

# Unique Discipleship to a Unique Master: Discipleship in the Gospel according to Mark

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The phenomenon of Jesus and his disciples continues to be a central area of research and writing in both scholarly and popular venues, as well it should, since discipleship to Jesus in large part sums up the Christian life. I have participated in that examination of discipleship for much of the last thirty years, as a scholar, pastor, teacher, and perhaps most importantly, disciple of Jesus. I first wrote on Mark's view of discipleship several years ago, in summary fashion,<sup>1</sup> so I am happy to extend that study here. We will first look briefly at the unique form of discipleship that Jesus initiated in the first century, and then look at the specific perspective from which the gospel of Mark views discipleship to Jesus.

## **Jesus' Unique Form of Discipleship Masters and Disciples in the Ancient World**

Discipleship was a common phenomenon in the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>2</sup>

Ancient literature, art, and other artifacts bear testimony to the widespread occurrence of masters and disciples. But the diversity of discipleship was directly related to the differentiation between masters, who ranged from great educators to philosophers to physicians to great thinker-masters of the past to religious figures.<sup>3</sup> The relationship assumed the development of a sustained commitment

of the follower to the master and his particular teaching or mission, and the relationship extended to imitation of the conduct of the master as it impacted the personal life of the disciple.

Greek Sophists such as Protagoras were among the first to establish an institutional form of relationship in which the master imparted virtue and knowledge to the disciple through a paid educational process.<sup>4</sup> Socrates and Plato objected to such a form of discipleship on epistemological grounds, advocating a relationship in which the master directs dialogue to draw out innate knowledge from his followers. Hippocrates likewise disavowed charging fees for passing on medical knowledge, but vowed in the famous "Hippocratic Oath" that in the same way that his teachers and gods passed on the Art of medicine to him, "that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart a knowledge of the Art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to disciples."

Within Judaism this same type of diversity of discipleship was related to the differentiation in the types of master. Disciples were committed to a recognized leader or teacher or movement, and the relationships ran the spectrum from philosophical (Philo<sup>5</sup>) to technical teachers (rabbis<sup>6</sup>) to sectarian (Pharisees<sup>7</sup>) to revolutionary (Zealot-like nationalists<sup>8</sup>) to prophetic (John the Baptist<sup>9</sup>).<sup>10</sup>

## *Jesus and His Disciples*

The scene depicting disciples following Jesus around during his earthly ministry dominates the gospel panorama. The consistent refrain of the Gospels, however, is that Jesus' form of discipleship became distinctly unique. Discipleship to Jesus continued to bear surface similarity to other forms of discipleship within Judaism and the Greco-Roman world, but it was strikingly unique because of one primary issue: Jesus Messiah was a unique Master, and discipleship to him would therefore be unique.

On the historical level, one must first study Jesus the Master in his first century historical setting in order to understand his followers' type of discipleship. That kind of study will supply the unique historical form of discipleship that Jesus initiated, and will reveal the commonality of historical data that the Gospel writers share. On the theological level, each Gospel writer also has a unique perspective of the historical relationship between Jesus and his followers that addressed the needs and concerns of the evangelist's own audience.

On both levels the evangelists were intending either to awaken or to strengthen the faith of their readers.<sup>11</sup> Each of the Gospels gives an accurate recounting of the historical details of Jesus' life and ministry, yet each offers a unique perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus for the particular needs of the audience to which it is addressed, as well as a wider audience of churches in the Mediterranean world.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, discipleship can be understood narrowly as a technical discussion of the historical master-disciple relationship, and also in a broader way as Christian experience—what such a way

of life requires, implies, and entails.<sup>13</sup> To understand fully the gospel conception, one must keep in view the moment within the earthly life of Jesus in which the challenge of discipleship is given to and lived out by the original disciples, and the moment within the Church's life when disciples are challenged.<sup>14</sup>

