ response of love, even if the reordering of the commandments has suggested that he was not obeying them the way he should. “having looked upon” indicates an intent, direct gaze as Jesus searches the man with spiritual insight. Jesus is impressed by the man, following his careful scrutiny of him, and responds with love and the desire to have him as a disciple. Marcus describes Jesus as “moved with fatherly affection” as He points out the one thing still lacking.

There is a question at this point as to the nature of the man’s lack. Collins asserts that for Jesus, law keeping is sufficient to secure eternal life. It is a higher level of spiritual achievement the man is promised should he sell everything, as indicated by the promise of treasures in heaven. This is supported by reference to Hellenistic texts of the time reflecting

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259 Evans, Mark, p96.  
260 France, Mark, p402.  
261 Evans, Mark, p96.  
262 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p727.  
263 France points out the middle ἐφύλαξάμην strictly means “I have avoided, kept myself from,” something he has put down to sloppy grammar. It would suggest that “these things” (ταῦτα πάντα) would refer to the prohibitions rather than the commands themselves making a better translation “I have kept myself from doing these wrongs from my youth up.” See France, Mark, p402.  
264 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p727.  
265 BDAG., p321.  
266 France, Mark, p403.  
267 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p727.  
268 Collins, Mark, p479.
the idea. The question must be asked of Collin’s assertion, however, if his eternal life could still secure when he is, to quote Collins, “appalled” by Jesus’ request. Evans agrees that for Jesus, law keeping is sufficient for eternal life. For Evans, the man was not on a quest for greater enlightenment. The man had overlooked the requirements of the law regarding compassion for people. Throughout Torah the responsibility to love and care for others is seen, from gleaning laws (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22) to the expectation of loving others as you love yourself (Lev 19:18,34). This seems a far more satisfactory explanation given the way Jesus points to the law and the response of the man in question. However, the request Jesus makes of this man goes far beyond caring for the poor. To sell “as much as you have” (ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον) and give it to the poor borders on an unreasonable request of anyone. To attempt to explain this Marshall uses the language of a transaction where we give and God credits our “heavenly bank account.” This idea of gifts to the poor resulting in heavenly treasure was common in the later strata of the Hebrew Bible and into early Judaism.

When comparing the other texts in Judaism with Mark 10:21, the major difference is the amount required by Jesus. This has caused problems for subsequent Christians as, to quote Marcus, when it comes to selling everything “they are so reluctant to do so.” Rather than a blanket command to poverty, Clement of Alexandria takes an allegorical interpretation. Jesus desires the man to rid his soul of the value he places on his wealth, which chokes out the seed of life (Who is the Rich Man that shall be Saved?). Likewise, Luther noted the danger of over-valuing wealth rather than simply possessing it. For Luther, the concern was serving mammon, not the having of wealth but rather the reliance on it. France considers the Greek construction, describing the strong language as “a single, complete disinvestment and donation” followed by an invitation which “sets a new course for the future.” Not only is Jesus calling for a renunciation of possessions but a total abandonment of the man’s current values and a taking on of a new set. This supports Luther’s interpretation and points to the

269 Collins, Mark, p479.
270 Evans, Mark, p98.
272 e.g. Prov 19:17; 2 Macc 12:45; Pss. Sol. 9:5; 2 Baruch 14:12; 4 Ezra 7:77. For a discussion on the idea and development of the concept of treasure in heaven, see Eubank, “Storing,” p79.
273 Marcus, Mark, p728.
275 Bayer, Oswald, Martin Luther’s Theology: A contemporary Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008) p304.
276 France, Mark, p403.
man’s lack as being one from the first section of the Decalogue; “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). Jesus’ teaching is therefore not focused on the abandonment of wealth but rather the state of the heart. The emphasis is therefore the call to follow.

The man has an immediate transition from reverent pursuit to intense dismay (στυγνάξω), a rare word with overtones of dark clouds and deep gloom. He turns away grieving as he is very wealthy. Whether he lacks the capacity to let go of his wealth and choose a higher good, or he is unable to trust God as Jesus suggests, there can be no question: the man chooses what was of greatest value to him.

**Jesus’ interpretation (10:23-27)**

At this point Jesus turns to look (περιβλεψάμενος) at his disciples, which recalls the look (ἔμβλέψας) Jesus gave the rich man. It is to look all around, an all-encompassing look which, given the use of ἔμβλέψας in verse 21 suggests a deeper look and a response to the unspoken thoughts and questions of the disciples. There is a potential contrast through the use of these words between the wealthy man who refused to follow, and the acceptance of Jesus’ call to follow by those who possess less. On the other hand, the way Jesus looks at the disciples may emphasise the relevance of the issue to them. They are certainly shocked at Jesus’ seemingly unrealistic demand that has resulted in such a positive looking recruit being lost (10:24). There can be no question that Jesus sees this as an ideal situation for teaching the disciples more of the values of his kingdom.

When we consider the love Jesus had for this man, his exclamation “How hard it will be for the rich to enter the dominion of God!” (10:23b) is undoubtedly both a critique of the man’s unwillingness to follow and dismay that anyone would resist treasure in heaven for the sake

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277 BDAG., p949.
280 BDAG., p799.
283 Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, p734.
of earthly comforts. At this the disciples are astounded (θαμβέω), a response described in the same terms as a crowd witnessing Jesus’ power over demons (Mk 1:27), and to Peter and John healing a man crippled from birth (Acts 3:11). By this Jesus is calling into question the scripturally-based cultural assumption that wealth was a blessing from God or a reward for obedience. But where this leaves some hope, Jesus’ next words remove all doubt as to the difficulty to enter the kingdom of God.

As seen in the Figure 4.1 above, Jesus’ teaching over these verses begins by being difficult for the disciples to comprehend, and ends in physical impossibility; for humans at least. “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (l0:23b) is intensified and expanded in verse 24b: “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!” No longer is the difficulty limited to the rich, but now to all people. The use of children (τέκνον) in this passage is most likely an endearing term to provide some reassurance to his disciples during a difficult teaching rather than referring to literal children, as in v13-16 παιδίον is used for children. This intensification is furthered by Jesus comparing a camel going through a needle’s eye to the rich entering the kingdom of God. With the proverbial form εὐκοπώτερον ἔστιν ... ἢ ... , when the “easier” is utterly impossible, the latter is emphasised as

285 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p734.
286 BDAG., p442.
287 Deut 28:1-14, esp. vv. 11-12; Prov 10:22; Collins, Mark, p480.
288 The image of a literal camel passing through the eye of a sowing needle is the image that is being called upon here. Over the years many have tried to minimize the severity of this image and retain some hope. Yet the whole point of Jesus’ teaching is the impossibility and one’s need of God who can do all things. A similar use is seen in Rabbinic writing who favour an elephant over the camel. R. Samuel b. Nahmani uses the image of an elephant and a gold date palm going through the eye of a needle as evidence that in dreams God only shows us our own thoughts (b Ber 55a). It is also used at rhetoric in b B Mes 38. In all cases it is an illustration that is accepted as a way of stating the utter impossible.
harder still (cf. Lk 16:17; Mk 2:9). Jesus has progressed from hard for the rich, to hard for all people, to utterly impossible for the rich to enter into the kingdom of God.

In response (10:26), the disciples are astonished “beyond measure, exceedingly” (περισσῶς) which intensifies the already extreme “filled with amazement to the point of being overwhelmed, literally struck out of their senses” (ἐκπλήσσω) of 10:24. Dumbfounded, they ask each other if it is possible then for anyone to be saved (10:26b). If they were initially troubled by the difficulty for the wealthy to be saved, the definitiveness of Jesus’ proverb is too much to comprehend. For a third time Jesus looks (ἐμβλέψας) with understanding that knows the struggle and questions of his disciples, and gives the needed words to answer their situation: “With man it is impossible but not with God; with God all things are possible” (10:27b). Jesus gives hope and the means for all to find the life this rich man sought. But as France points out, it creates more questions than answers and certainly is not tidy theology.

Jesus’ teaching to his disciples shows that the rich man’s question was very poor but insightful. The rich man was insightful enough to acknowledge that there was something lacking, but his question was poor in that there was nothing he could do. Jesus’ command to sell everything and follow Him highlighted the spiritual poverty of his soul and his need for nothing short of a miracle. It is only God who is capable of doing what was needed in this man’s life. His need was greater than ever because of the allure of his wealth. This is the danger for the rich. Yet Jesus’ point is clear, God can do what is otherwise impossible.

Jesus’ application of this teaching (Mk 10:28-31)

Immediately after the rich man’s failure, Peter is fast to point out that they have left everything to follow Jesus. There could be a hint of smugness or self-confidence in this

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289 France, Mark, p404.
290 BDAG., p806.
291 BDAG., p308.
292 French, Mark, p406.
statement as they have met Jesus’ stringent expectation. After all, where the rich man is a negative example for Mark’s audience, the disciples are a positive example of how to respond to Jesus’ call. On the other hand there could be some self-justification that surely they weren’t in such a precarious place as the rich man; surely they were secure. Whether flavoured with a little pride or insecurity, Jesus’ response provides both comfort and warning for those who have given much to follow Him.

Figure 4.2. Symmetry of Jesus’ promised recompense for losses in following Him (10:29-30).

| Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel | who will not receive a hundredfold now, in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields with persecutions and in the coming age, eternal life. |

Jesus’ response consists of two, mostly symmetrical clauses as seen in Figure 4.2. The first details what is lost, the second what is gained. Of note in Jesus’ response are the following:

1. The claim that nothing of significance will be lost through discipleship, highlighted by the symmetry.

2. Further, an emphasis that any loss will be more than compensated, given the hundredfold assurance.

3. The emphasis on what truly is of value, ζωὴ αἰωνίως, given it is the singular promise for the coming age compared with the numerous rewards in the current age.

4. Rewards come with persecutions. In this age, following will at times be accompanied by estrangement from family resulting in the necessity of leaving them, as well as

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293 France, Mark, p407.
294 Collins, Mark, p481.
295 Evans, Mark, p102.
296 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p737.
297 Ibid., p737.
298 Ibid., p737.
religious persecution. Of interest is its parallel; lose “for my sake and for the sake of the gospel.” Marcus reminds us that sharing in the good news of Christ also means sharing in his sufferings. Persecution likely reflected the experience of Mark’s audience and was a stark reminder to all followers of Jesus that this life would certainly have its trials (cf. Mk 8:34).

5. The omission of “fathers” in the list of rewards and of spouses in the entire teaching. The omission of father likely reflects the idea that we have only one heavenly Father. Further, given the first will be last (10:31), would those who are first (ie. the fathers in a patriarchal society) become the last, losing their position and status to become brother and servants? The omission of spouses is consistent with Jesus’ immutable stance on marriage (Mk 10:2-12).

6. Lastly, the order of items listed, with houses (οἰκίας) at the start and fields (ἄγροι) last. France suggests that while everyone has a house and family, only the affluent had fields. It has been argued that the list represents an ascending scale of economic value. Gundry argues from the perspective of a brother waiting for inheritance. Thus brothers are a liability as they will take a portion of the inheritance. Sisters are of greater value as they will be married off at the profit of a dowry, and so on. While a novel argument, as Marcus points out, it is well known brothers were of greater value than sisters and fathers than children in patriarchal society. Marcus notes the tension with abandoning one’s parents given the fifth commandment and suggests Mark chose a list which placed leaving parents in a less prominent place towards the end. Another suggestion is the addition of fields to link this list in the audience’s mind with the rich man who was a land owner (cf. 10:22).

300 Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, p737.
301 Evans, *Mark*, p103.
303 Ibid., p407.
304 Ibid., p407.
305 Ibid., p407.
307 Ibid., p468-469.
309 Ibid., p732.
While this list is emphasised as a key teaching by Jesus,\textsuperscript{309} it is not a commendation of poverty as was interpreted by many Christians from medieval times onwards.\textsuperscript{310} In Mark’s gospel, Peter and his colleagues left boats and nets, with the implication of homes and family also, yet the home of Peter was still available for Peter, Jesus and his disciples (1:29-36), as was a boat that they appear to have had free access to (4:35-36; 6:32, 45).\textsuperscript{311} The point is how lightly possessions are held, not whether possessions are owned. As emphasised in Mark 3:20-35, it is the family of God rather than our earthly family that matters most.\textsuperscript{312} Likewise, the community of believers were to welcome into their homes those who had been estranged from their own homes and those proclaiming the gospel, and to share freely as they have need (10:43, cf. 6:8-10).\textsuperscript{313} In this sense any loss is more than made up for in this life.

But the greater treasure was life eternal (\(\zeta\omega\eta\,\alpha\iota\omicron\nu\omicron\zeta\)), the very thing the rich man sought without success. The question must be asked exactly what that might entail. What is “life eternal?”\textsuperscript{314} \(\alpha\iota\omicron\nu\omicron\zeta\) described a period of unending duration, hence the translation of “eternal” life.\textsuperscript{315} Some have therefore argued that eternal life is purely an eschatological occurrence, and link it with the kingdom of God which is also argued as a future occurrence.\textsuperscript{316} For Mark, the idea of eternal life is described as the age to come (v30), and Jesus links the ideas of eternal life and the kingdom of God in this encounter. Some scholars go so far as to state “current scholarship acknowledges a present possession of eternal life,” but it must be noted this comes from a wider reading of scripture than just Mark.\textsuperscript{317} Rickabaugh argues that eternal life is knowledge of God, a place of abiding in Christ where true life is found.\textsuperscript{318} This is not incompatible with a period of unending duration, even one experienced in the eschaton. Instead, it is a question of when it begins. As argued in the previous chapter, life and the

\textsuperscript{309} The 14 uses of \textit{Ἀμήν} in Mark indicate particularly important pronouncements with a number relating to spiritual warnings and rewards. See France, \textit{Mark}, p397.

\textsuperscript{310} Bailey, Michael D., “Religious poverty, mendicancy, and the reform in the late Middle Ages” \textit{Church History}, Vol 72, No 3, (Sep 2003): p457.

\textsuperscript{311} France, \textit{Mark}, p407.

\textsuperscript{312} Collins, \textit{Mark}, p482.

\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., p482.

\textsuperscript{314} BDAG., p33.


kingdom of God are parallel (9:43, 45 and 47), and the kingdom has begun to be realised now through the revelation of God through the presence of Jesus.318

In his doctoral dissertation, Marcus considers the kingdom of God in Mark 4. He argues for an apocalyptic reading of the gospel based on his findings, a triumph of Jesus over satan through his death and resurrection.319 He describes Jesus’ victory as “new-age light” dawning in the midst of “old-age darkness.”320 The new age is “decisively inaugurated in his crucifixion,” yet God is still transforming the old age into the new.321 Thus the kingdom is here and now, while for some it is still distant, and the new age has come despite many not entering into it. The emphasis Marcus makes, however, is that it is God’s word that is transforming this age, transforming lives, and inviting people into the kingdom.322 It is the revelation of Jesus Christ that makes the difference, so in that sense eternal life is here and now for those who hear and enter into relationship with Jesus Christ. Thus eternal life is entering into the kingdom of God. It is life in the kingdom with its unending communion in the presence of God starting whenever the individual enters into God’s kingdom.

An objection to this argument could be Jesus’ distinction between rewards “in the present age” and those “in the age to come.” However, if this age is concerned with material things and the coming age is concerned with God and his kingdom then there is less tension between these ages. In that sense, in this age every need will be provided while people oppose you. In the coming age there is the physical presence of God Himself. Whether now or later, there can be no question, eternal life means life of unending duration and quality in the presence of God.

The pericope ends with a very fitting summary of Jesus’ teaching to this point, “but (δὲ) many who are first will be last, and the last first” (v31). The saying could be considered positive for the disciples as, unlike the rich man, they have made themselves last in order to follow Jesus.

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318 See page 47-48 above.
319 Marcus, Mystery, p229-230.
320 Ibid., p230.
321 Ibid., p233.
322 Ibid., p230, 232.
whereas those seeking things in this life will in turn become last. However, it could also function as a warning to them not to take their position in Jesus’ presence for granted. The use of ὅτε (10:31) indicates a likely contrast with the previous statement, and the opening words by Peter that hint at superiority (10:28). Regardless of their commitment, they cannot assume to be first in the kingdom, which is perhaps the stimulus for James and John requesting these places a few verses later (10:37). Marcus points out that in the very next verses Mark writes another of Jesus’ passion predictions showing Jesus, who is rightfully “the first” willingly becoming the last. Like Jesus, his followers are to see what is of true value and not demand the first place in this life. Instead they must focus their energy on what truly matters in order to have life in the kingdom of God.

