

# Route Sixty-Six

*Part Forty-One*

*Mark*

*But to Serve*

*(John 5:39; Mark 10:45)*

*With Study Questions*

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**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).**

## **Introduction**

Sometimes it helps to hear it from someone else in a different way, with a different emphasis. I was a bit older than most people when I got married. I was already a pastor and had been one for many years. I had done scores, if not hundreds, of weddings. But my bride was not entirely confident that I had a handle on the event. She needed corroboration. And she needed to hear it a little different slant.

I coached at the open and collegiate level for many years. I left coaching and had a family. When my kids were old enough, I coached them. They were good students with great attitudes. Every now and then I would bring in a former player who had made it big in the game. This open level player would give advice on technique and fitness (sometimes things I had taught them). My own children would walk away with a new enlightenment. This open athlete might say a very similar thing a little differently than I.

This also would happen when we're on vacation, visiting another church. We would listen to a sermon. The pastor didn't say anything that I disagreed with. In fact, he would say things that I've said. But he said it with a different tone or accompanied by a different text or illustration. Somehow my children would often walk away with a keener grasp. So much so, that they might wonder why I had never told them what they heard in that sermon. I felt I had.

The point is, hearing similar things from someone else in a different way, with a different emphasis, will often broaden our grasp of a particular field. And there is no field or topic that is as critical for our spiritual well-being as the life of Christ as conveyed in the Gospels. They contain the

same story (the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ) from four different authors. They tell the story from four distinctive, yet harmonious ways, with different points of emphasis.

In our Route Sixty-Six series, we're examining how (based upon John 5:39) Christ is the central focus of all Scripture. This was His statement in reference to the Old Testament. How much more in reference to the New Testament.

## Survey of Mark

In our last study, we learned that Matthew primarily concerned himself with a Jewish audience and their anticipation of God providing a promised Deliverer—a Messiah—the Savior. At the dawn of man, directly after the fall, God made a promise. Matthew emphasized that God had kept that promise. Hence Matthew began with the genealogy, tracing the ancestry of Christ back to Abraham.

Mark has no such genealogy. There seems to be indications that Mark was focusing on an audience that was a mixture of Jew and Gentile. It has been convincingly argued that Mark himself (based upon his name and surname—John Mark) may have had a Jewish mother and a Roman father. All that to say a genealogy would not have been as high of a premium to his first intended readers. In Mark we seem to be moving into a more diverse audience.

So, what was the unique perspective of Mark in telling of the life of Jesus? Not only do we see no genealogy, we see no record of His birth at all. The Gospel According to Mark opens with the ministry of John the Baptist. Mark reaches, in one chapter what Matthew takes eight chapters to reach. By way of contrast, let us notice that though Matthew mentions the kingdom over fifty times, Mark mentions it only about a dozen times.

So, what is the unique perspective of Mark? It's been said that Mark is like a camera man giving shot and shot. The word *euthios* (meaning 'straightaway' or 'immediately' is everywhere. Twelve of the sixteen chapters begin with the word "and" *kai*, giving us the feel that it is to be read in one sitting. But let us not make the mistake that Mark is a sort of Cliffs Notes version of the Gospel.

Even though it's about half the length of Matthew, it can actually be viewed as much longer than Matthew. What I mean by this is that there are things that Mark seems to intentionally leave out (like the genealogy and

birth, as already stated). Even the teaching ministry of Jesus is deemphasized. A startling observation is that if we removed the genealogy and nativity, along with the very abbreviated emphasis of the parables and sermons, Mark seems to have much more to say than Matthew.

So, what is the unique perspective of Mark? What Mark seems to bring to the forefront of his Gospel is not so much what Jesus taught (though it certainly includes teaching) or even who Jesus is (although it most assuredly includes that as well). It is what Jesus *did* that Mark highlights. Mark focuses his camera on Christ the servant. A theme verse for Mark might be found in the tenth chapter, after James and John were lobbying for positions of power and leadership in glory. The culmination of Jesus' response is found in the words:

**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).**

A highlighted feature in Mark's Gospel is Jesus at work. It becomes almost exhausting to read. Mark presents, in rapid succession, Jesus casting out demons. And not just a demon here or there, but a legion of demons (Mark 5:9). Yet He is not too busy to engage in the intimate occasion of healing Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:30, 31). Big and small, Jesus is at work. Although Jesus is Lord, the word "Lord" is almost never used in Mark (though we see it up to eighty times in the other three gospels).