## *The Evangelists' Portraits of Jesus and His Disciples*

Each of the four Gospels presents the record of Jesus' life from different perspectives.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, each Gospel offers different perspectives about his closest companions, his disciples.<sup>16</sup> One scholar states, "We have in the four canonical Gospels portraits of Jesus with lines, shadows, colors, and *chiaroscuro* that differ. The Marcan Jesus acts differently from the Lukan Jesus; the Matthean Jesus speaks differently from the Johannine Jesus. Correspondingly, the role of discipleship differs in the four Gospels."<sup>17</sup> Each Gospel focuses on distinctive features that help us understand Jesus' purpose in calling and training his disciples.<sup>18</sup> Combined, the sketches of the disciples in each Gospel give us a well-rounded perspective of what Jesus intended discipleship to mean.

### *Discipleship in Mark: Unique Servants of the Unique Redemptive Servant*

The portrait of the disciples of Jesus as found in the Gospel of Mark corresponds with Mark's portrait of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Mark transports us back into the first century to walk with Jesus under Palestinian skies, to hear him preach and teach, to watch him perform miracles, to see him in disputation with the religious leaders, and to witness the reactions of people to

him. The person who reads Mark's Gospel is challenged to move back and forth between the first century and the present day, viewing the message and ministry of Jesus in its original context so that it may speak clearly to the present circumstances of life.

Mark highlights the uniqueness of Jesus, and in doing so highlights the uniqueness of discipleship to this unique Master. So an important issue for understanding discipleship in Mark's Gospel is to recognize that center stage always belongs to Jesus. Although this may seem obvious, unfortunately it is a fundamental hermeneutical principle that is violated on a regular basis by those reading the Gospels, and by those teaching or preaching on discipleship from them. Although other characters and the scenes in which they appear serve an invaluable role by highlighting various facets of his person and ministry,<sup>20</sup> first and foremost Mark tells a story about Jesus.<sup>21</sup> From the first verse—where he is declared to be the Messiah, the Son of God (1:1), to the final verse—where his stunning resurrection from the dead causes the women to run away with trembling and bewilderment (16:8), Jesus is the one about whom this entire gospel is written, and discipleship to him must be understood in the light of his unique Person and Mission.

### *The Unique Mode of Discipleship*

Mark gives us a basic portrait of Jesus, and also a basic portrait of Jesus' disciples as they walk with him.<sup>22</sup> Mark's overall narrative, rhetorical strategy, some argue, is best characterized as a call to discipleship that requires losing one's life, as Jesus did, in order to save it (Mark 8:34-38).<sup>23</sup>

### *The Calling to Discipleship*

After Jesus' introduction, the calling of four men to follow Jesus immediately takes a significant place in Mark's narrative (1:16-20). Several important points underscore the significance of Mark's account of Jesus' first public activity.

In the first place, the primary focus of this incident is on Jesus and the Kingdom of God that he has announced. The calling scene highlights especially Jesus' authority. When he calls, people obey. Jesus is the Spirit-anointed messianic Son, in whom the Kingdom has arrived. The only appropriate response is to obey immediately. This is the fundamental core of what it means to enter into a relationship with Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

Second, with this call Jesus initiated his unique approach to what will become his form of discipleship.<sup>25</sup> This is one of the most characteristic differences between Jesus and other masters. In the ancient world prospective disciples would ask to study with and follow the potential master. But Jesus himself takes the initiative to call these men to follow him. It is by virtue of Jesus' authority alone that one can embark upon the life of following and sustain it.<sup>26</sup>

Thirdly, the call and response of the four brothers is based upon an extended prior relationship that they had enjoyed with Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Mark's focus is upon Jesus' authority as the inaugurator of the Kingdom, so he does not go into detail about the background of these brothers. But this is not the first encounter between them and Jesus. The Fourth Gospel fills in some background. Andrew was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist who left him to become a disciple of Jesus, and he immediately brought his brother Peter to Jesus (John 1:35-42). The unnamed

disciple has traditionally been identified as the Apostle John.<sup>28</sup> In all likelihood at least Andrew, Peter, and John (and perhaps James?) were among the ones identified as Jesus' disciples who accompanied him to the wedding at Cana, where they observed the miracle and believed in him (2:1-2, 11). They likely are the disciples who ministered with Jesus in Judea during the first year of ministry (cf. 3:22-23; 4:1-3). By the time of the incidents here in Galilee, about a year later, they had considered Jesus' mission carefully. As Jesus embarks upon his Kingdom mission, they respond immediately when he calls.