Whether the disciple’s motivation was based on a little smug pride or on insecurity, Jesus’ response assures his disciples that whatever has been lost will be more than accounted for. However, it comes with the warning that while there is an influence from this age of sin it will come with persecutions. With the additional bonus of the whole family of believers comes opposition from those “outsiders” previously seen in Mark 3. There will never be security or comfort in possessions in this age, and while Jesus’ followers will have what is needed they must not be looking to them or holding them tightly. After all, the real reward comes in the age to come. It is there that life will be unending. Even more, it will be defined by the presence of God with the comfort and security that being with God provides. A follower of Jesus can enjoy that life now spiritually, and in completeness once Jesus comes again.

Motivation for following Jesus

To conclude, I will look at the pericope specifically with motivation in mind. At first glance we see a man who is spiritually dissatisfied despite his ardent efforts to be righteous. When he addresses the Markan Jesus with an illustrious title Jesus immediately points him to the goodness of God. The Markan Jesus indicates that all of his doing was in vain as his perception of goodness was misguided, with absolute goodness and life being found in God.

324 BDAG, p213.
Right at the start of the pericope God is upheld as the source of all that is good, and the source of life.

As the man has not yet understood, the Markan Jesus enquires after his righteousness. On Torah observance the man is confident, even though he still feels he has not achieved life. His efforts at being obedient to God are sincere but blinded by his own desires. In love Jesus challenges his true god, money. When told to turn his value system around, reject wealth and put all his energy into following Jesus, the man is totally dismayed and rejects Jesus’ call. Disappointed, Jesus points out that money is a very powerful god, and those who have much find it difficult to let it go. In fact, all have things in life that they struggle to let go. Like the rich man who saw he had need and asked “what must I do?” (10:17), all are in a place which Jesus is very clear about; the individual can do nothing. With humans it is impossible (10:27). Fortunately, with God all things are possible (10:27), and He can make up for human weakness and failing.

Peter too misses the point, which he does regularly in Mark’s gospel. Peter points out that they have met Jesus’ outrageous requirements for eternal life, having left everything. Jesus reassures Peter and the disciples that any loss will be more than made up for, both in this life and the next. In this life any loss will be thoroughly compensated through the family of believers, but with it will be opposition from those who reject God. There is also the promise of eternal life; never-ending life in the very presence of God.

Clearly the motivation to follow Jesus is not wealth or generous compensation for loss, since Jesus has vividly shown possessions can be a hindrance to life. Worse, the compensation for loss in this life comes with a sting in its tail: persecution. The only thing of true value promised is eternal life. As noted earlier, there are a range of ideas about what eternal life entails, from a purely eschatological event to the receiving of life in God’s presence from the moment the reader accepts Him by faith. Life in the presence of God is found in Mark’s discussion of the kingdom of God and eternal life (1:15; 4:11, 20, 26; 9:43,45, 47), as well as

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326 France, Mark, p402.
327 Ibid., p403.
seen in the tearing of the heavens (1:10) and the veil (15:38). It is life in the presence of God that is the motivation for following Him.

Further, there is the promise of the world set right. If many who are first will be last and the last first, then the proud will be humbled, the powerful will be weakened, those exploiting others will be brought down and those underfoot lifted up. This is clearly a cataclysmic event! Within this reversal is the promise that the world will not remain the way it has always been. There will be a time for justice, and an acknowledgement that God is in control. But should one’s hope not be in God and their delight not be in his presence, ultimately this would not be a very positive event. Thus for those who delight in God, the motivation is for his presence and the restoration of all things to how God created and intended them to be. For those who do not delight in God, there is nothing in this pericope that would be welcomed at all if understood.
Chapter 5. Triumph or Suffering: Jesus’ Passion Predictions

Forming the centre piece of the gospel are three predictions by Jesus about what is ahead for Him: betrayal, suffering, death, and resurrection (8:31-9:1; 9:30-50; 10:32-45). The similarities between these three scenes are very clear; Jesus predicts the suffering and death He will soon endure, concludes with his resurrection from the dead, and one or more of the disciples act in total opposition to the point and values Jesus has just advocated. Jesus then rebukes the attitudes presented and takes the opportunity to teach the group of disciples as a whole about the true values of God. We shall begin by examining the three predictions. This will be followed by the response or behaviour of the disciples immediately after these predictions. We will then consider Jesus’ correction. To conclude we will consider what is taught regarding rewards and punishment through these predictions.

The Predictions

Before we embark on understanding this section we must come to a conclusion regarding the origin of these teachings. Many scholars have questioned if these are prophecies-after-the-fact as they have a close correlation to the gospel’s account of the event. Evans suggests these predictions are inserted earlier in the story and actually took place in Jerusalem after the triumphant entry. This is based on what he considers “reasonable behaviour” on the disciples’ part, particularly the fast switch from excitement to betrayal and the abandonment of Jesus. However, as Collins states, this teaching is “a shocking inversion of the standard expectation of the Messiah and his deeds,” which I suggest better describes the less-than-ideal responses of the disciples. Other scholars contend that death and resurrection is a reasonable expectation of an apocalyptic prophet. There is sufficient scriptural teaching for the Messiah to know and understand his destiny. Jesus’ allusions to the Deutero-Isaian songs of the Suffering Servant (Isa 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12), especially in the third prediction

328 While we have dealt with 9:33-50 separately, we shall again briefly consider it in the context of the predictions and the response of the disciples in order to get a complete picture of the theme and its significance.
329 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p604.
330 Evans, Mark, p11.
331 Collins, Mark, p403.
332 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p604.
333 It is worth noting that a suffering Messiah was not the current understanding among Jews in the time of Jesus, as will be explored shortly. However Jesus is clear that He knows his destiny and will follow God’s will.
(Mk 10:32-45), indicates this to be the case. Passages like Mk 10:45 also make clear the idea that Jesus knew why He came and how his life and ministry would eventuate. As such, I would suggest that while Mark may have chosen wording that specifically linked the predictions to Old Testament prophecies in the readers’ mind, the context presented can reasonably be taken as representative of the Markan Jesus’ original teaching.

The first prediction in Mark 8:31 begins with the words “then He began to teach them” (Καὶ ἠρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοῦς), indicating Jesus was beginning a new and central theme. Until this point, the disciples’ perception of Jesus and his destiny were shaped by his favoured title, the “Son of Man” (2:10, 28). Although debate remains, the title “Son of Man” comes from Daniel 7 and finds similar elements and language not only in these predictions, but in all of Jesus “Son of Man” sayings. The notable difference is that the “Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is triumphant and receives authority, glory, sovereign power, worship from all nations, and an everlasting kingdom (Dan 7:13-14). The only mention of suffering relates to the faithful (Dan 7:21) until they are rescued. The title “Son of Man” was not linked in Jewish thought to the Messiah. Still, the way Jesus used it likely aided the disciples in envisaging a glorious picture of victory and a great kingdom. Should they have known Daniel 7 well enough to be aware of the suffering righteous it doesn’t seem to have impacted their response, except perhaps to fuel Peter’s aversion to the idea of suffering (8:32). As Marcus points out, the Messianic hope was a military leader, a righteous judge, and a spiritual shepherd, with some texts elevating him to a quasi-divine figure. There is no reference prior to Christianity that the Messiah would suffer, with the only messianic link to Isaiah 53 found in the Targum, which conversely attributes the suffering and atoning death to the Messiah’s enemies. As such, Jesus is beginning a new and essential line of teaching that contradicts everything the disciples think they know about Messiah to date; that He will suffer and die, and be raised to life again. This new line of teaching is also emphasised by the use of δεῖ: it is necessary. It was essential for Jesus to emphasise that this almost incomprehensible teaching is both God’s will and the fulfilment of Scripture.

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334 France, Mark, p333.
335 Evans, Mark, p16.
336 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p1105-6.
338 Evans, Mark, p16.
The structure of these three predictions is remarkably similar, shown in Figure 5.1 (below).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark 8:31</th>
<th>Mark 9:31</th>
<th>Mark 10:33-34</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>δεῖ</td>
<td>ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου</td>
<td>ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is necessary that</td>
<td>the Son of Man</td>
<td>the Son of Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου</td>
<td>Παραδίδοται</td>
<td>will be betrayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Son of Man</td>
<td>should suffer many things and be rejected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πολλά παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι</td>
<td>is delivered</td>
<td>will be betrayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>υπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερεῶν καὶ τῶν γραμματέων</td>
<td>εἰς χέρια ἀνθρώπου</td>
<td>to the chief priests and scribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the scribes</td>
<td>into [the] hands of men</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστήσεται</td>
<td>καὶ ἀναστήσαται</td>
<td>and after three days he will rise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and after three days rise</td>
<td>and ... after three days rise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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340 BDAG., p762. While the same basic word here and in Mk 10:33a & b, this is a Semitic construction paralleled in Latin referring to delivering someone / something into someone’s hands.

341 BDAG., p762. This is a Latin tradition for handing over into the custody of police or courts. Heavily in view in this construction is Judas’ actions.

342 BDAG., p762. This use is a Latin tradition for handing over into the custody of police or courts.

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As seen above, all three predictions (i) begin by referring to Jesus as the Son of Man, (ii) contain a reference to those who are responsible for His death, (iii) contain a prophecy of His death, and (iv) prophesy His resurrection “after three days.” There are differences. As noted above, only the first prediction begins with “Then he began to teach them that” (Καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτούς ὅτι δεῖ) introducing a new line of teaching and indicating that this must happen as part of God’s plan. However, the idea of the “necessity” (δεῖ) of Jesus’ death in the divine plan (8:31) is alluded to in 9:31 and 10:33 by describing the prophecy as if it were already happening, achieved by the use of the present passive form of παραδίδωμι with a futuristic sense. Thus God’s foreknowledge is always emphasised as is the assurance that He is ultimately still in control despite the initial appearance of events.

A second variation is the suffering and rejection of the first prediction. Mark describes Jesus as suffering πολλά, which can refer to a great number, extensively or to a very high scale. Thus to suffer “many things,” to suffer “greatly,” or to suffer “horribly” all make good sense. This concept is not reflected in the second prediction where instead Jesus is described in far less emotive words as being παραδίδοται (“turned” or “handed” over, or “is delivered”). The third prediction uses παραδοθήσεται (“will be betrayed”), giving a different flavour to the wording of the second prediction. The third also goes on to describe the condemning, betrayal to gentiles, beating, spitting, and scourging, which links in both the themes of the first two predictions. While the pattern is slightly different, the idea of suffering is very clearly presented in both the first and third predictions.

The first prediction notes Jesus will be ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι, which refers to scrutinising and declaring as unworthy or unfit, and hence total rejection. This goes deeper than the betrayal of the later predictions to a statement on a well-considered conclusion regarding the moral and intrinsic worth of Jesus; however the idea of rejection and betrayal is still present in each of the predictions.

344 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p667.
345 BDAG., p847-850.
346 See footnote for Figure 5.1.
347 See footnote for Figure 5.1.
348 BDAG., p110.
The identities of those who were to be responsible for Jesus’ death are inconsistent through the predictions. The first identifies them as the elders, chief priests and scribes who reject Jesus. These were the three main power groups who made up the Sanhedrin (the elders being leading representatives of the lay nobility), the most powerful political-religious authority in Israel after the Romans.\(^{349}\) Their inclusion demonstrates the comprehensive rejection of Jesus by Israel and their failure to recognise Him as Messiah. The second prediction simply describes those responsible for Jesus’ death as “humans” (ἀνθρώπων). The repeated use of ἀνθρώπος emphasises the tragedy that people failed to accept their own, their representative before God, but rather turned Him over to their own evil desires.\(^{350}\) The third prediction notes the chief priests and scribes who were the ones entrusted to spiritually lead and guide Israel. They miss that Jesus is sent by the God they claim to serve and instead deliver Him to death at the hands of Gentiles, illustrating their powerlessness and dependence on their pagan occupiers. By the use of παραδόθησει to describe the betrayal of Jesus, we see not only the chief priests and scribes, but allusions to Judas’ betrayal.\(^{351}\) Through these predictions we see Jesus rejected by Israel, by all humanity and by his own servants (priestly and disciples).

Mark 10:33-34 describes in far greater detail exactly what will happen to Jesus in a kind of climax for the three predictions. Legal language indicative of a trial and verdict is used pointing towards Jesus’ trial before the High priest and Judean council (καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτὸν θανάτῳ). That Jesus would be handed over to Pilate is foreshadowed by “then they will hand him over to the Gentiles” (καὶ παραδόσουσιν αὐτὸν τοῖς ἑθνεῖσιν), and the exact way they will treat Him is clearly spelt out: mock, spit and flog (ἐμπαίξουσιν, ἐμπτύσουσιν, μαστιγώσουσιν). This detail in the third passion prediction has an important role in building suspense, focusing attention and alerting the audience with regard to what they should expect as the narrative continues.\(^{352}\) We see a link through the third Markan prediction to the elements of the suffering servant of Isaiah (mockery and spitting, Isa 50:6; 53:5; flogging, Isa 50:6; 53:5; and death, 53:8-9, 12), reflecting the events to come but also interpreting them in the light of God’s suffering Servant.\(^{353}\)

\(^{349}\) France, *Mark*, p335.

\(^{350}\) Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, p669.

\(^{351}\) Ibid., p742.


The predictions are consistent in their particularly “matter of fact” wording that the Son of Man will “be killed” (ἀποκτανθῆναι). Even Evans, who sees these predictions as occurring very much later than recorded or even recorded in hindsight, acknowledges that “in all probability Jesus did predict his death.” Mark does not make the Jews directly responsible for Jesus’ death unlike some later writers, allowing the previously mentioned groups their share of responsibility. This also leaves the audience to acknowledge their part in Christ’s suffering and death to ransom all from their sin.

All three predictions are also consistent in their description of Jesus’ resurrection. μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας literally meaning “after three days” was an idiom that meant “the day after tomorrow.” After this short period of time Jesus would “rise” (ἀνίστημι) which is best translated “rise up.” However, Marcus notes both “rise up” and “rise again” provide a double entendre in play much like in John 3:3-34. This gives a sense not only of a return to life (rise again) but also of arising (rise up) for a specific purpose and role, both valid understandings according to BDAG, predicting Jesus as both alive and enthroned.

These three predictions are complementary, providing various angles and building tension and expectation to a mini crescendo through the centre of the gospel. They are also fundamental to knowing how Jesus would have us understand the meaning and significance of his death. They help to reveal and keep us focused on Jesus’ mission and purpose, “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45b).

The Disciples’ Responses

Up until Mark 8:30 the gospel describes Jesus’ ministry as gaining the support of the masses and appearing to be unstoppable. After the mystery, teaching and miracles we hit a high point with a human for the first time in the narrative recognising and acknowledging Jesus’ true
identity as the Χριστός (8:29), even if Peter failed to fully understand what that meant (8:32-33). The gospel now takes a turn as Mark considers the priorities and expectations of humans compared with those of God. The Markan Jesus addresses this by teaching his disciples openly (παρρησίᾳ) about his death in a clear and detailed way. Mark emphasises the shocking and simply untenable nature of Jesus’ teaching through the reactions of his disciples to these three predictions. The only thing that makes these predictions even remotely reasonable is the prediction that Jesus will also be raised to life. After each prediction, and subsequent ignorant response by the disciples, Jesus proceeds to correct their understanding through further teaching. We shall consider each of the responses by the disciples and Jesus’ emphasis in correcting them.

Mark 8:27-9:1

Mark 8:29 sees Peter professing Jesus as the Χριστός. After the mystery of the kingdom and their inability to understand parables, this surely is a positive step forward, certainly for Mark. Instead of celebrating that they are at last starting to understand, the Markan Jesus corrects their misconceptions by beginning to teach of his upcoming suffering and death in plain, simple speech. Peter’s response is to take Jesus aside (προσλαβόμενος). This does suggest a confidential approach, removing Jesus before He further embarrasses Himself, so Peter can offer some correction. However, it is also a very assertive and patronizing action.

