



Cultivate

A Christ-Centered Way of Life

... as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith... Colossians 2:6-7

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS THROUGH THE 4 GOSPELS – PART 3

By Marius Gradwell

The Gospel of Mark: Jesus the Servant - The face of an Ox

Mark records more miracles of Christ than any of the other Gospels. Jesus proves his divinity in Mark by the demonstration of miracles. There are more miracles than messages in this Gospel. Jesus shows that he means what he says, and he *is* who he says.

In Mark, we see Jesus the Messiah coming as a servant. He reveals who he is through what he does. He explains his mission and message through his actions. John Mark captures Jesus on the move. He skips the birth of Jesus and dives quickly into presenting his public ministry.

The overriding theme of the Gospel of Mark is that Jesus came to serve. He gave his life in service to mankind. He lived out his message through service, therefore, we can follow his actions and learn by his example. The ultimate purpose of the book is to reveal Jesus' call to personal fellowship through daily discipleship.

When we speak of the gospel that Jesus preached, it's critical that we examine the New Testament Gospels because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are inspired records, which reveal Jesus' gospel to us.

Biblical scholars generally accept that Mark wrote his Gospel before the others, giving us the first written record of Jesus' life and teachings. Mark's Gospel reveals the gospel that Jesus preached in two specific passages:

Mark 1:14-17 *ESV* Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, (15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (16) Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. (17) And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

Mark 8:27-31 *ESV* And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" (28) And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." (29) And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." (30) And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. (31) And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

These two passages make it clear that there are seven elements essential to Jesus' gospel. Each of the seven elements is not only imbedded with discipleship, but also leads to it.

Four Elements in Mark 1:14-17

These four verses are extremely important for understanding Jesus' gospel. Take note that verse 14 expressly states that Jesus was "proclaiming the gospel."

The four elements of the gospel revealed in Mark 1:14-17 are:

1. God's kingdom is here,
2. repent of sin,
3. believe the gospel,
4. and follow Jesus.

These four elements fall into two categories:

1. content and
2. call.

The content of Jesus' gospel, at this point, was exclusively about the kingdom of God. The call of Jesus' gospel involved repentance, belief, and following Jesus.

Jesus' declaration that the kingdom of God is here served as the content of the gospel in Mark 1. It is significant that Jesus spoke of the gospel as "the gospel of the kingdom of God," revealing that the coming of God's kingdom is essential to the gospel Jesus preached. Jesus' gospel, then, was first about God's kingdom. How many times have you shared the gospel without mentioning God's kingdom? If we are not saying anything about the kingdom of God, are we preaching Jesus' gospel?

The second category these elements fall into is the *call* of Jesus' gospel. In Mark 1:14-17, Jesus called people to respond to his proclamation of the gospel by repenting of sin, believing, and following him. The call and the content go hand-in-hand. The gospel is not just about information; it is about transformation. Jesus did not just proclaim that the kingdom had come; he also called people to respond to that proclamation by repenting, believing, and following. As such, both the content of Jesus' gospel and his call are part of "the gospel."

Mark 1:14-17 reveals four essential elements of Jesus' gospel, but there are seven in total. We now turn to Mark 8:27-31 for the other three elements.

Three Elements in Mark 8:27-31

In the context of this Gospel as a whole, Mark 8 is not only at the middle of the book, but it's also the turning point—theologically, geographically, and also as it relates to Jesus' revelation of the gospel. Jesus reveals three more elements of his gospel in Mark 8:27-31.

Mark 1 and Mark 8 have a two-year gap between them. This means that for two years Jesus had been proclaiming part of the gospel—that God's kingdom was at hand—before he revealed the three other elements of gospel content.

A lot happens in Mark 8, and it is all triggered by one thing—the Apostle Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ.

These verses in Mark 8:27-31 represent a major moment of gospel revelation. Jesus reveals three more elements of the gospel:

1. that he is the Christ and
2. that he would die and
3. be resurrected.

In the first eight chapters of Mark's Gospel, people had expressed various opinions about Jesus: His family thought he was out of his mind; the scribes said Jesus was possessed by Satan; the people of Capernaum called him a teacher; the people of Nazareth could not think of him as more than a carpenter; King Herod believed he was John the Baptist raised from the dead; others said he was Elijah; and still others one of the prophets.

Surprisingly, Jesus' disciples had not said anything about who they believed him to be up until Mark 8. But here in Mark 8:29, Jesus asks the Twelve, point blank, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's response is powerful—so powerful: "You are the Christ." This is the first time in Mark's Gospel that someone calls Jesus "the Christ." When Peter makes this theologically loaded statement from the Old Testament, it is a profound moment in the Gospel of Mark.

To first-century Jews, the word "Christ" was a holy word, reserved exclusively for the long-awaited messiah, God's promised saviour for the world. ("Christ" is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word for "messiah.") Because we are so far removed from their culture it's difficult to grasp the full weight of this title or the significance of what Peter says here. For them, though, to profess Jesus as "the Christ," as Peter does, was to proclaim Jesus as the one about whom all Scripture had been written and the one who fulfils all Scripture. This was huge! Peter's confession triggers so much critical change in Mark's Gospel. For example, Jesus begins speaking to the Twelve about his death and resurrection, a topic he had never broached before.

Jesus immediately begins teaching the Twelve about his impending death at the hands of the Jewish religious establishment and his third-day resurrection. In fact, he teaches the Twelve about his death and resurrection three times in three successive chapters (Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33-34). The three predictions of his death and resurrection begin with Peter's confession, which also signals a massive shift in Jesus' discipleship strategy with the Twelve. From Mark 8:27-31 onward, Jesus spent his time almost exclusively with the Twelve, teaching them the true cost of discipleship (for example, Mark 9:30-31). Taking all of this into consideration, we begin to get a sense for how critical a turning point and how theologically weighty Mark 8:31-34 really is.

The three elements revealed in Mark 8:27-31—that Jesus is the Christ, he died, and he was resurrected—complete the list of seven essential elements of Jesus' gospel.

Now, if you were paying careful attention to Mark 8:27-31, notice that the word "gospel" does not appear anywhere in that passage. Mark 1:14-17 expressly states that Jesus was "proclaiming the gospel," but Mark 8:27-31 is not as clear. It is obviously a theologically stout passage, but it does not explicitly state that it is a *gospel* passage. This is, in part, because Mark 8:27-31 was a *prophecy* of Jesus' death and resurrection. (Jesus had not actually died and been resurrected yet.) It was not until after Jesus' resurrection that these three elements were understood to be (and confirmed as) essential to the gospel. How, then, can we know for certain that the three elements we have identified in Mark 8:27-31 are truly essential elements of Jesus' gospel?

While Mark 8:27-31 does not specifically state it, 1 Corinthians 15 does: In fact, it is no overstatement to say that 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 is one of the most important gospel passages in the entire New Testament and it confirms that the three elements revealed in Mark 8:27-31 are, indeed, essential elements of Jesus' gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:1-5 *ESV* Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, (2) and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (5) and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Practical Application

Mark 10:42-45 *ESV* And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. (43) But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, (44) and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (45) For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark presents Jesus as the suffering Servant of God and as the One who came to serve and sacrifice for us, in part to inspire us to do the same. We are to minister as He did, with the same greatness of humility and devotion to the service of others. Jesus exhorted us to remember that to be great in God’s kingdom, we must be the servant of all. Self-sacrifice should transcend our need for recognition or reward, just as Jesus was willing to be abased as He lay down His life for the sheep.