Fourth, allegiance to Jesus' person is *the* decisive act.<sup>29</sup> What might this tell us about the spiritual condition of the brothers at the time of their call? As we have observed, the Fourth Gospel indicates that these four had extensive prior acquaintance with Jesus, and even believed in him as Messiah (cf. John 1:41; 2:11). It is difficult to establish when it is that these individuals were "saved" according to our current post-resurrection categories. The true nature of Jesus' identity was so mind-boggling that it is hard to determine how much these four fully understood Jesus. They were, however, responding as much as they could to as much as they understood, which is the essence of entering into a salvation-producing relationship with God. "In Mark's Gospel, understanding who Jesus is and why he came entails acknowledging his claim upon one's life. Mark's characteristic model of salvation is discipleship."<sup>30</sup> Throughout Jesus' ministry there is an increasing understanding of who he was, and that increasing understanding required a corresponding adjustment of their commitment to him.

Fifth, with this call Jesus enlists workers to join him in his Kingdom mission,

promising, "I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17 NASB). The historical situation presents the opportunity for a metaphorical wordplay on their future role. These Galilean fishermen (*halieis*) will be fishers of men (*halieis anthropon*) in the Kingdom mission Jesus has inaugurated. "Jesus' call ... changes the disciples' vocation implying a radical break with their former way of living. Instead of living by the fishing business, they will live to reach others."<sup>31</sup> These four will be designated as apostles (3:13-19) and will become part of the inner circle around Jesus (cf. 13:3), and not only will be sent out on a short term mission with Jesus' own authority (6:7), but they also will go out on a worldwide mission (13:9-10). Jesus enlists co-workers early in his Kingdom mission.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Form of Discipleship*

This "call" also sets a distinctive mark on Jesus' *form* of discipleship. Although Mark does not here use the technical term "disciples" (*mathētai*) to refer to these men in this calling pericope, the narrative leads us to understand that this is their identity, because they immediately become his closest followers (cf. 1:29, 36). They are assumed to be identified, along with the named Levi (2:14), with the unspecified followers designated as "his disciples" when it occurs for the first time (2:15), and then throughout the narrative.

On the surface, Jesus had many of the characteristics of a Jewish rabbi. He taught in their synagogues and on the Sabbath, he taught in accordance with Jewish customs, he is given respect due a teacher of the law, his disciples followed him around, and he is even called "rabbi" (9:5; Matt 26:49; John 1:49). The normal pattern in Israel was for a prospective disciple to approach a rabbi and ask to study with

him. Joshua b. Perahyah said, "Provide thyself with a teacher and get thee a fellow disciple" (*m. 'Abot* 1.6), which Rabban Gamaliel echoed, "Provide thyself with a teacher and remove thyself from doubt" (*m. 'Abot* 1.16; cf. Matt 8:19). Later rabbinic disciples followed their master around, often physically imitating the master's teaching of Torah, because "imitating the master is imitating Moses' imitation of God."<sup>33</sup>