At this point Mark includes an awkward pause with Jesus turning to look at his disciples before responding. This is not in keeping with Mark’s focused, fast-paced narrative. France indicates that Jesus won’t be taken aside and the pause included the whole group in his response. Marcus, I feel, better expresses what I believe both he and France mean,

360 BDAG., p781.
361 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p613-614.
362 Evans, Mark, p20.
364 BDAG., p883.
365 France, Mark, p338.
366 λαμβάνω, part of this composite word, speaks of laying hands on or grasping something. This is intensified by the addition of προς. BDAG p583.
367 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p606.
368 France, Mark, p338.
suggesting this motion shows that the whole group share a common understanding with Peter who is the only one brave, or foolish, enough to voice it. It gives a more inclusive emphasis and less of a “power struggle” feel. Marcus further explores this strange pause in a very fast-paced gospel, concluding that some of Mark’s original audience too may have shared Peter’s opposition to Jesus’ suffering, and by including the rest of Jesus’ followers it invites the audience to reflect also.

Jesus’ rebuke is sharp, “Get behind me, Satan!” (Ὑπαγε ὃπισώ μου Σατανᾶ). There are three interpretations proposed: (1) an order to leave and get out of Jesus’ sight; (2) an injunction to stop being an obstacle; and (3) a command to Peter to resume following as a disciple and stop trying to lead Jesus. While the idea of a “hindrance” is included in Matthew’s account of the incident (Matt 16:23) there is little in Mark’s Gospel or use of language to make #2 viable. Collins sees a total rejection of Peter’s attempt to prevent Jesus’ prophecy of suffering being fulfilled and so agrees with #1 to a point but also notes an effective double meaning with #3 being the primary intent. She suggests that the ever redemptive Jesus lets Peter know that he should resume the role of follower like the disciple he is called to be. Likewise, Marcus, France and Evans concur that #3 is the best understanding.

Jesus’ description of Peter as Σατανᾶ is, to quote France, “an extravagant term of abuse.” Yet Jesus is not identifying Peter as the devil or being possessed by it, rather Peter is taking on a role that the devil usually plays. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew Meaning “opponent.” Jesus names Peter plainly for the role he is performing, emphasising Peter’s problem of competing concerns. Where Peter has in mind the things of this world, Jesus is focused on the things of God; something they are struggling to even comprehend.

369 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p607.
370 Ibid., p607.
371 Ibid., p607.
372 Collins, Mark, p407.
373 Ibid., p407.
374 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p608; France, Mark, p338; Evans, Mark, p19.
375 France, Mark, p338.
376 Collins, Mark, p407.
377 Evans, Mark, p19.
Mark then alerts us that some new instruction is coming and widens this teaching beyond the scope of the immediate disciples to his whole audience through the use of “having called the crowd” (προσκαλεσάμενος τόν ὄχλον). It must be noted that “called” (προσκαλέω) is a very assertive word relating to the summonsing of an army or a summons to court. The situation is still a highly tense one, and Jesus is assertively correcting a clear error. This adds to the idea that while Peter was brave or foolish enough to speak up, all were included in the error by thinking along very similar lines. Jesus has already commanded Peter to fall back in line behind Him; now through the use of “follow me” (ὁπίσω μου) Jesus makes it clear to anyone else who would follow that it is expected they will in fact follow. Through προσκαλέω, Jesus has “summoned” his army, and now through ὁπίσω μου He is instructing them to follow Him into battle. It isn’t a command, it is for those who desire (θέλει) to follow. This then is clarifying a basic condition of discipleship.

In order to follow, Jesus instructs the disciples in 8:34 to deny themselves (ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν). The same term is later used of Peter’s denial of Christ (14:30, 31, 72). Marcus suggests this is set in the context of persecution and pressures to deny Christ in the face of interrogation, to disclaim any connection with Christ. In understanding the extent of this France points us to 2 Timothy 2:13 where God’s faithfulness is assured because He is unable to deny Himself (ἀρνήσασθαι ἑαυτὸν) or dissociate Himself from who He is. The call of the disciple is to dissociate oneself from one’s own identity and self-determination and join the march towards death; certain death to self and possible death in this life.

The use of “cross” (σταυρός) in 8:34 is the only mention of the cross outside Mark 15. To take up one’s cross (ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ) literally meant to carry the crossbeam that would be used for one’s execution. While Luke adds “daily” to indicate a metaphorical use (9:23), Collins suggests the impact of Mark’s usage was its primarily literal wording. Not only has Jesus predicted his death, but He is specifying the “how” of his death. While crucifixion was common enough in Palestine at the time, the saying is unprecedented with the

378 France, Mark, p339.
379 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p615.
380 Ibid., p625.
381 Ibid., p625.
382 France, Mark, p340.
383 Collins, Mark, p408.
384 Ibid., p408.
disciples of other contemporary leaders being urged to take the yoke of Torah or the yoke of the commandments, but never a cross.\textsuperscript{384}

Jesus further elaborates with talk of saving and losing one’s life (ψυχὴ). The range of meanings for ψυχὴ creates some challenges with temporal and eternal, physical and metaphysical aspects all in sight.\textsuperscript{385} France emphasises this point and the word play that results from it.\textsuperscript{386} Do we dare to lose this temporal life for the promise of saving it in eternity? Are we courageous enough to hold our temporal life loosely in order to save it? Is Jesus and the gospel (εὐαγγελίον) worth that much to us? While the promise of life is not conditional on death, with Jesus’ impending death this was a very real possibility for his disciples, as it was for Mark’s audience. Despite immediate threats, this is far more a comment on values then a command to martyrdom. Mark’s rhetorical question of 8:36 makes this clear, “For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” (τί γὰρ ὀφελεῖ ἄνθρωπον κερδῆσαι τὸν κόσμον ὅλον καὶ ζημιώθηαι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ). In this verse there are not the negative connotations to “world” (κόσμος) that are seen elsewhere in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{387} Rather, Mark is asking about the value of one’s life. The achievement of all there is to be gained, even the whole world (κόσμον ὅλον), pale in comparison to the value of one’s own life. This is expressed in different words in v37, which asks about the exchange rate (ἀντάλλαγμα) for one’s life (ψυχὴ). Jesus is clear that there is one thing of value, and there is one way to get it. The cost is high, but the alternative is worse.

To conclude this section of teaching, Jesus forecasts his ultimate triumph. France depicts this conclusion in terms of shame and honour; shame here and now is a small price to pay for acknowledgement and honour later.\textsuperscript{388} Marcus notes a “sentence of holy law” structure based on the Old Testament concept of “an eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”\textsuperscript{389} If one is ashamed of Christ now, He will be ashamed of them before his Father and the angels. Shame in this case

\textsuperscript{384} e.g., \textit{m. Abot} 3:5; \textit{m. Ber} 2:2. See Evans, \textit{Mark}, p25.
\textsuperscript{385} BDAG., p1098.
\textsuperscript{386} France, \textit{Mark}, p340.
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid., p341.
\textsuperscript{388} France, \textit{Mark}, p342.
\textsuperscript{389} Marcus, \textit{Mark} 8-16, p628-29.
not only related to interrogation and martyrdom but also the scandalous and revolting death Jesus was set to die.\textsuperscript{390}

The second part of this saying relates to Jesus’ refusal to acknowledge those ashamed of Him in the eschaton, according to Marcus and Collins (8:38).\textsuperscript{391} This leads to Marcus concluding that 9:1 is a false prophecy as it requires an imminent fulfilment to 8:38.\textsuperscript{392} France suggests another perspective. \textit{ἐλθῃ} (“he shall come”) does not necessarily require us to read “descent” at the time of the parousia, rather it reflects Daniel 7:13 and the “coming” of the Son of Man (οὐς ἄνθρωπος) into his kingship.\textsuperscript{393} Jesus will soon be restored with the sovereign authority due Him, giving Him earthly vindication and Heavenly glory. Jesus’ kingdom has come, it is in conflict with the kingdom of evil, and if they want to be counted as Jesus’ disciple in the spiritual realm they need to be prepared to be his disciple in the physical world too.

When considering this passage as a whole we see a rollercoaster ride of emotion, misunderstanding and chastisement. Passions are high and the stakes are higher. Jesus has just been declared Messiah, the hero to solve all their problems and fulfil all their expectations. Jesus takes that proclamation on Himself but refuses the expectation, instead teaching a way of suffering and death. Peter responds in the expected way, expressing horror at the “utterly vile death on the cross,” as Origen describes the revulsion afforded crucifixion in antiquity (Origen, \textit{Commentary on Matthew} 27:22-26).\textsuperscript{394} Jesus promptly calls them all back into line and tells them straight that if they would follow Him, they have to follow. The “way” He walks includes suffering, death, and a denial of self in service to God. They must know what is important, and Jesus will have them understand despite the difficulty of the teaching. Should one be ashamed of Him they will have no advocate, because there is only one Son of Man (Υἱὸς τοῦ ἄνθρωπος). There is only one Messiah, the cross is the defining moment in his ministry, and they need to decide whether they are willing to follow Him on His terms.

\textsuperscript{390} Marcus, \textit{Mark} 8-16, p629.
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., p629; Collins, \textit{Mark}, p411.
\textsuperscript{392} Marcus notes that the disciples have not seen the return of Jesus with his angels yet have died. Due to his future eschatological understanding of the kingdom this means the prophecy must be false. See Marcus, \textit{Mark} 8-16, p630.
\textsuperscript{393} France, \textit{Mark}, p342-343.
\textsuperscript{394} Marcus, \textit{Mark} 8-16, p629.
Mark 9:30-50

Mark 9 begins with the transfiguration, a bold display of the divinity of Jesus. It is followed by an exorcism which emphasises Jesus’ authority and the disciples’ spiritual deficiencies. Jesus now steps out of the public arena as the need to teach His disciples takes priority. What Jesus has to teach is in such contrast to the popular expectation of the Messiah that Evans suggests it threatened to collapse Jesus’ movement should it become public. However, given their inability to understand, it is also entirely possible Jesus needed dedicated time to gently help them begin to comprehend God’s plan. The imperfect tense of teaching (ἐδίδασκεν from διδάσκω) indicates this is continuing teaching (9:31). Marcus describes it as being repeat occasions through the journey, whereas France sees it as a cue to Mark’s audience that this is not new, but rather an emphasis on what has already been taught. Evans notes this is more than a mere announcement or prediction, suggesting teaching (διδάσκω) refers to the exposition of scriptures to better help the disciples understand. In this sense it links in well with the “necessity” (δεῖ) of Mark 8. Whatever the case, the disciples could not deny Jesus was serious about and committed to this way as much as they likely hoped to not hear it again.

This is the simplest of the three predictions. Unlike the detail of Jesus’ “suffering and rejection” by “the elders and the chief priests and the scribes” (Mk 8:31), in 9:31 Jesus is simply “betrayed into human hands” (παραδίδοται εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων). “Betrayed” is not the best sense of παραδίδωμι as noted in Figure 5.1 above (p69), but rather “delivered.” While the verb does not mean “to betray,” there is an implication of hostility. The present tense expresses the certainty of the future event, a common practice in New Testament prophecy. The simplicity emphasises the repetition of ἀνθρώπος. “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands” (Ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων)

395 France, Mark, p371.
396 Evans, Mark, p57.
397 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p666.
398 France, Mark, p371.
399 Evans, Mark 8:27 – 16:20, p57.
400 France, Mark, p372.
401 Collins, Mark, p440.
indicates the sad irony that the human who was representative of all humanity would not be accepted by humans, but instead they would turn him over to violence.\footnote{Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p669.}

After seeing Jesus’ authority over the demon (9:14-27) and Peter, James and John seeing the transfiguration, death at human hands must have been very confusing. This wasn’t how it was meant to be, and the disciples respond with silent bewilderment (9:32).\footnote{Ibid., p669.} A suggestion with regard to their silence is that they were unwilling to hear it clarified again.\footnote{Evans, \textit{Mark}, p58.} Jesus is adamant and his teaching unmistakable, yet they struggle to believe it is His destiny. They likely understood enough to know they don’t want to hear any more.\footnote{France, \textit{Mark}, p372.} Also, there was almost certainly a fear held by the disciples that if their Master is killed, could the same happen to them?\footnote{Collins, \textit{Mark}, p441.} After the teaching of Mark 8:34 this would be a very valid concern. So they are silent and don’t ask further. Marcus notes the privileged position the disciples enjoyed as “insiders”,\footnote{Cf Mk 4:11.} who could come to Jesus and ask questions.\footnote{Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p670.} In both Greek and Jewish cultures, question-and-answer held a central place in the discovery of truth and the study of Torah respectively.\footnote{Ibid., p670. (cf. Plato’s \textit{Apology}; \textit{m. Abot} 6:6).} To not enquire as to the truth at the heart of their leader alerts the audience to the disciple’s spiritual deficiency and the importance of not doing likewise. But ever the Saviour, when the disciples won’t ask the hard question we see Jesus taking responsibility as teacher and asking one on their behalf to continue the lesson (9:33).

In this second prediction the disciples’ misunderstanding is not emphasised in the same way as the first with Peter’s rebuke or the last with James’ and John’s request. Instead of engaging with Jesus they are distracted by jostling among themselves for position on the journey. Now, Jesus asks them the question which engages them in the lesson they were not so keen to continue (9:33-34). As this section was covered in greater depth in the previous chapter we shall simply draw out the key points. It must be noted that in the previous chapter we were considering more specifically the references to Hell and judgement as opposed to considering the passion predictions so we will consider the differing perspective.
To quickly summarise the teaching, Jesus insists that they serve others rather than putting themselves over others, especially those considered unimportant. Exclusivity is heavily frowned upon and most importantly, to cause the downfall of another is paramount to Judas’ betrayal of the Son of God.\(^{410}\) Their self-promoting actions are identified by Jesus as causing the downfall of themselves and of others.

The idea of how they are treating others is poignant given Jesus’ passion prediction: “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands (9:31).” Jesus has just told them what humanity will do to their own representative. As noted earlier, despite debate, the scriptural basis for this term is Daniel 7.\(^{411}\) In Daniel 7:25 LXX, we read of the holy people of God “all being given into his hands,” the passive of Mark’s language (9:31) perhaps being the divine passive as in Daniel.\(^{412}\) Dan 7:25 portrays the struggle of the holy ones of God at the hands of humans, an idea reflected in Jesus’ second prediction. Daniel describes a situation where evil appears to be victorious over these holy ones, but ultimately fails with the kingdom of the Most High lasting forever (Dan 7:27). In both passages, the actions of people and the powers behind the scenes are brought to the fore. The reality of this world and the actions of those in it are highlighted.

In the entirety of the teaching of Mark 9:30-50, Jesus is indicating to the disciples that the cross should dictate their interactions with each other. When they consider their motives and compare them with Christ’s we see two very different and opposing pictures. The context for much of the discussion is their spiritual malady and self-centred lack of engagement when Jesus again confronts them with his purpose: that is, to die for the salvation of humanity. In the first passion prediction, they have been called to a death to self-interest and instead to follow in the way of Jesus because of his death and resurrection. Now in light of the death and resurrection of Christ they are called to see and interact with one another in a very different way. Death to self means a life of service to all in the same way Jesus’ death served all.

\(^{410}\) Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, p695.
\(^{411}\) Evans, *Mark*, p57.
\(^{412}\) Ibid., p57.
The third passion prediction begins with Jesus leading the Twelve and other followers to Jerusalem. We see Jesus purposefully leading the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His disciples are in tow, astonished at Jesus’ desire to get there despite all He has said will happen, and the rest of his followers afraid at what might be about to happen. The scene follows Jesus’ interaction with the rich man and the disciples’ rebuke of the children coming to Jesus. Both are times when the disciples were confronted with the opposite nature of Jesus’ kingdom compared with this world. It is into this context that we hear the last and most specific of the passion predictions, as discussed earlier.

As in the previous passion predictions, the disciples catastrophically miss Jesus’ point. Peter, in 10:31, receives an implied rebuke for his suggestion that the disciples have fulfilled Jesus’ hefty requirements for eternal life (10:28), which seems to encourage James and John to make a play for status. While Peter is “out of favour,” the remaining members of the inner circle approach (προσπορεύομαι) Jesus. This implies an opportunistic moment, perhaps speeding up to walk with the purposeful Jesus while the other disciples are following a little more tentatively. The brothers request Jesus to “do whatever they ask,” an extravagant request reminiscent of Herod’s interaction with his wife’s daughter in Mark 6, and by inference the way the ungodly use authority. Jesus’ response is wise and tentative, first seeking clarification. The request is to sit on Jesus’ right and left in his glory (ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου). James and John are requesting the top positions in the new kingdom they anticipate will soon be established (as opposed to a kingdom in the parousia as some have interpreted it). Perhaps Jesus’ use of Son of Man with the royal connotations of Daniel 7, along with the general Messianic assumptions, led the disciples to see their journey to Jerusalem as one of victory, missing the repeated emphasis on Jesus’ death.