No, in Mark we see both massive and warm and familiar acts of service. Jesus calms the storm, expels demons, cures the incurable, feeds the five thousand and the four thousand, walks on water and raises the dead. But Mark, more than the other gospel writers, records small, touching details, with an emphasis on the personal touch (the hand) of Jesus.

When He healed Peter's mother-in-law, Mark records that He took her by the hand. At Bethsaida, He took the blind man by the hand. In giving hearing and speech to the deaf and dumb man, He put His fingers into his ears. In raising Jairus's daughter, Mark records that Jesus "took the child by the hand" (Mark 5:41). Mark gives details: who was related to whom, who lived together, what time things happened, where people stood.

While His followers argued about who would be greatest, Jesus brings their eyes to a child. If you want to be first, Jesus taught, you “shall be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Matthew records that Jesus put the child “**in the midst of them**” (Matthew 18:2). But Mark adds a touch here.

**Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them**<sup>37</sup> **“Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me”** (Mark 9:36 – italics mine).

Yes, Mark emphasizes Christ the servant. He served massively and intimately. Let us not lose sight of this highest of Christian virtues. If we desire to be identified as a believer, a follower of Christ, we must follow His overall refrain of servanthood. Paul wrote of it so powerfully and beautifully.

**Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:1-11).**

Can we say that this mind, which was in Christ Jesus, is also in us? Is it at least a sincere pursuit?

### **An Interrupted Ministry**

One other thing Mark does is interject a stark contrast in the midst of his account. Things seem to be going so well. Jesus is hard at work, and the only thing His disciples seem to be worrying about is who's going to be the top dog in glory. Jesus was popular!

**And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak" (Mark 7:37).**

And then comes chapter eight. When His popularity apexes and it becomes apparent that He can take the crown and scepter in Jerusalem, the real story surfaces. Jesus will push His servanthood to a level that made even His closest followers cringe.

**And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. <sup>33</sup> But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:31-33).**

It's been said that all the gospels are accounts of the passion (the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death) with long introductions. Mark is no exception. Over and above what Jesus taught and in concert with who Jesus is, is what Jesus did. Did provide an example to follow, most certainly. In terms of servanthood, He taught:

**For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you (John 13:15).**

But there was an act servanthood that Jesus did that we cannot follow. And that is to die for the sins of others. It was here that His attractiveness waned. It was said regarding high status of Jesus recorded in the first eight chapters of Mark.

### **How unsubstantial was the popular clamour.**

Mark will now record the tragic enigma of Christ's rejection. One of the only affirming comments made in the last half of the gospel came from the lips of a Roman centurion. When the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom and Jesus breathed His last, the centurion who stood opposite Him, said...

### **...Truly this Man was the Son of God (Mark 15:39b)!**

The integrity of faith was now put to the test. Those who were excited that following Jesus might elevate their social, political, economic or even psychological status had to rethink their convictions. True servanthood involves the emptying of self. Though we cannot imitate Jesus in terms of His substitutionary atonement, we are called to "take up our cross." Or as Jesus put it:

**And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it (Mark 8:34, 35).**

It is a sort of self-mortification. A dying to self and a living to God and to others that forms the Christian's call. And we die to self and die to others because He died for us that we might live, truly live. Jesus Himself describes that greatest act of servitude in the greatest act of love.

**Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13).**

This is what Jesus has done for us. This is our blessed hope. It is the call of the church to bring this hope to a lost and dying world. And Jesus

promises to be with us in the fulfillment of this Great Commission. The work and service of Christ did not end at the ascension. This very gospel informs us of Christ's continued work in the ministry of the apostles.

**And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs (Mark 16:20).**

Let us be comforted in our mission that we are not merely working for Jesus; we are working with Jesus.



## Questions for Study

1. What advantages are there from hearing the same story from different people different ways (page 2)?
2. In what ways is the Gospel of Mark different than the Gospel according to Matthew (pages 3, 4)?
3. What seems to be the unique perspective of Mark in the ministry of Jesus (pages 3, 4)?
4. What can we learn and imitate when it comes to what Mark highlights about Jesus in his gospel (pages 5, 6)?
5. How did the ministry of Jesus get interrupted? How did His followers respond? Have you ever experienced anything like this (pages 6, 7)?
6. What aspect of Jesus' servanthood is it impossible for us to imitate (page 7)?
7. What was Jesus' greatest act of love and how did you benefit by it (pages 7, 8)?
8. What can we be confident of as we continue to work to fulfill the Great Commission (page 8)?