But as Jesus' ministry unfolds, he begins to establish a form of discipleship that is unlike the rabbis. In the early stage of the Jesus movement, various people came to Jesus as they would to a rabbi or prophet (e.g., John 1:38, 49; 3:2). At the inauguration of his Kingdom mission, Jesus establishes a new pattern, because he is the one who takes the initiative to seek out and give a call for these brothers to enter into a permanent relationship with him.<sup>34</sup> Even though it is probable that Jesus' disciples memorized much of his teaching and passed it on as the tradition of the church, they were ultimately committed to his Person, not just his teaching. The goal of Jewish disciples was someday to become masters, or rabbis, themselves, and to have their own disciples who would follow them. But Jesus' disciples were always to remain disciples of their Master and Teacher, Jesus, and to follow him only (cf. Matt 23:8-12). Discipleship to Jesus was going to be different than what many might have anticipated. It was not simply an academic or religious program. Discipleship was a life that began in relationship with the Master and moved into all areas of their experience. This is the beginning of Kingdom life.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Unique Members of Discipleship Disciples and Apostles*

Mark further emphasizes that Jesus selects from among the larger group of disciples a smaller group of Twelve to be with him as his apostles (Mark 3:13-14).<sup>36</sup> Mark's wording is somewhat ambiguous, but Luke gives further clarification: "When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles" (Luke 6:13). The term *disciple* designates those who had been called to repent and believe in the gospel that Jesus has initiated; they form the broad group of those who believe in Jesus (Mark 3:13-14; 4:10). The term *apostle* designates specific disciples, the Twelve,<sup>37</sup> who are commissioned and trained to represent Jesus as leaders of the church to come (3:14; 6:7-13, 30-31). The Twelve are both disciples and apostles. As disciples they represent all believers; as apostles they represent leaders.<sup>38</sup>

The distinction between the general group of disciples and the specific group of the Twelve apostles has to do with function, not with status or worth. All are equal with regard to their discipleship to Jesus, which speaks of their entrance into salvation and the Kingdom of God. The role of the Twelve as apostles is functionally oriented toward leadership. But this function did not elevate them to a higher status; calling to leadership is a calling to servanthood (cf. Mark 10:45).<sup>39</sup>

This is similar to the distinction that we find in the book of Acts, where "believers" (Acts 4:32) are called "disciples" (Acts 6:2), while the Twelve are consistently called "apostles." The expressions "those who believe" and "the disciples" signify the same group of people (cf. Acts 6:7; 9:26; 11:26; 14:21-22). *Disciple* was also the earliest synonym for Christian (Acts 11:26).

Therefore, all Christian believers are disciples, while only a small group of those who are the primary leaders of the early church are designated as *apostles*.<sup>40</sup>

### *Breaking Down Barriers to Discipleship*

The form of discipleship that Jesus institutes is unexpected and shocking, because he breaks down barriers between social classes, he overturns religious conceptions of well-being, and he abolishes slavish adherence to religious cultural traditions (Mark 7:1-13). Jesus' call to discipleship includes the calling of a local tax-collector, "Levi, son of Alphaeus" (2:14), whom the first Gospel refers to as "Matthew" (Matt 9:9). Since the circumstances of the calling are the same in the Gospels, most scholars suggest that this tax collector had two names, Matthew and Levi.<sup>41</sup>

In Palestine tax-collectors were employed as representatives of the Roman governing authorities, collecting the prescribed duties and generally seeing to public order. They usually were enlisted from the native population, because they needed to know local people and local customs to avoid being deceived. They were expected to collect a certain amount of tax money for the Roman authorities, and whatever extra they collected constituted their own commission. A tendency to resort to excessive extortion made them despised and hated by their own people (cf. Luke 19:8). Matthew was quite likely not a well-respected member of the region; rather he was probably considered a traitor for selling out his own people to the Roman occupation and rule.

Upon his calling, Matthew immediately followed Jesus and arranged a banquet for him and his other disciples at his own home (Mark 2:15; cf. Luke 5:29-30).<sup>42</sup>

To the banquet were invited "many tax collectors and 'sinners'" (Mark 2:15), most likely Matthew's closest companions in his life before discipleship. Table fellowship was an important social and religious convention among many groups in the ancient world. Boundaries were established that designated who were included, and excluded, from the meal, and that also served to delineate religious and ethical obligations toward the participants.<sup>43</sup> The derision that many felt generally for tax collectors was aggravated because they were regarded as ceremonially unclean because of their continual contact with Gentiles and because of their compromise of the Sabbath by working on it.<sup>44</sup>