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414 Ibid., p412.
415 Ibid., p415.
Jesus replies with “You do not know what you are asking” (Οὐκ οἴδατε τί αἰτεῖσθε), implying the brothers’ request to be thoughtless and superficial.⁴¹⁹ The brothers are asked if they can drink the cup or be baptised with the baptism Jesus will endure. The cup refers to one’s portion or lot in life that one must partake, whether suffering, afflictions, judgements or blessings.⁴²⁰ The bapt- word group in non-biblical Greek can refer figuratively to the immersion of people in various sorts of evil, much like water and flood imagery in Old Testament and Jewish texts.⁴²¹ The ever courageous and loyal brothers acknowledge they are willing to take the necessary temporary trials to share in the glory Jesus will have in His new kingdom. Jesus’ response is that they will share his cup and baptism, but these positions are not his to give. France comments:

The cup and the baptism thus prove not to be qualifying conditions at all, but rather a way of indicating that their whole concept of δόξα and of the way it is to be achieved is misguided. It cannot be earned even by the extreme suffering which he [Jesus] must undergo and which they in their turn will indeed share.⁴²²

Clearly, even the most devoted following for one’s own gain or reward is not something that Jesus endorses in this passage. These seats of authority are already prepared (ἔτοιμάζω) which, expressed in the passive without an agent, are therefore prepared and assigned by God.⁴²³ How they are assigned and for whom are left undefined.

The rest of the Twelve are indignant (ἀγανακτέω) with James and John, the same response that Jesus gave to them for repelling the children in verse 14. Yet unlike Jesus’ righteous indignation, it is more likely the disciples were angry that the brothers got in ahead of them.⁴²⁴ There is also the suggestion that the brothers were related to Jesus, making the situation even more provocative.⁴²⁵ In response Jesus again summonses (προσκαλέω) the group.⁴²⁶ This implies the same value is held not only by the brothers or even the twelve, but is held by the whole group, so Jesus confronts the whole group again with the values of the kingdom.

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⁴¹⁹ Collins, Mark, p496.
⁴²¹ e.g. Ps 42:7; Isa 43:2; IQH 11[3]:28-36.
⁴²² France, Mark, p417.
⁴²³ Ibid., p417.
⁴²⁴ Ibid., p418.
⁴²⁵ Evans, Mark, p118.
⁴²⁶ BDAG., p881.
Jesus begins his teaching with an illustration that they know (Οἶδατε). It is a fact, commonly observed and needing no qualification. Jesus points out how the nations (ἔθνος - usually “gentiles”) use power. While the Jews also share this approach to power, as demonstrated in their treatment of Jesus, his point is the universal commonality of this approach. οἱ δικοῦντες ἄρχειν (“those who rule and ensure you know it”) and the μεγάλοι (“great ones or those with authority”) are not pointing to an office as such, but rather to those who have the ability and position to exercise authority.

The way they rule is defined in 10:42 as “lording” (κατακυριεύω) and “exercising authority” (κατεξουσιάζω). Both these terms contain the prefix kata- which often carries negative connotations, especially seen in the violent conquest or aggressive usurpations these terms describe in the LXX and 1 Maccabees. “Tyranny” (τύραννος and τυραννείν) too was commonly used to describe Greek rulers and the aspirations of Jewish rebels in the writings of Josephus, for example, giving cause to define power in Jesus’ day as coercive. It has been suggested the saying does not deprecate those in authority as such; rather it is an objective statement of fact to build comparison. Yet it seems overwhelmingly that the exploitation of power and flaunting of authority, rather than its benevolent exercise, was the norm of Jesus’ day. Either way, the power asserted to which Jesus refers is a negative power that seeks to put the one in authority over those they command. It does not build up the other, but harms them. It is a power gained at the other’s expense.

Of this kind of power, Jesus is clear; “But it is not so among you” (οὐχ οὕτως δὲ ἐστιν ἐν ὑμῖν). This is a categorical rejection of the view of power seen in this world. Jesus again emphasises the radical nature of power in his kingdom. In the second prediction, Jesus calls them to be the “servant” (διάκονος) of all (9:35). Now Jesus takes his teaching to a whole
other level with the introduction of “slave” (δοῦλος). In the Greco-Roman world, the greatest of horrors was slavery, something quite deliberately associated with death both in this passage (10:45b) and in Philippians 2:7-8. It is in the lowest and most degrading of social standings where Jesus commands his disciples to look for the path to “glory” (δόξα), the way to be “first” (πρῶτος) and “great” (μέγας).

Jesus then presents in verse 45 the saying that gives meaning and clarity to the entire passage: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (καὶ γὰρ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ άνθρώπου οὐκ ἠλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονήσαι καὶ δοθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν). That the Son of man came not to be served but to serve gives meaning and precedent to Jesus’ instruction regarding leadership in v43-44.436 “To give his life as a ransom” clarifies and adds meaning to the cup and baptism of v 38-39.437 This (and the parallel in Matthew) are the only use of “ransom” (λύτρον) in the New Testament, although Paul uses various cognates.438 “Ransom” (λύτρον) is used in the LXX for buying back a slave (Lev 25:51), for release of a prisoner of war (Isa 45:13) and of God’s claim over the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites which He “owns” (Num 3:11-13).439 In Exodus 30:11-16, a ransom is to be paid when a census is undertaken to avoid a plague. This is significant, as it is described as an offering to God to make atonement, linking the ideas of ransom and propitiation in some cases.440 Other than the literal ramifications of a substitute for mankind, we see in this statement verbal echoes specifically of Isaiah 53:10-12, especially if there is the wider link made between ransom and the atoning sacrifice, and in the theme of the song as a whole, suggesting “the Son of Man came to fulfil the task of the ebed Yahweh.441 Of great importance to remember, though, is that this text with some of the richest Christology in Mark is given as a model for the disciple of Jesus.442 For them to be great, and to be like Jesus, they are to put the concerns of “many” (πολὺς) ahead of their own, to serve, and possibly even to give up their lives.

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435 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p755.
436 Collins, Mark, p500.
437 Ibid., p500.
438 France, Mark, p421.
439 Collins, Mark, p500-501.
441 France, Mark, p421.
442 Ibid., p421.
In this last of the three passion predictions we see a climax in Jesus’ teaching of what will happen to Himself; and a climax in his expectations of his disciples. The model He gives and expects of his followers is a very confronting one. Its justification is the person of Jesus and his death. Jesus’ first passion prediction resulted in a teaching that the cross should dictate how the disciples relate to Jesus; will they take up their cross and follow? The second passion prediction confronted the disciples with the call to let the cross define how they relate to and serve each other. Now Jesus introduces the idea that the cross should define their very identity and values. The three predictions teach that the cross is to define how a disciple relates to God, to each other, and to themselves. This is what it means to follow Jesus. This is the depth of devotion called for to be a disciple. This is the commitment required to reflect the person, character and values of their Leader.

Reward and punishment in Jesus’ passion predictions.

The call Jesus presents is a confronting one. The three scenes are highly charged exchanges with emotions running hot. As one investigates these passages it is easy to forget how confronting these teachings were to the very core of the disciple’s values and being. It is clear to see what the disciples were looking for in these cases; they hoped that Jesus would fulfil their expectations of Messiah in an earthly kingdom, provide them with greatness among themselves and over “outsiders,” and give them authority and high positions in his kingdom. In all cases, Jesus shatters their hopes and expectations. In each case Jesus reverses the value systems and calls them to follow anyway. Their goal of glory, power and prestige is not offered, condoned or even humoured; it is categorically rejected.

If we consider what rewards Jesus may have offered, we see an inference that those unashamed of Christ will have an advocate before God. Yet when we consider Mark 8:34-38, Jesus is comparing success in this world with success in the next. “What is more important, what do you want?” Jesus asks. “Do you want earthly success or eternal success?” You can’t have it both ways, or as implied in Mark 10:17-31, serve two masters. If you deny Christ for gain (8:36), you have lost. Jesus is not offering a reward here but elaborating the need to be solely committed to Him. You can’t half take up your cross; you can’t half deny yourself.
As we concluded in the previous chapter, the second of the predictions did hold out a reward of sorts. Again, however, it defies the values of this world. Instead of power and prestige, they are promised Jesus if they want Him above all else. In the last prediction the disciples are invited to share in the glory of Yahweh, to travel with their Master in completing and fulfilling his purpose. There are no specific roles or positions promised. On the contrary, they are specifically denied. However, Jesus does outline the way to greatness – being a servant and slave to all. In their context it is hard to see this as a reward or a positive motivator at all. Greatness through slavery and death was too far removed from their understanding of the Messiah’s role. As such, one cannot claim any rewards being used to entice the disciples in these three passages other than the person of Jesus as seen in the second passion prediction.

The other end of the spectrum is punishment. There is a warning of “forfeiting one’s life” in the first prediction, which is followed up by the warning that Jesus will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him. Again, though, this is not a threat but an emphasis on the importance of being solely committed to Jesus. What exactly does the forfeiting of one’s life entail? Mark doesn’t tell us, with the closest being the image of γέεννα in chapter 9. But, as we saw in the previous chapter, this was an illustration to motivate good choices, rather than to describe the outcome of bad ones. In all the predictions we see very clear and rather blunt teaching by Jesus that there is no middle ground; whether in the image of the cross, the elaboration of the value of one’s life, the command to discard any part that causes you to sin, or the command to become a slave. Even the image of γέεννα and Jesus’ willingness or not to acknowledge a disciple before the Father and angels are not about punishment even if they are intended to motivate.

The question must then be asked what motivation is presented in these passages? It must firstly be noted that it is only in the context of Jesus as Messiah that the passion is discussed. In Mark 8:29, Jesus is clearly identified as “the Christ” (ὁ Χριστός) by Peter, a title Jesus affirms through his response. Mark 9 begins with the transfiguration and a show of Jesus’ authority over demons when the disciples are failing, again making it clear that there is something different about Jesus. Mark 10 has the weakest Messianic references, yet the Kingdom of God is spoken of with authority (v23, 24) as is the promise of eternal life (v30).
It is only once the disciples have reached a reasonable level of understanding and assurance that Jesus introduces this most difficult of topics. Thus it can be concluded that Jesus is expecting these teachings to be understood in the light of Jesus as Messiah and the scriptures defining the Messianic age. The “anointed one” was the Davidic king who would deliver Israel from bondage and establish an ideal kingdom of justice. While the disciples saw and desired this in their immediate world, and Jesus’ fulfilment was in a universal sense, it was a role and expectation Jesus does take on Himself. One motivator to follow, then, is that Jesus will make all things right and establish his kingdom, although educating the disciples to correctly understand what that meant proved a challenge.

Of importance, one motivator to follow is Jesus’ foreknowledge. While the disciples at the time would have failed to understand and grasp the full ramifications of all Jesus said, once they came through the passion they would have the assurance of knowing that Jesus did know, and had always known. This makes a difference, as Jesus not only knew the future, but was prepared to walk it. The predictions emphasise both the power and the compassion of Jesus. His character of love and motivation to save are clearly seen inviting faith and trust.

The predictions don’t just contain information about events, but also Jesus’ motivation. We are reminded that through the incarnation, serving us and calling us to serve each other (10:43-45), Jesus has Himself identified with us, a most condescending and humble of acts. Surely this would be enough to inspire anyone to follow. Yet we see the theme of “humans” (ἀνθρώποι) in the second prediction, and just how humans responded to the Son of Man who came to give his life for all humanity. With this following an illustration of Jesus’ foreknowledge and understanding it makes one question why He would do so much for those who valued Him so little? Yet He was willing to become a “servant” (διάκονος) and even a “slave” (δοῦλος) in order to “ransom” (λύτρον) all who are willing. This selfless desire to save is certainly motivation for one to follow.

443 e.g., Ps 2, 89, 132; Sam 7; num 24:17; Gen 49:10; Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5-6; 33:17-22.
444 Marcus, Mark 1-8, p104.
445 This challenge continues today. An example of this is the Valuegenesis studies undertaken by the Seventh Day Adventist Church which investigates and tracks changes in the understanding of God, scripture and Christianity among 12-18 year old Seventh Day Adventist youth.
Gain, Barry (ed), Valuegenesis II - A Comparative Study of Faith Development and Values Formation in Seventh-day Adventist Adolescents and Youth aged 12-18 years In Two Generations, (Cooranbong, Aust: South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2012).
Should a hesitation remain, we see Jesus’ brutal response to Peter’s chastisement of Him in Mk 8:33 and his command to resume following. Where in this case Peter was directly working against Jesus and possibly deserved worse, Jesus’ response was still one of salvation and redemption. We see that Jesus reflects the God who disciplines those He loves in order for them to retain life. There is a singular focus on redemption and salvation in all Jesus’ actions.

The Markan Jesus motivates his disciples to follow Him despite massive obstacles and hardship, by demonstrating his character, his single-minded desire to save all who are willing, and the promise of making all things right. They are further reassured that Jesus is Messiah and can establish his kingdom by God transfiguring Jesus, which demonstrated his divinity, and later by Jesus’ foresight as they see and understand the fulfilments of scripture they have failed thus far to see. There is no coercion with rewards or punishments, just a revelation of who Jesus is, his purpose, and his ability to see his purpose through to completion. Jesus then offers the invitation to follow.

446 Prov. 3:12.
Chapter 6. The Temple in the Gospel of Mark

Mark’s gospel is distinct among the Gospels in its few references to the temple.

Where the other gospels all have numerous mentions of the temple spread throughout their gospel narratives, the first mention in Mark is found in chapter 11 with the interruption of the temple function and the cursing of the fig tree. This episode sets the scene for further references during Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, and particularly at his death. Given the significant place of the temple in Jewish religion and thought, and the place God had given it in relating to Him, when it comes to following God it must be considered. Jesus ministered in a Jewish context, and Mark claims Old Testament authority for Jesus, the same Scripture that informed Judaism of his day. As such it shapes the language and imagery of much of Mark’s gospel, and gives insight to the interpretation of it as well.

In this section I will begin by considering the collection of pericopes in chapter 11:11-33. Next, the parable of the tenants will be explored to determine whether the imagery identifies a teaching on the temple, and if so, what that teaching is. We shall then explore the significance of the numerous temple references as part of the passion narrative. We shall conclude by considering the significance of the temple theme in the motivation for one to follow Jesus. Through this section I expect to see a rich illustration of what Jesus’ death has accomplished. It is also expected that Jesus’ teachings on the temple will give an idea of what following Him will look like into the future, including insights into the motivation the reader is given to follow Jesus.

Temple and the Fig Tree

The first mention of the temple in the gospel of Mark is at the conclusion to the triumphal entrance (Mk 11:1-11). Jesus fulfils the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, and the crowds celebrate quoting Psalm 118:26. It is suggested that they are recognising Jesus as King or Son of

447 Mark only has 11 mentions over 5 chapter with all very late in the gospel (Mk 11:11, 15, 16, 27; 12:35; 13:1, 3; 14:49, 58; 15:29, 38) Matthew has 16 mentions in 6 different chapters throughout the gospel (Matt 4:5; 12:5, 6; 21:12, 14, 15, 23; 23:16, 17, 21; 24:1; 26:55, 61; 27:5, 40, 51), Luke 18 mentions over 10 chapters again widely spaced (Lk 1:9, 21, 22; 2:27, 37, 46; 4:9; 18:10; 19:45, 47; 20:1; 21:5, 37, 38; 22:52, 53; 23:45; 24:53) and John 14 over 6 chapters (Jn 2:14,15, 19, 20, 21; 5:15; 7:14, 28; 8:2, 20, 59; 10:23; 11:56;18:20).


449 e.g. 1:2-3; 12:36-37, as well as countless allusions.
David, and possibly even Messiah. Despite massive celebrations leading up to Jesus’ arrival at the temple, the reader could be forgiven for thinking Jesus’ entry into the temple was particularly underwhelming. The crowd no longer features and Jesus simply looks around and leaves. After such a build up one might have expected Jesus’ grand entrance to climax somehow; but it does not. This spectacular “anticlimax” is described by Marcus as the Markan Jesus’ tendency to depart from expectation. The entering of the temple as a triumphant king would likely be considered a major affront to the authority of the Sanhedrin and highly provocative, as it would indicate Jesus’ authority over them. The anticlimax could also be explained as a rejection of Jesus by the leaders of the city. A welcome was the usual practice for celebrities and is even more expected for the King from the line of David or the Messiah. However, the leaders of the city do not come to welcome Jesus as might have been expected, a bold statement of their value of Jesus.

To further this line of thought, Evans speculates that Psalm 118:26 could have led Jesus to expect He would receive a priestly welcome, especially given the Jewish Targum paraphrase of Ps 118:22-28 which is explicitly Davidic, tracing his rejection (the rejected “boy” not “stone”), allusions to sacrificing the boy (v27) and final recognition as king. The entrance of Jesus clearly indicates support from a crowd; however the anticlimactic conclusion indicates that it was not unanimously acclaimed by all in the city, and certainly not by those in authority. However, it is hard to suggest that Jesus expected to be accepted and welcomed as Evans proposes when He was clear about his impending rejection and death. An affront and rejection was more likely expected, but as Jesus indicates in 14:21, the path He

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450 Collins, Mark, p520.
451 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p780.
452 Ibid., p780.
453 France, Mark, p438.
454 Collins, Mark, p521.
455 Evans, Mark, 146.
456 Targum Ps 118:22-28. The child the builders abandoned was among the sons of Jesse; and he was worthy to be appointed king and ruler. 23. “This has come from the presence of the Lord,” said the builders; “it is wonderful before us,” said the sons of Jesse. 24. “This day the Lord has made,” said the builders; “let us rejoice and be glad in it,” said the sons of Jesse. 25. “If it please you, O Lord, redeem us now,” said the builders; “if it please you, O Lord, prosper us now,” said Jesse and his wife. 26. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the word of the Lord,” said the builders; “they will bless you from the sanctuary of the Lord,” said David. 27. “God, the Lord, has given us light,” said the tribes of the house of Judah; “bind the child (or lamb) for a festal sacrifice with chains until you sacrifice him, and sprinkle his blood on the horns of the altar,” said Samuel the prophet. 28. “You are my God, and I will give thanks in your presence; my God, I will praise you,” said David.
457 Collins, Mark, p520.
must walk has already been written, and He willingly walks it. After not being welcomed at
the temple, Jesus looks around and returns to Bethany where He is staying.

Inserted at this point in the story is the last miraculous act of Jesus recorded in Mark’s gospel.
The story of the fig tree and the clearing of the temple are intentionally interwoven to allow
them to interpret each other.\footnote{Evans, \textit{Mark}, p154.} Jesus sees a fig tree in leaf and desires fruit, but none is found
as “it was not the season for figs” (Mark 11:13b). At this Jesus is heard by his disciples to
curse the tree. The idea of a charismatic leader addressing a tree and having the tree respond
is not new in Jewish legend or the Hebrew Scriptures.\footnote{Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p788.} The withered fig tree is used
specifically as an image of eschatological judgement on Israel (Isa 28:3-4; Jer 8:13; Hos 9:10,
16; Joel 1:7, 12; Mic 7:1). This is Mark’s purpose for sandwiching the stories together,
giving a visual illustration of the state in which Jesus found the temple.\footnote{France, \textit{Mark}, p441.} They are further
linked in the description of the fig tree being withered from the roots up, and not one of the
temple’s stones remaining on another (13:2).\footnote{Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p793.} The tree presented full of promise but was
barren, and this too was Jesus’ verdict on the temple.\footnote{See France, \textit{Mark}, p441.}

The story again switches to the temple. Jesus arrives ready from the previous day’s
reconnoitre to deliver a calm, well-considered response to what He saw. The sale of animals
was not an unexpected or unnecessary service (cf. Deut 14:24-26). Nor was the changing of a
range of currencies into the Tyrian coinage required by the temple treasury for the temple
tax.\footnote{Ibid., p443.} The Mount of Olives was at times during history used for this purpose,\footnote{Jeremias, J., \textit{Jerusalem in the time of Jesus} (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1969), p48.} raising
questions not as to the appropriateness of the trade, but the need for it to be within the temple
courts.\footnote{France, \textit{Mark}, p444.} Eppstein makes the novel suggestion that trade was very new to the temple courts
and this was the first time Jesus had been confronted with it. It is suggested to have been
introduced by Caiaphas as spiteful competition to weaken the sympathisers of the recently

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Evans, \textit{Mark}, p154.}
\item \footnote{Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p788.}
\item \footnote{France, \textit{Mark}, p441.}
\item \footnote{Marcus, \textit{Mark 8-16}, p793.}
\item \footnote{See France, \textit{Mark}, p441.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., p443.}
\item \footnote{Jeremias, J., \textit{Jerusalem in the time of Jesus} (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1969), p48.}
\item \footnote{France, \textit{Mark}, p444.}
\end{itemize}
ejected Sanhedrin. However, the thesis is based on assumptions that cannot be proven, and therefore must remain a mere possibility. Mark’s emphasis in his account is consistent with this theory in one sense: the aversion to carrying anything through the temple courts indicates a greater concern with the location than trade as such.

In justification, Jesus quotes two passages, Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. An objection has been raised to Jer 7:11 as ληστής does not refer to dishonest trade or exploitation, but rather to those involved in violent theft. However, it is quoted as rhetoric rather than to document the specific activity Jesus is opposing. The reference to Isa 56:7 points towards acceptance of Yahweh by the gentiles. By linking it with Jer 7:11, Jesus makes a clear statement that the leaders are frustrating the divine plan. Clearly they understood that Jesus’ actions were directed at the ruling priests and temple authorities and not the vendors who Jesus disrupts, as it is the authorities that immediately seek to destroy Him. Despite the power and esteem given the priests and scribes, the crowd were more in awe of Jesus which prevented his immediate arrest. At the very least there was public sympathy which indicates this was not seen as a desire for the temple to be destroyed, or even a prophecy that it would. Jesus’ desire was to have this failing temple turned back to achieve its intended destiny. While there is no question Jesus was acting with redemption in mind (14:58), the illustration of the fig tree was already in progress suggesting that the outcome was already known. Jesus was going to completely rebuild the way people relate to God in order to bring life. This was why Jesus came.

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468 σκέδος – “thing, object used for any purpose at all” BDAG., p927. There is nothing in the context to indicate what is being carried is essential for the temple to function, instead potentially suggesting people are using the court as a short cut.
469 France, Mark, p444.
470 BDAG., p594.
472 Collins, Mark, p531.
473 Collins, Mark, p531.
474 Evans, Mark, p180-181.
475 Ibid., p182.
The next morning the fig tree is withered. The context indicates the fig tree symbolizes God’s judgement on Jerusalem and its temple. It provides an opportunity for the sayings about faith and prayer. “Have faith in God” (v22) is the point Jesus wishes to make, further elaborated in the following verses. Faith will allow “this mountain” (ὁρεί τοῦτο) to be cast into the sea. Given it is “this” mountain there is a question as to which mountain in particular Jesus is speaking about. Three obvious options exist; (1) the statement is proverbial, (2) the Mount of Olives, and (3) the Temple Mount or Mount Zion.

The first suggestion is that the saying is proverbial, much like the camel and needle saying of Mk 10:25. The opposition to the identification of a specific mountain is based on the absence of “mountain” (ὁρος) referring to the Temple or the Mount of Olives in the Old Testament or other texts. Another option is the Mount of Olives on which the fig tree likely stood. This suggestion is based on Zechariah’s prophecy about the splitting and moving of the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). The most likely option, given the context, is the Temple Mount. While the gospels do not speak of the temple mount as “this mountain,” Zech 4:7 describes it as a “great mountain,” while Isa 2:2 and Mic 4:1 speak of “the mountain of the Lord’s house.” Rabbinic tradition also refers to the temple mount as “this mountain” (e.g., b. Pesah 87b; b. Git. 56b). There is clear assurance in this statement of the power of faith and prayer, but there is again a clear indication of the judgement on and destruction of the temple which supposedly has failed to produce faith and is not the “house of prayer for the nations” as it was intended to be.

We shall briefly consider the motivation touched upon in this passage. An immediate conclusion is that a failure to fulfil God’s spiritual mandate will result in strong action from Jesus. This is seen harshly in the case of the fig tree, and implied eschatologically in the clearing of the temple. Jesus’ purpose in clearing the temple was to remind them that the purpose of the temple was to bring all people to God. A house of prayer is a place of

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476 France, Mark, p448.
477 Collins, Mark, p531; France, Mark, p448.
478 France, Mark, p449.
479 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p785.
480 Carroll, J. and Green, J., Death, p32; Marcus, Mark 8-16, p785; Evans, Mark, p188.
connection with God. Instead they are encountering noise, congestion, and probably exploitation. It also brings to mind the words of Malachi in 1:10 where God is portrayed pleading that someone would shut the doors to the temple and stop all the false sincerity and hypocrisy. We again see in Jesus’ actions an indication that God would sooner have no temple than one that is a negative influence or worse, causing a “little one to stumble” (9:42).

The implication of the withering of the fig tree is the destruction of the temple system. What has failed to intercede for the nations (11:17) will be removed, and Jesus will provide another means for his disciples. They will be heard and answered by God (v24) as long as they are connected to and shaped by Christ (cf. v25). While Jesus doesn’t articulate the “temple not built by human hands” (14:58) as the church of living stones built on the stone the builders have rejected (1 Pet 2:4-9, cf. Ps 118:22), He does give the assurance they will have access to God nonetheless. This is based in part on the Psalm just attributed to Jesus (Ps 118:19-27 with 118:26 given in Mk 11:9) in which the rejected cornerstone is exalted, which is seen as marvellous (Ps 118:22). The Psalm also includes the idea that through this exaltation God has made his light shine on them. In this section Jesus is seen making a way to God for the nations, and breaking down the obstacles to knowing Him. Somehow, in Jesus, God will shine on the nations and bring intercession for his people even when his people fail to fulfil their spiritual role.

**The Parable of the Tenants**

Following soon after the clearing of the temple and the fig tree illustration we find the parable of the tenants. Between the two we find the authorities challenging Jesus, who is teaching in the temple courts, as to his authority to do such things (i.e. interrupt temple function and trade). The parable begins with the introduction “Jesus then began to speak to them in parables” (12:1), where the antecedent of “them” (αὐτοῖς) is the very same chief priests, scribes and elders.\(^{482}\) Thus this parable is directed at them (cf. 12:12).

\(^{482}\) Collins, *Mark*, p544.
The result of the parable is a desire to arrest Jesus which is again halted by fear of the crowds. The question is, other than just the context, is this parable relevant to the temple? The setting is the temple courts (11:27). The biblical context alluded to is Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1-7) which “provides a specific interpretive orientation.” The song points to an unfaithful and condemned Israel. Further, regular attendees of the synagogue would have understood that the “tower” represents the temple and the “wine vat” represents the altar, as these are clarified by the Isaiah Targum (Isa 5:1-7). Therefore “the villains of the parable would then be easily identified as the ruling priests.” It is reasonable to see the temple or at least the temple’s role and function in Israel referred to in this parable, given the location, the primary audience, the symbolism and conclusion of Ps 118:22-23.

The parable reflects Israel whom God established, but who rebelled. The servants and their mistreatment reflect the many prophets God sent to his people. The audience would likely have been surprised at the patience of the land owner, and perplexed that he would send his son after such treatment of servants who come in the land owner’s name and with his authority. The tenants are motivated by the desire to steal another’s inheritance. This brings to mind the theme of inheritance and with it the story of Naboth’s vineyard, which Naboth refused to sell to King Ahab because of his honour of the Lord and his forefathers (cf. 1 Kg 21). Given this image, not only are the chief priests, scribes and elders painted as rebellious against God and coming under judgement, but Jesus implies they are comparable to King Ahab who earned the unenviable description that “There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord” (1 Kg 21:25a). Of note in this case, when Elijah found King Ahab and prophesied his demise he “tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly” (1 Kg 21:27). Perhaps Jesus is confronting them with their sin and giving them a model of the correct response, as opposed to simply being vengeful, which has been noted by some.

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486 Evans, Mark, p234.
Yet Jesus knows the fate of the son who they kill and throw out of the vineyard. He rhetorically asks what the land owner will do. It is suggested that, while rhetorical, the answer may not have been given by Jesus but by the crowd. The answer is the same either way, they will be destroyed and the vineyard will be given to others more faithful.

To conclude the parable Jesus quotes Ps 118:22-23 again, linking this event with the triumphant entrance (11:9). He was not accepted on arrival by the chief priests, scribes and elders who are portrayed as the tenants, and He is not accepted now. They see Him as a stone to be rejected (ἀποδοκιμάζω), after careful scrutiny to declare it useless, unfit and unworthy. Instead the vineyard will be given to others, and that which they declared useless will become the most important stone.

The rejected stone becomes the most important stone in the new temple, a reference some early Christians interpreted as Christ’s foundation through his death and resurrection of a sanctuary of “living stones,” that is, the Christian community. This is amazing both in positive and negative ways. It results in joy for the crowd who revere Jesus and whose favour is protecting Him. But for the chief priests, scribes and elders with whom Jesus is currently in a tense dialogue, there is astonishment that Jesus would have the audacity to predict their demise. Their response is predictable given their previous behaviour; they plot to arrest Jesus.

Again we must stop and consider motivation in our brief survey of this parable. Marcus notes that this parable answers the question of the chief priests, scribes and elders in 11:28: “By what authority are you doing these things? ... And who gave you authority to do this?” The answer the question of Jesus’ authority is that it is not from human beings but from God Himself. Through Jesus’ references to scripture He has again pointed to the failings of Israel, and through his clearing of the temple He has challenged the way they understand and

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488 Ibid., p236.
489 BDAG., p110.
491 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p815.
492 Ibid., p815.
honour God. Everything about the way the ruling religious leaders are acting was being challenged.

The question then must be asked, what was Jesus trying to achieve? The religious leaders continue to alienate themselves from God, something Jesus is trying to highlight, so they too can be part of the kingdom of God. In this parable we don’t see Jesus giving up on the religious leaders and leaving them to be destroyed. Instead, as illustrated by the owner of the vineyard, God sent his son to give those very religious leaders, and all humanity, every opportunity to acknowledge and honour Him. Here Jesus, the faithful Son, is fighting for the salvation of his enemies. Surely this would give great motivation to follow God, the God who loves and pursues the very people conspiring to destroy his Son. As we know that God does not change (Mal 3:6), this should motivate all people too, that the love of God and his desire to save extends to the worst, so it surely extends to them as well.

Further, we see the assurance that evil will not remain. Those creating the worst in this world will be held accountable, and the truth of God will reign. There is hope for a renewed world, clear access to God, and things will be set right. Obviously this is negative motivation for those creating wrong in this world, which is presented as “just rewards.” This is neither new nor emphasised. It forms more the natural flow of the narrative and a statement of fact rather than rhetoric. The emphasis is on those the land owner sends, and particularly the son He loves, who is elevated to the highest place.

The Temple in the Passion Narrative
At Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin (14:53-65) we encounter another temple reference deemed important enough by Mark to repeat during the crucifixion narrative. Some unidentified individuals (τινες) stand up and give false testimony (ψευδομαρτυρέω). Their claim is Jesus said; “I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands” (14:58). Mark is quick to point out that their testimony did not agree (v59), totally discrediting them and their accusation (cf. Deut 19:15).

493 Ibid., p815.
494 BDAG., p1007. Notes the meaning as “somebody” or “anybody.”
495 BDAG., p1097.
It is argued that Jesus did in fact say this or something like it.\(^{496}\) Certainly the prophecy of Mark 13:2 comes to mind although it does not include the rebuilding, and the parables of the fig tree and the tenants also foresee the destruction of the temple. However the prophecy of Mark 13:2 is in the “divine passive” voice (οὐ μὴ ἀφεθῇ and οὐ μὴ καταλυθῇ) as opposed to the allegation of Mark 14:58 where Jesus is the centre of the action of destruction and reconstruction (Ἐγὼ καταλύσω ... ὑκοδομήσω).\(^{497}\) Other points of interest include a change of wording; ναὸς or temple structure in 14:58\(^{498}\) as opposed to the previously used ἱερον which included the whole temple precinct.\(^{499}\) The change of words distances the accusation from Jesus in the mind of the reader as all Jesus’ prophecies have been worded differently from 14:58.\(^{500}\) Also of interest are the descriptors χειροποίητος (“made by human hands”)\(^{501}\) and ἀχειροποίητος (“not made by human hands,” “transcendent”).\(^{502}\) This reference to the temple would have been particularly offensive as it hints at idolatry (cf. LXX Lev 26:1, Isa 2:18; 10:11; 19:1, etc).\(^{503}\)

The final point of contention is the impossibility of the time frame to rebuild which would have to depend on miraculous power. Given the divine origin of the temple to be replaced, Jesus is at best claiming equality with God, at worse enlisting demonic powers.\(^{504}\) This amounts to blasphemy. At the end of the day, the very mention of threats to the temple could result in execution\(^{505}\) and was enough to land Jesus in serious danger.\(^{506}\)

It is to be noted that while the accusation is labelled false, the irony of Mark’s authorship presents truth coming from those who do not know or understand they are in fact speaking the truth, including about Jesus’ kingship and messianic status.\(^{507}\) Mark’s Christian audience

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\(^{496}\) Evans, *Mark*, p445.

\(^{497}\) Collins, *Mark*, p701.

\(^{498}\) BDAG., p665.

\(^{499}\) BDAG., p470.

\(^{500}\) France, *Mark*, p606.

\(^{501}\) BDAG., p1083.

\(^{502}\) BDAG., p159-160.

\(^{503}\) Evans, *Mark*, p446.

\(^{504}\) Collins, *Mark*, p702.


\(^{506}\) Evans, *Mark*, p446-447.

would know or foresee the destruction of the temple and view the Christian community as the eschatological temple. They also know that Jesus will rise again after three days. In this sense, Mark regards this charge as theologically significant despite stigmatising it, thus incorporating it into his theme of irony which allows truth to come from the ignorant.

While Mark suggests the final charge against Jesus related to his acknowledgement of his Messiahship and divine status (14:62), the charge that persists is the allegation that He will destroy and rebuild the temple. Jesus is crucified.

In Mark 15:29 we see the second reference to the temple during the passion narrative. The ignorant masses mock Jesus, indicating the popular support He has gained over the last week has evaporated. The idea that Jesus might be a threat to the temple is enhanced by the visual association of being crucified between two violent thieves (λῃστάς). The chief priests and scribes also mock Jesus calling Him to come down “that we may see and believe,” recalling Mark 4:12 and their inability to see. Despite their acknowledgement that “He saved others,” they still mock Him because “He can’t save Himself.” The charge the people remember is the claim to destroy the temple, a theme Mark seems keen to hold in the front of the audience’s mind throughout the crucifixion.

With the death of Jesus comes the final reference to the temple. At Jesus’ death, “the curtain of the temple (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ) was torn in two from top to bottom” (15:38). This is unfortunately ambiguous as there were two curtains in the temple, one outside the main entrance and the other separating the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. There are sound arguments that the torn curtain could be either of these, and a differing emphasis concluded dependent on the curtain assumed. Arguments considered are the richness of the

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508 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p1014.
509 France, Mark, p605.
510 Juel, Messianic, p94, 97.
511 France, Mark, p647.
512 France, Mark, p605.
513 BDAG., p594.
514 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p1052.
515 Collins, Mark, p759.
symbolism and the public nature of the event. The author of Hebrews interprets the event as involving the inner curtain, hence the rich theology, but France argues we cannot assume Mark shared the theological symbolism. After the accusations and mocking of Jesus based around the temple, he sees it most likely the more public outer curtain would have been torn as an act of “divine vandalism” that rebuts the chief priests and scribes, and lets them know their time is over. However, did the author of Mark and the author of Hebrews choose a symbol that fitted with their theology, or did they take an event and look to understand the implications of that event? In that case, would not the event dictate the choice of curtain and therefore be consistent across authors?

Evans too suggests it is the outer veil that is torn. His argument links the scene of Jesus’ death (15:38) and baptism (1:10). The heavens are described as being torn (σχίζων) at Jesus’ baptism, and the outer veil of the temple was described as a “panorama of the heavens” (J.W. 5.5.4) that was also torn (σχίζων). Evans suggests that “just as the descent of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism tore the heavens, so now the loud exhalation of Jesus’ spirit has torn the veil of the temple.” However, the use of “torn” (σχίζων) at Jesus’ baptism “does not imply that the dove split the heavens” but rather evokes Isa 63:19b LXX and Ezek 1:1. It was a textual link to emphasise the desire of God for self-revelation. As with France’s view, this is a clear sign to those who mocked Jesus that He is in fact Messiah. Yet the idea of a divine sign to those who mock Jesus saying “come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (15:32) is most perplexing. It recalls Mk 8:11-12 and the demand of the Pharisees for a sign. With clear frustration Jesus, responds “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it” (8:12). I would argue that the tearing of the veil was not from a supernaturally huge exhalation by Jesus, and that it was not the outer curtain that was torn as that would constitute a bold sign. It seems far more likely God is providing self-revelation (see below) rather than a sign in this event, and therefore the inner curtain would be a better suggestion.

516 France, Mark, p656.
517 Ibid., p656-657.
518 Ibid., p657.
519 Thackeray, Josephus J. W. 5.5.4, p265.
520 Evans, Mark, p509.
521 Ibid., p509.
522 Collins, Mark, p148.
Marcus favours the interpretation of the inner veil being torn. He acknowledges the link between the baptism and death of Jesus with the word association, and the symbolism of the outer veil being torn with its astronomical image. However, he notes the key feature of the baptism isn’t the tearing of the heavens but that they divide in order for the spirit to emerge from behind them in a revelatory act. While the tearing of the outer veil has pleasing symbolism and symmetry, the tearing of the inner veil allows for the same purpose, the revelation of God.

The ναός is described by Marcus as most often being the inner shrine of the temple, although he acknowledges it can also refer to the whole structure. The veil of the temple (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ) was familiar to both Jewish and pagan readers since both the Jewish temple and Hellenistic temples curtained the deity from sight, and should the veil be removed this was described as an act of revelation (Apuleius Metamorphoses 11.20; Ovid Fasti 2.563). The result of these considerations leads Marcus to conclude that while judgement and prophecies of destruction are evident in the tearing of the veil, the primary purpose is the act of divine revelation and the joy of the free access to the presence of God for all.

The outer veil of the temple, as noted above, depicted a scene of the entire heavens or sky (J.W. 5.5.4). This veil is described by Josephus and is the basis (along with the word σχίζω) for the link with the baptism of Jesus and thus the choice of veil which is torn. Interestingly, Josephus describes that the Holy of Holies “is, as it were, a Heaven peculiar to God; but the space of the twenty cubits, is, as it were, the sea and land, on which men live.” (Ant. 3.6.4). If the choice of curtains was a link between the baptism and the cross through the symbolism of the heavens being torn, the inner curtain far better affords this imagery. Again, God is breaking out of the area identified with heaven to break into the realm of humans. The significance relates to the understanding and significance of the individual sections of the temple rather than simply the illustration on the outer curtain. It is then

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523 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p1057.
524 Ibid., p1057.
525 Ibid., p1056 - heiron is used by Mark for 11:11, 15, 16, 27; 12:35; 13:1, 3; 14:49. naos is used in the accusation of the destruction of the temple (15:29, 38) and in the context of the curtain being torn.
526 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p1057.
527 Ibid., p1067.
528 Thackeray, Josephus J. W. 5.5.4, p265.
529 Thackeray, Josephus Ant. 3.6.4, p375.
consistent with the idea of the revelation of God being the primary purpose. This, after much discussion and argument, is Collins conclusion. “The death of Jesus on the cross is accompanied by a real, but ambiguous and mysterious, theophany, which suggests that the will of God is fulfilled in the apparently shameful death of Jesus on the cross.”

Again we ask the question of motivation. What is presented as motivation to follow Jesus in the temple imagery of the passion? Certainly we see judgement and the removal of power from those who mis-used it. We are reminded that God is ultimately in control by the various ways the temple is described as being under threat. The accusation that Jesus would destroy the temple was in a sense blasphemy, and even He had indicated that it was God who determines its fate (13:2). We see the passion people had for their systems and power basis, to the exclusion of God, in the way that the only charge remembered related to the temple, but that God will still overcome. Most importantly, we see that the purpose of Jesus’ death was to bring a new, clearer, and more accessible revelation of God to all people, both Jews and the nations. It is this desire, to the detriment of his own Son, which shows us the love God has for us, and invites us to both know and follow. The motivation the Markan Jesus presents to follow Him is his passion to be known and understood so that humanity can freely access and choose to live in relationship with Him, even when it cost Jesus his life.

**Motivation in the Temple Theme**

To conclude, we shall consider what the wider temple theme reveals about the motivation Jesus intended for those who follow Him. The temple image communicates some of the accomplishments of the cross. God will be seen, understood and known by humanity, a fact seen in the tearing of the veil, and in the removal of the vineyard from the unfaithful tenants to entrust it to those more faithful. God wants to be known, and is actively working to that end. God is revealing Himself and breaking into the world, and through Jesus He has made Himself present and able to be known regardless of how faithful his people are.

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The fig tree and clearing of the temple showed a very similar message, with a clear picture of access to God Himself without the need of the human system and intercession. Rather, “have faith in God” (11:22) and humans can bypass the need for such systems. Those things that have stood in opposition are no longer a barrier to God. Mark reminds the reader that Jesus too was rejected, but became the most important and beautiful stone. He again reminds his audience that in what looks like the greatest defeat, God is in control. God is reaching out to this world, and if He is allowed, He will reveal Himself and freely give the life He desires for all humanity. It is life in the presence of God without religious or other barriers. This is what is promised if one would choose to follow - the personal knowledge and presence of God.
Chapter 7. The Way of the Cross

“The death of Jesus broods over the entire Gospel [of Mark].” Early in the narrative the purpose and fate of Jesus is alluded to (3:6), and as Jesus continues to go on the way, the Cross grows clearer and clearer. The theme is central to the gospel such that no study of the Gospel of Mark could be considered complete without discussing it. It is here where we conclude our study into the motivation to follow Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Mark.

The theme of the Cross stands as the destination along “the way” (ὁ δός) on which Jesus must journey. The themes are so closely tied that we shall consider them together. Our study will begin by considering “the way” Jesus single-mindedly pursues. On the way Mark progressively reveals more of Jesus’ identity. Mark’s purpose in withholding and revealing aspects of Jesus’ identity will next be explored, along with the revelation that comes through the cross. Lastly we will examine the impact of the Cross on discipleship, the act of following. We will conclude by considering the motivation presented to follow through the theme of “the way” and the Cross.

The Way
The narrative in the Gospel of Mark is presented as a journey, with Jesus journeying on “the way.” His pursuit of “the way” is focused to the point of being single-minded. In exploring this theme, three questions must be asked; (1) whose way is Jesus following, (2) why is the way filled with obstacles, and (3) what motivation is presented through this theme?

The way as God’s way

“The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ” (1:1) both opens and summarises the gospel of Mark. We are immediately confronted with both “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον), originally a reward for good news which came to simply mean “good news,” and “Christ”

532 France, Mark, p411,412.
533 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p145.
534 BDAG., p402.
(Χριστός), the anointed fullfiller of Israelite expectation of deliverance, or Messiah. This is no ordinary story. The opening sentence informs us that the coming of this Jesus is a very good thing, well worth our knowing, and that it is a work of God. After this introductory summary, Mark introduces the theme of “the way” by quoting Isaiah 40:3 and a combination of Malachi 3:1 (LXX) and Exodus 23:20 (LXX). God’s promise is to send a messenger to prepare “your way” (ὁ δόν σου), a voice crying out “prepare the way of the Lord” (ὁ δὸν Κυρίου). The passage in Exodus 23:20a (LXX) states “And behold, I send my messenger before your face, that he may guard you in the way” (Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ἵνα φυλάξῃ σε ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) and Malachi 3:1a (LXX) states “Behold I send out my messenger and he shall prepare the way before my face” (ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐξαποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου, καὶ ἐπιβλέψεται ὁδὸν πρὸ προσώπου μου). It is worth noting that in this blending Mark has changed Malachi’s wording of “my way” (προσώπου μου) to “your way” (ὁ δόν σου). Marcus argues for a distinction between “your way” (1:2) and “the way of the Lord” (1:3) based on the subordination of Jesus to God (10:18, 40; 13:32; 14:36; 15:34) and Mark’s maintenance of the distinction between “your way” (1:2) and “the way of the Lord” (1:3). Yet Mark’s alteration of Malachi 3:1 indicates that he considers Jesus’ way and God’s way are synonymous. This is a way prepared by God, an idea echoed through Mark 8:27-10:52 with Jesus “on the way” to Jerusalem to fulfil his divine purpose (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52).

Mark is clear this theme originates with Isaiah, with a quote from Isaiah 40:3. One of the themes Isaiah addresses through Isa 40-55 is the New Exodus of God’s people from Babylonian bondage. Through these passages Isaiah revisits the powerful deliverance of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt (e.g., 43:16-19) with the assurance that God is doing something new and great. Where in Isa 40:3 the way is prepared for the Lord, in Isa 42:16; 43:16–19; and 49:11, 12 the way is prepared by God for His people. This is not a conflict, because God has always travelled with his people (e.g., Ex 25:8; 29:45-46; 40:34-38, etc). The way was the salvation God was bringing to his people, and would bring again. Mark reintroduces this theme of the way in which God prepares to bring his people to salvation. However, this time it isn’t a way through the waters of the Red Sea (Isa 43:16) or rescue from

535 BDAG., p1091.
537 Carroll and Green, Death, p28.
Babylon (Isa 43:14). This salvation is focused around God’s servant (Isa 42:1-9; 52:13-53:12), the suffering servant who will bring salvation to all humanity (Isa 55:1; 56:1-8). It is the way of salvation that Jesus so tenaciously journeys, the way to life through his death (10:45).

“The way” Jesus journeys is expressed both as a physical way (ending at Jerusalem) and as the fulfilment of his divine commission, received at his baptism (1:9-11) and clarified through “wilderness experiences” and prayer (1:12-13, 35-39; 6:30-46; 14:32-42). Mark’s record of Jesus portrays Him as almost driven to his destination, where He will fulfil God’s purpose. The theme in Mark is most thoroughly developed by the repeated use of ὁ δός, meaning “an established way or course” (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52). Along the way, Jesus prepares his disciples by outlining what they are to expect (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). This serves to give meaning and purpose to the journey. Jesus understood that his death would achieve God’s redemptive purpose, even though the disciples and the audience have yet to discover this, and therefore his death is the will of God. Jesus goes on to make it clear to all in 10:45; Jesus’ mission is to win salvation for humanity, to refuse to save his life in order to save the lives of others.

We could express this idea in Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him” (Mk 14:21a). Mark uses scripture to testify that these events are the will of God, and that it is God’s way that Jesus is travelling. Scripture provides a way to interpret and understand these events. Examples of this are the words “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mk 15:34 = Ps 22:1 [LXX 21:2]), giving the words of Ps 22 and its prophecies of Jesus’ death (Ps 22:6-8, 14-18) to interpret his feeling of abandonment. This psalm not only shows Jesus’ death as the fulfilment of scripture and as God’s will, but provides a statement of trust in God by Jesus (Ps 22:22-24). Images from this psalm include

539 Carroll, J. and Green, J., Death, p27.  
540 Ibid., p28.  
541 BDAG., p691  
542 Carroll and Green, Death, p28.  
543 BDAG., p214.  
545 Carroll and Green, Death, p28.  
546 Juel, Messianic, p95.
the dividing up of his clothes and casting lots (Mk 15:24 = Ps 22:18 [LXX 21:19]), and the
insults and head shaking of those passing by (Mk 15:29 = Ps 22:7). Scripture is used to
“construct a framework within which to make sense of Jesus’ death – and to offer testimony
that his death was ‘in accordance with the scriptures.’”547 Thus we again see the author
indicating that Jesus is travelling an appointed way, prophesied in scripture, commissioned by
God, and led by the Spirit as God’s servant to bring salvation.

Forebodings along the Way

From the outset of the narrative there are indications that things won’t happen as one might
expect. Jesus is introduced as Messiah and Son of God548 (1:1), the One who will baptize
with the Holy Spirit (1:8), who God openly declares is his dearly loved Son (1:11), and who
enters the desert to overcome the devil’s temptations before being attended to by angels
(1:13). This opening section sets very high expectations. Truly, this is “good news!” The
crowds see it too, praising Jesus’ teaching which has authority never previously experienced
(1:27). It is something they have never seen before (1:28), to the point Jesus could not openly
enter a town because of crowds (1:45). By the end of the first chapter, a first time reader
could well be confused, wondering why this man has not taken the throne of one, or many
countries.

In 3:6 is reported the first open trouble, with Pharisees and Herodians conspiring together
against Jesus. Yet there are earlier hints of conflict with John’s arrest (1:14) and suggestions
that Jesus too will be taken away (2:18-20). The trouble in 3:6 is the end of a longer
progression, beginning with the scribes “questioning in their hearts” (2:6-7), then questioning
the disciples’ behaviour (2:16), entering into open confrontation with Jesus (2:18, 24) and
finally attempting to find an accusation against Jesus (3:2). By 3:6 the Pharisees and
Herodians are looking to kill Jesus, a very clear expression of the passion Jesus provoked in
people for good or bad.

547 Juel, Messianic, p96.
548 Regarding the title “Son of God and its authenticity see footnote 68, p21.
The theme is again introduced in Mark 6:4, where the rejected Jesus identifies himself as a prophet, pre-empting a similar fate. This is particularly ominous given the beheading of John the Baptist (6:14-29) who himself was a prophet and the one who prepared the way for Jesus. While they are subtle indications of Jesus’ impending death, these controversies are heard more loudly in their context due to the contrast with the overwhelming success and popularity of Jesus’ ministry.

Renewed conflict with the Pharisees (7:1-23; 8:11-13) leads into a time of teaching alone with his disciples (8:27-10:52). As Jesus is teaching his disciples and not being faced by his opponents, one might expect a reprieve in the forebodings of impending death, yet this is where the loudest predictions of Jesus’ death are heard. It is here, on “the way” (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52) that Jesus makes clear to his disciples that He must suffer and die, but rise again (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In each case the disciples show a lack of understanding and support for Jesus’ divine mission; rather they are people of the same generation as the Pharisees (8:14-21). On arrival at Jerusalem the conflict escalates (11:18; 12:12), but the popular success of his ministry prevents any plots eventuating (11:18; 12:12; 14:1). The conflict climaxes as Judas betrays Jesus (14:1), and the Passion begins.

For Jesus’ entire journey there is opposition, conflict and betrayal. Yet there are the constant reminders that Jesus’ way is God’s way; the gospel is proclaimed (e.g., 1:14), evil spirits obey (e.g., 1:26), the sick are healed (e.g., 1:34) and the disciples slowly gain the odd insight (8:29). Further, God breaks into the situation and declares Jesus as his son, twice (1:11; 9:7). This assures the reader that despite the conflict and opposition, Jesus is God’s appointed Messiah, Jesus is deeply loved, and Jesus is still journeying on the right way. Despite all that people can do against Jesus, the divine agency of the eventual outcome is stressed.

549 Carroll, and Green, Death, p24.
550 Ibid., p25.
551 Ibid., P27.
What motivation is presented to follow from “the way” and its obstacles?

Before we can determine what motivation is presented to follow we must consider one essential question: why did Jesus journey on “the way?” To be motivated by an act requires, at least in part, for one to be inspired not only by the act but the reason and motive behind it. One may follow a leader to certain death for sufficient reason, whereas out of integrity another may be shunned despite easy gain. What was Jesus’ reason to face suffering and death?

One suggestion is that “the goal for Jesus was not suffering; rather it was obedience to God and serving one another.”\textsuperscript{553} While Mark speaks of Jesus being obedient to God (e.g., 14:36), it is not a point that he emphasises. Service on the other hand is a clear teaching (9:35; 10:45). Another suggests the key focus is sacrificial; the renewal of the Sinai covenant on the one hand, and a sin offering that expiates the sins of many on the other.\textsuperscript{554} This is based on the Markan idea “to pour out blood” (14:24) and its Levitical links with expiating sin (Lev 4:7, 18, 20, 25). Others focus on the ransom image and freedom from the enemies of God.\textsuperscript{555} A very important emphasis to make is that first and foremost, the death of Jesus “does not cancel the meaning of his life – that the reign of God has begun and that God has come near his people.”\textsuperscript{556} All these suggestions point to a similar purpose, that Jesus was looking to provide forgiveness and a way to return humanity to citizenship in the kingdom of God.

With this in mind, Jesus’ choice to follow “the way” is spectacular. He not only endured opposition, but ultimately journeyed to the cross with the clear knowledge that on it He would die “for many” (10:45). If this theme is to motivate, it must be by the love of the one who would give so much. Mark is quite intentional in the parable of the tenants to note the love the Father had for his Son (12:6), a sentiment repeated in declarations at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration (1:11; 9:7). While Mark never specifically tells his audience that Jesus died out of love for them, for God to give One He loves for their forgiveness makes a bold statement. The motivation we see in Jesus’ willingness, more, his single-minded pursuit of

\textsuperscript{553} Pruitt, “Meaning,” p368-369.
\textsuperscript{554} Collins, “Interpretation,” p550.
\textsuperscript{555} Dowd, and Malbon, “Significance,” p297.
\textsuperscript{556} Ibid., p296.
“the way” God prepared for Him to bring salvation to the world motivates us because of his love for us, and invites us to reciprocate that love.

As noted above, we also see the entrance of the kingdom of God and are given hope that it is taking hold and growing. With this is the promise of things made new (13:26-27). While there is no illusion that it will be an easy way, the kingdom of God is seen breaking into our world, something presented by Mark as very desirable.

**Identity**

“Who then is this?” ask the disciples (4:41). This question looms over the entirety of Mark’s plot. The way in which Mark develops and resolves this question, and Mark’s purpose in using it, will be considered in this section. We shall begin with an overview of the theme’s development. The ambiguity of Jesus’ identity retained throughout the narrative will be considered, and the author’s purpose determined. Lastly we shall consider what we can discover from this theme as a motivation to follow Jesus.

At the outset, Mark informs the reader of Jesus’ identity from three authoritative positions. From his omniscient position as narrator Mark tells us that Jesus is both Messiah and the Son of God (1:1), privileging his audience with the truth about Jesus’ identity. We are also given John the Baptist’s understanding of Jesus’ identity as a prophet of God. John describes Jesus as the “more powerful or mightier one” (ἰσχυρός) who will baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:8), indicating that Jesus will mediate God’s eschatological salvation. Lastly, we hear who God sees Jesus as: his dearly loved Son (1:11).

Narrative criticism of scripture has given us confidence in taking the narrator’s perspective as being “always reliable,” and God’s view as normative for truth. Thus we can take great confidence from these revelations. To complete the initial revelation of Jesus’ identity the audience is given an insight into the

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559 BDAG., p483.
560 Kingsbury, “Significance,” p371. The role of pouring out the spirit was one attributed to God’s work in the eschaton (Ezek 39:29; Joel 2:28-29). By attributing this to Jesus, John is acknowledging Him as Messiah and the One who would usher in the Messianic age.
temptation in the wilderness where Jesus is stronger than the temptations of satan (1:12-13) before receiving angelic aid. At the outset Mark informs his audience that Jesus is the Son of God, a fact that is unknown and not witnessed to by human characters until the cross (see 15:39).562

The next section of Mark’s narrative describes Jesus’ Galilean ministry. During this section there are insights into who Jesus is seen to be, both by humans and by the supernatural. The demons know that Jesus is the Son of God and proclaim it boldly until they are silenced (Mk 3:11-12; 5:7). Among humans, Jesus’ fame grows (6:14). Mark 1:27 tells of their awe and wonder at what Jesus says and does, clearly implying that their actual question is “who is this?”563 The “who” questions continue; who dares to forgive sin (2:7), who can command the wind and seas (4:41), isn’t this the carpenter (6:3)? The section finishes with speculation as to who this might be; perhaps John the Baptist returned to life, or Elijah, or a prophet like those of old (6:14-16). These questions build the theme by heightening the curiosity of the characters in the story, and the audience.

As Jesus now heads for Jerusalem and crucifixion, the questions and speculations become more specific. The perception of the public is again questioned and contrasted with the disciples’ understanding; Jesus is Messiah (8:27-30). Where the disciples have a better understanding of who Jesus is, this is shown as insufficient as it is not a title Jesus ever uses to describe Himself,564 and one He allows only when properly nuanced.565 The disciples only understand to a point, because who they believe Messiah to be is completely inconsistent with who Jesus as Messiah actually is, as his kingdom does not come with earthly glory or power.

564 It is important to note 14:61-62. Here Jesus affirms the words of the high priest who asks by stating the preposition (ἐπηρώτα αὐτῷ καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ), effectively “So you are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” It is argued that Jesus’ response is “You have said I am” confirming them yet maintaining the Messianic Secret Mark has spent all gospel developing, which can only be revealed at the cross. This response is far more in line with Jesus response to Pilate (15:2). For discussion on the original texts, consistency of the response with other contemporary authors and the consistency with Jesus’ tendency for obscure responses see Marcus, Mark 8-16, p1005-1006, 1015-1016.
565 Carroll, and Green, Death, p29.
As Jesus gets closer to the Cross He twice allows the title of Son of David (10:46-52; 11:8-10). This comes with expectations of healing and kingship, likely stemming from the connection of this title to that of Messiah (12:35). But again this title is insufficient, as demonstrated when Jesus challenges the common perception of this title in 12:35-37. The question, which Mark likely intends as rhetoric for his audience, is “how can the Son of David be both less than David and more than David?”566 Obviously as David’s descendant He is less, but He is more because He is not only the Son of David, but also Lord. Mark has taken the extraordinary measure, despite his very efficient language, of quoting more of Ps 110:1 LXX than is needed to make his apparent point.567 Mark’s point is more than simply a challenge to the perception of Messianic expectation, but a statement of co-regency, as the Lord is not just the Son of David but more importantly, the Son of God.568 That Jesus is the Son of God is the primary point Mark is looking to reinforce for his audience, and this defines every other way of knowing and understanding Jesus.

The final stage in the revelation of Jesus’ identity comes on the Cross. “For the first time in Mark’s story, a human being other than Jesus Himself publicly and correctly understands Jesus’ identity in the same way as both God and Mark as narrator: Jesus is the Son of God.”569 The Cross does not provide proof of anything, but it is offered by Mark as evidence that Jesus is the Son of God (15:39).570 It was the cross and the manner in which Jesus died that allowed the centurion to see and understand Jesus as the Son of God. This makes it emphatically clear that for Mark, Jesus cannot be understood without the Passion.571 It is only through this retrospective lens that the human characters in this narrative, and the audience, can truly see and understand the question of Jesus’ identity.572

567 Marcus, Mark 8-16, p850.
568 Ibid., p850-851.
571 Carroll, and Green, Death, p29.
Mark uses the question of identity to challenge the perceptions of his audience. Like the human characters, there are a lot of theories and ideas about who Jesus is, and what Jesus’ purpose should be. Regardless, there is an absolute truth, known by God, and seen and understood by the supernatural beings. Jesus’ revelation is about humanity coming to see, know and understand Jesus as He is, not as they would make Him. Jesus is the divinely commissioned Messiah of God, the Son of God come to summons Israel into God’s eschatological rule, to teach and reveal the truth of God, and to accomplish salvation for all humanity. Although at the outset the audience were privileged to know that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God (1:1, 11), it is only at the Cross that the audience can understand what it means for Jesus to be Messiah, the Son of God.

When we turn our attention to motivation, we must begin, as Mark has, with the recognition that Jesus is seen in many different ways. From among the crowd in Mark’s narrative can be heard who Jesus might be, yet they did not see or understand. Then and now the work of religion can cause good, and bad, both of which can shape the perception of the reader. But Mark would have the reader withhold judgement and conclusion of who Jesus is until the Cross has been seen. There Jesus is seen as the Son of God who has come to serve humanity. The Son of God giving himself as a ransom for humanity is clearly displayed. Through the Cross Jesus endured betrayal, rejection and humiliation of scandalous proportions. Thus on the Cross the reader sees Jesus as God’s Son, displaying his desire for humanity’s salvation with his humility clearly displayed. For Jesus to condescend so far is clearly a great act of love.

Further, through the Cross the character of the Son of God is revealed. Jesus is not just the “mighty one” (1:8). If Jesus is merely more powerful than us, then a motivation of reward and punishment, or at least fear, would be a very real consideration. Rather, Jesus’ character is one of love, service and humility (10:45), while also being powerful and refusing to allow evil or sin to continue to enslave humans (e.g., Mk 1:34). One of the ways Jesus describes his work of salvation in Mark is to ransom, a technical term in antiquity for the purchase or

574 Ibid., p374.
manumission of a slave.\footnote{Stott, J., The cross of Christ, (Nottingham, England: Inter-varsity Press, 1986), p205.} As Jesus states, He came to give his life as a ransom (10:45), given in the context of his impending crucifixion (10:33-34). The purpose of Jesus was, in part, to free us from slavery to the power of evil, despite the terrible price it cost Him. This was seen above in Jesus’ motivation to journey on the way, and through the New Exodus theme seen also in the way.\footnote{Dowd, S., and Malbon, E. S., “The significance of Jesus’ death in Mark: narrative context and authorial audience” Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 125, No. 2, (2006), p284.} Jesus is God’s Son with his character and goodness, one to be admired and to be trusted. It is for these reasons that Mark would have us follow. And all these attributes are seen most clearly through the retrospective lens of the Cross.

**The Cross and Discipleship**

The purpose of Mark’s gospel is to elicit a response from his audience, specifically, a desire to follow Jesus.\footnote{Williams, Joel F., “Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel” Bibliotheca sacra, Vol. 153, no. 611, (1996), p336; Pruitt, R. A., “The meaning of the cross in Mark” Evangelical Review of Theology, Vol. 34, No. 4, (2010), p366.} It is argued that the Markan community is one that is both suffering, and one that has likely already denied Jesus.\footnote{Carroll, and Green, Death, p35-36.} This is said to frame Mark’s purpose for writing the way he has. On the other hand, Bauckham argues compellingly for a wider audience, more of an “open text” intended to be circulated widely by the well travelled Christians among the tightly-knit churches.\footnote{Bauckham, R., The Gospels for all Christians (Grand Rapids, MI:William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), p2.} Either way, the author would have intended the average follower to be able to relate to the characters in the narrative. Thus, the way Mark presents Jesus’ disciples is very mixed; individuals who initially respond well (1:17, 20; 2:14), but soon fail to see Jesus for who He is (e.g. 8:17-21). This tension is played out vividly in Mark 8. Jesus is the exemplar, and Peter forms the negative example, opposing Jesus’ obedience to God and God’s divine commission. Jesus addresses Peter’s error with the pericope of what a true disciple looks like (8:34-38) which we examined in chapter 5 above. The critical issue is identity. Who is Jesus, and are his disciples like Him in his obedience to God and service of each other; even if it leads to suffering and death?\footnote{Carroll, and Green, Death, p36-37.}
At the beginning of the narrative discipleship could be easily mistaken for doing what Jesus does. Initially the disciples follow Jesus’ example wonderfully by preaching the kingdom, driving out demons and healing the sick as Jesus instructed the disciples to do (6:12-13). There are failings, but only the sort of failings one would expect of those learning. But Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah (8:29) begins a whole new understanding of discipleship. It is the journey to Golgotha that turns the tables on both Peter and the audience. Jesus’ agenda is his divine mandate, the commission God gave Him at his baptism, and which He announces in 1:14-15. Thus discipleship is not just about miracles and fame, but service and sacrifice (8:34). It is here that the disciples, and the audience, start to learn about true discipleship.

As we saw above, both “the way” and Jesus’ identity make sense only in the light of the Cross. In this sense Mark forces his audience to withhold their judgements about who Jesus is until the end of the narrative. Likewise discipleship is developed slowly. Discipleship too can be seen and understood only in the light of the Cross. In doing so, the author neither approves nor condemns the disciples throughout the narrative; neither does he force the audience to reflect on their own following. If Carroll and Green are correct about the Markan community suffering and potentially already having stumbled in their following, this could alienate or discourage them. Even at the conclusion of the gospel the hand of Jesus is seen reaching out to the unfaithful disciples (14:28; 16:7), with neither Mark nor Jesus condemning them.

By inference the Markan audience is not condemned either, but also receives the hand of forgiveness and restoration. After all, Jesus called disciples “that they might be with him” (3:14). Even at the very end of the gospel the audience are reminded that continued misunderstanding and failure are still a part of discipleship, even by those faithful through the worst times. This is seen through the women who were the most faithful at the cross and are entrusted to carry the message of hope and restoration to the disciples that Christ had

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582 Green, Way, p43.
583 Ibid., p43.
585 Carroll, and Green, Death, p35-36.
risen, but instead remain silent in fear (16:7-8). But failure is not the end. Like the disciples, like the women at the tomb, all disciples of Jesus are forgiven for failures and reminded that they too will still see Jesus as He has promised (16:7).

Despite Mark’s desire to elicit a commitment to follow from his audience, he avoids some of the rhetorical devices common to his time. Instead of using miracle stories to gain applause, response, even belief as many early Christian and Greco-Roman sources do, Mark stifles the applause as Jesus commands beneficiaries to tell nobody. The point is clear, “the applause – and the belief – that come from the spectacular deeds of the miracle stories are insufficient to motivate true discipleship.” To follow through the early days of fame and popularity are easy, but to follow to the cross is a lot more difficult. True discipleship is linked to suffering, not only the suffering of Jesus, but also that of the followers of Jesus (8:34). It takes more than wonder; it takes insight and understanding into Jesus, the Son of God.

As we consider miracles we must consider what their purpose is. Achtemeier takes the story of Bartimaeus to consider miracles and discipleship in Mark. The story is quite thoroughly demonstrated to be a “call story” rather than a miracle story, thus distancing the call to follow from the miracle. Jesus didn’t heal Bartimaeus in order that Bartimaeus would follow. Rather, persistent faith is the necessary preparation for a follower to be able to journey on “the way” with Jesus, and to have the spiritual sight needed to see and understand. Given the proximity of the story to the multiple passion predictions, and the extended discussion on discipleship, Achtemeier concludes that discipleship is to be considered in relation to the passion. “Discipleship now means: following Jesus in the way of the cross.”

588 Ibid., p233.  
589 Ibid., p233.  
591 Ibid., p115.  
592 Ibid., p136.
In developing the audience’s understanding of discipleship Mark has very intentionally used minor characters in different ways, something most studies overlook. There are 22 passages that present these minor characters, all of which are vital to Mark’s primary function of moving the audience to follow Jesus and live faithfully. It is these characters who give theological richness throughout the narrative, mostly through contrast, along with colour and constant surprises. The Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30) is praised for her faith and boldness despite being a Gentile in contrast with the Pharisees who are described as hypocrites despite being experts in God’s law. The demoniac (5:1-20) displays devotion to Jesus and a desire to follow when the disciples (4:41) are afraid of Jesus. The centurion, while likely overseeing Jesus’ death and being a Gentile, shows insight and reverence when Jesus’ own followers have abandoned Him. Through these minor characters, “Mark emphasises the importance of faith, the open invitation to all to follow Jesus, and the real possibility of failure in discipleship.”

The minor characters change roles within the narrative as needed to emphasise the author’s point, beginning as suppliants (1:1-10:45), moving to become exemplars who contrast the failure of Jesus’ disciples (10:46-16:7), before taking a role of negative examples (16:8). Faith is a key theme developed and emphasised through these characters, as is insight into who Jesus is, overcoming fear, and committed devotion to Jesus. They are the unlikely heroes, not the singled out and specially trained apostles, but normal people like Mark’s audience who have an interaction with Jesus and are invited to follow. They demonstrate that anyone can be a follower, but it is not an easy road.

The challenges of discipleship are further illustrated by a comparison between the predictions of crisis to come before the end of the age as recorded in Mark 13, and the passion narrative (Mark 14-15), summarised in the table 7.1 below.

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594 Ibid., p336.
595 Ibid., p336.
596 Ibid., p343.
### Table 7.1. A comparison of the predictions of crisis to occur before the end of the age and the passion narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark 13</th>
<th>Mark 14-15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The destruction of the temple (v. 2)</td>
<td>The destruction of the temple (14:58; 15:29, 38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciples to be delivered up to the Jewish and Roman authorities (v. 12-13)</td>
<td>Jesus is delivered up to Jewish and Roman authorities (14:10-11, 18, 21, 41-42; 15:1, 10, 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciples to be betrayed by kin (v. 12-13)</td>
<td>Jesus is betrayed by a table intimate (14:10, 20, 43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sun to be darkened (v. 24)</td>
<td>Darkness covers the land (15:33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Son of humanity to be seen coming in the clouds with great power (v. 26)</td>
<td>The Son of humanity to be seated at the right hand of the Power and to come with the clouds (14:62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one knows the hour (v. 22, 33).</td>
<td>The hour has come (14:41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch! (v. 5, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37).</td>
<td>Watch (and failure to) (14:34, 37-38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.” (v. 35)</td>
<td>Throughout 14:17-15:1, these time designations are used: evening, midnight, cockcrow, early morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master comes and finds you sleeping (v. 36)</td>
<td>Jesus comes and finds his disciples sleeping (14:37-38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through these comparisons we see that Jesus’ death is to be interpreted as the beginning of the long-awaited new epoch. More importantly to our study, the persecution of Jesus’ followers is clearly identified with the suffering and death of Jesus. Both are seen above (Table 7.1) mirroring each other, implying that the followers of Jesus will not only experience suffering as Jesus did, but that we should interpret our suffering in the same way as Jesus’ suffering. This means suffering by followers of Jesus is part of the messianic work of bringing redemption to this world which was begun with Jesus, and is being brought to a conclusion by his followers through the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:8).

The journey on “the way” of discipleship is defined by Jesus Christ, his life and his death. We have solidarity along our way with Him. This takes on fresh meaning in light of the redemptive mission of the Son of God, revealed and understood at the cross; but this is not the

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597 Carroll, and Green, *Death*, p36-38.
598 Ibid., p36-37.
culmination, it must be continued. A true disciple’s life, past and present, is to be shaped by Jesus’ teaching about the cross, Jesus’ life and his death. Yet whatever they may encounter, they are reminded that Jesus called them first and foremost to be with Him.

Having considered the various studies on discipleship that have gone into this discussion, the majority have either failed to note a motivation, or implied one which turned out to be particularly negative. Meyer’s summary of the gospel in Mark is “The good news is the bad news, and the bad news is the good news: the news of the cross, the suffering Messiah and Son of God, and the suffering followers of the Messiah and Son of God.” Another conclusion was “Discipleship now means: following Jesus in the way of the cross.” Both are certainly true to the teachings of Jesus in Mark and closely reflect Mark 8:34, but both statements are also unfaithful to the teachings of Jesus in Mark. Mark invests half a gospel of teaching and disclosure to build to a point where he can boldly state the disciples’ need to take up their cross without alienating his audience. After all, the gospel is a narrative which has a sequence and progression. It is not an image that can be viewed as a whole in an instant.

Discipleship is to follow Jesus in the way of the cross, but Mark does not expect perfect following by the disciples because they have not seen the cross. While clearly negative examples, there is no judgement on them, although they do receive some rather blunt chastisement. The only hint of criticism is directed towards the women at the tomb who, out of fear, refused to deliver the greatest possible news. Mark’s use of the emphatic “to none nothing” (οὐδεὶς οὐδὲν, 16:8) makes it very clear that there was no way they were going to share the news which had been entrusted to them. These women had been the most faithful of Jesus’ followers at the cross and grave, but now even they fail in their discipleship, despite the cross.

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599 Ibid., p37-38.
600 Carroll, and Green, Death, p38.
603 Williams, “Discipleship,” p335.
604 An obvious exception to this statement is Judas. Jesus’ comment of 14:21 could certainly be described as critical, and rightly so. However, Judas is not an example of what it means to follow. His actions were not a failure in his attempt to follow but rather a refusal to follow.
605 France, Mark, p683.
To be motivated to follow in the way of the cross requires the reader to see and understand Jesus is the Son of God, and to see Him as He is, not as humans would make Him. This is only seen through the cross. To follow in the way of the cross also requires one to see Jesus’ hand of forgiveness and acceptance reaching out to us despite our unfaithfulness, just as He did for the disciples (14:28; 16:7). The reader needs to remember that the call of Jesus is to be with Him (3:14). While it involves a cross, it is a call to be with Jesus despite suffering, rather than a call to suffer. Even within that suffering it is not pointless or arbitrary, but like Christ’s it is part of bringing life to this world, the same redemptive work Jesus began at the cross as He began to usher in the new age. In this age minor characters play major roles, the least of individuals stand up as heroes of faith and an example for all, and just like for Jesus, victory comes in the most surprising of guises.

Motivation from the Cross

Through this study of the way of the cross we have seen a number of motivations to follow Jesus. We are reminded first and foremost that it is Jesus, the Son of God, that we are following. This is no ordinary man, no ordinary story, and no ordinary invitation to follow. But we aren’t simply called to follow one who is bigger or more powerful, we are called to follow God’s Son who came to serve and to give his life to secure the freedom of many. When we consider the opposition from friends and foe that Jesus experienced in Mark’s narrative, it is remarkable that Jesus would give so much for humanity. It too is remarkable that God would give his dearly loved Son. To give everything to ransom sinners clearly displays great love even if Mark does not elaborate it, and this love calls loudly to follow.

In this study we have seen that the kingdom of God is breaking into this world. With Jesus came the kingdom’s bold advance that continues through those who follow Jesus. We are called to follow in the way of the cross, motivated by the fact that our Leader has journeyed this way before us, and promises to journey with us (3:14). The disciple’s hardship is not without meaning and value. Any hardship endured is also part of Jesus’ redemptive work in this world, and part of the advance of the kingdom of God. We are motivated to follow

606 cf Mk 6:7-13 and the mixed response the disciples were to expect to their ministry. The disciple of Jesus is to expect success and trial as they carry out the work of salvation entrusted to them by Jesus to continue his ministry of redemption to this world.
because we have hope that the kingdom will soon come in its fullness, and the world will be made right. We are called to be part of that restoring work. Whether important or insignificant, we have a role to play, and in Mark’s story little people play spiritually big roles.

Lastly, Mark presents the forgiveness and patience Jesus has with his disciples and their many failings. The reader is encouraged that they too are being led and taught by Jesus patiently. They are forgiven for their failings to see and understand, to believe or to put their own agendas aside, or to try and shape God as they would have Him. Mark presents as motivation the gentleness and forgiveness of Jesus who calls everyone first and foremost to be with him.

Why follow Jesus? Why face suffering? Because Jesus is the Son of God, because Jesus died for our redemption, because Jesus calls both great and small to be with Him and journey with Him, and because Jesus invites little people to play major roles in ushering in the next age with Him.
Conclusion

We have explored in depth the key passages that relate to reward and punishment in the gospel of Mark. A significant finding is that punishment is not threatened for those who choose not to follow. Gehenna is raised in one section (9:43-49), but in the context of being serious about following Jesus. As concluded in chapter 3, the call for amputation is not literal but a teaching intended for those already following; likewise the idea of Gehenna is symbolic. Should the reader allow things in their lives that cause a separation from God, the result will be a life that is unclean and grotesque. There are two places where threatening language is used, one in 9:42 and the other in 14:21. The first relates to those who cause others to stumble resulting in being separated from God. This is something Jesus takes incredibly seriously. It is not about whether one chooses to follow Jesus or not, but about other’s having an opportunity to follow Jesus, and a very serious warning not to fight against God and his purpose. The second (14:21) is in reference to Judas, again in regards to a man fighting against Jesus and his redemptive purpose for humanity. There are no threats made to those who are disinterested or who choose not to follow, only to those hostile and causing the downfall of others. The disinterested are described as becoming blind, deaf and hard hearted (4:12), but again this is not punishment or threat, simply a causative statement.

More positive are the rewards. Should one forfeit anything in this life they are promised compensation a hundred times over (10:29-30) and with it eternal life. The temporary compensation includes houses, family, and fields, but with it comes persecution expected at the eschaton while the ages overlap. Persecutions certainly make the compensation a little less desirable, making it clear that Mark does not intend for us to be motivated by this compensation. Also of concern to those looking for rewards is that ζωὴ αἰώνιος is only mentioned in Mark’s gospel in this pericope (10:17, 30). It seems the idea of gaining eternal life is very closely tied to persecution in Mark’s mind. Should one be looking for rewards as a primary source of motivation they would be disappointed with Mark, as it is clearly not a key factor in his thinking.
It is important to note that there was motivation presented to follow Jesus by Mark. This was remarkably consistent throughout these passages and the gospel in general. It begins with God refusing to stay away, but rather tearing open the heavens and breaking into human existence to call people to Himself. The clearest indications are at the baptism of Jesus and the crucifixion of Jesus where we saw the tearing of the heavens (1:10) and the veil (15:38) respectively, and with his call of the disciples (1:16-20; 2:13-14). Yet his passion to be present with humanity is expressed in more than just these events. Through Jesus’ method of teaching (4:11-12) we saw Jesus’ promise that if one would ask, they would know the secret of the kingdom. In 9:33-50, with the challenging teachings about self-mutilation and millstones, we saw Jesus’ promise of welcoming Jesus and the One who sent Him. This was the key to understanding the whole passage. Effectively Jesus taught that if anyone wants Him, they can have Him. But they must value Him, and certainly not to cause anyone else to devalue Him. God desires humanity to be with Him, and after seeing his character all people are invited to choose to be with Him too. This too was the reality of ζωὴ αἰώνιος that was sought by the rich man. It wasn’t just eternity with Jesus after his return. As seen in chapter 3 and 4 it is life in the presence of God, not just for eternity but now as well.

Chapter 5 which focused on the passion predictions and chapter 7 which focused on the cross were explicit in expressing God’s desire to be with humanity. Through the cross, which is central to both these chapters and to the gospel of Mark, we see the salvation provided by God. Jesus is seen with the singular focus of following “the way” as God’s servant to bring life, and to ransom the captives in the New Exodus. Part of Jesus’ purpose is to bring the salvation that will allow all humanity to be forgiven and restored to God. This is seen through Jesus’ persistence on “the way” despite all the obstacles (e.g., 8:33; 10:32; 11:28), through his willingness to travel on “the way” despite the knowledge it would end in suffering, death and resurrection (8:31-9:1; 9:30-50; 10:32-45), and through the way He broke down the barriers to knowing Him (e.g., 12:1-12). Jesus came to give his life to provide ζωὴ αἰώνιος to humanity (10:45) if they would desire it.

We see the desire of God to be known. God has revealed Himself and his plan through the prophets (1:1-3) and through his Son (1:1:11; 9:7). To know God is promised in Jesus’ teaching if one would seek to know (4:11). This is throughout the Temple theme with God’s
revelation of Himself, and opposition to the things that were blocking humanity from seeing. Of course, we see God’s desire to be known most clearly through the cross, where we see the lengths Jesus went to for us to know, see and understand the love of God, the forgiveness and mercy of God, and the passion of God to restore us to Himself.

Finally we see God’s desire and work to restore all things to the way He intended them. Mark 1:2-3 is filled with Messianic hope for the world made right. The episode with the rich man has the bold proclamation of the power of God to do the impossible and restore people to the kingdom (10:27). It also contains the promise that the first shall be last and the last first, a phrase likely only welcomed by the humble follower of Jesus given its promise to elevate the humble and tear down those who oppress. The passion predictions present Jesus on “the way,” an image filled with Messianic hope for the world restored and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God to make things right. Lastly the cross is what makes everything possible for us. While the world could be restored, it is only through the cross that we can have a part in it through forgiveness and restoration. A major motivation is that the suffering and wrong of this world will be made right and God’s kingdom will reign forever, a kingdom we are invited to be part of.

The motivation presented in the gospel of Mark to follow Jesus is a revelation of who God is, how He feels about people, and what He is doing to restore humanity to Himself in the perfection He always intended, now and for eternity. We are then invited to follow despite the imminent difficulties we will encounter. Jesus simply says, “This is who I am. Am I enough?”

Is a motivation of reward and punishment faithful to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark? In a word, no. If one is calculating the pro’s and con’s of following around a motivation of reward or punishment then Mark fails to provide anything conclusive. Instead, we are repeatedly shown the character and identity of Jesus presented with an invitation. What motivation is presented by Jesus in the gospel of Mark to follow? Nothing less than an invitation to be in the presence of Jesus, now and for eternity.
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