The Pharisees were aghast that Jesus was eating with this group, especially the "sinners" (2:16). The term "sinner" (*hamartōlos*) was often used by the Pharisees to point to an identifiable segment of the people who were opposed to the will of God as reflected in their understanding of proper obedience to the Law and their *halakah* (e.g., Luke 7:36-50; Matt 26:45).<sup>45</sup> Matthew's cohorts were not only traitorous tax-collectors, but also Jews who lived outside of the Law, willfully ignoring rightful boundaries of appropriate Jewish behavior. In the minds of the Pharisees, for Jesus to share a meal with these types of persons indicates that he includes them within his own fellowship; it also suggests to them that he condones their behavior.<sup>46</sup>

Jesus declares that his ministry is not one of sharing in the sin of those around him, but of bringing healing to them. One of the most undeniably distinctive features of Jesus' message and ministry is the promise of salvation to "sinners."<sup>47</sup> To Jesus, a sinner was any person who remained opposed to the will of God. The

Pharisees considered themselves to be righteously healthy before God, because they defined righteousness by their observance of the Law—their “sacrifice.” But they are blind to their real sinfulness before God (Mark 2:17). The motley crew assembled with Jesus cannot avoid their own sinfulness. Matthew had been one of them, but he had experienced Jesus’ merciful call to salvation, so now he brings his former sinful companions to Jesus to find that healing for their souls as well. It is to these that Jesus has come to bring his message of mercy. Jesus’ offer of salvation to sinners apart from factional observances threatens the foundation and way of life of the Pharisees, yet is at the heart of the discipleship he established.<sup>48</sup>

#### *Discipleship and religious traditions*

In a programmatic interchange for discipleship to Jesus, Mark highlights how Jesus’ disciples are to conduct themselves with regard to traditional religious practices of committed disciples within Judaism. Jesus’ banquet with tax-collectors and sinners was offensive to the disciples of the Pharisees, but it also was offensive to the disciples of Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist (see 2:18). The “disciples of John” were committed followers of the prophet John the Baptist. They gathered around him as the prophet who would usher in the messianic age. They assisted John in baptizing those who came to him, and they engaged in strict religious practices taught by John, such as fasting and prayer (Luke 5:33; 11:1). The “disciples of the Pharisees” (Mark 2:18; cf. Matt 22:16) are most likely those in training to become full initiates to their brotherhood. They have been immersed in the Pharisaic commitment of the oral law and rigorous practice of their traditions, especially

fasting.

In the Old Testament, fasting was only prescribed to be observed on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32). But fasting came to be observed as an expression of confession of sin (Neh 9:1-2), mourning for a deceased person (1 Sam 31:13), humiliation (Deut 9:18) and concentration for prayer (Ezra 8:23). It was not a prescribed ritual in these latter cases. But various groups within Judaism took up fasting as a regular part of their observances, some fasting as often as twice a week as a means of approaching God.<sup>49</sup> John’s disciples did not understand why Jesus’ disciples did not regularly fast as a sign of repentance or as an indication of their spiritual discipline.

Jesus indicates that the arrival of the Kingdom of God brought to fulfillment the promises of Israel, which is cause for a time of rejoicing, like what would be experienced during marriage ceremonies (cf. Matt 25:12-13). It is not an appropriate time for fasting. However, fasting will be appropriate at a future time when Jesus is “taken away” (*aparthē*; Mark 2:20).

Jesus’ response is an important guideline for a proper perspective on discipleship and traditional practices. Spiritual growth in discipleship is not automatically assured through ritual observance of certain spiritual disciplines. Traditional practices must be carried out appropriately, not legalistically. Traditions are ways that humans have attempted to apply biblical principles to everyday life, but they are not absolute commands from God. They can be helpful if practiced appropriately, but they can be stifling to the movement of God if they become more important than commitment to Jesus himself.

Jesus illustrates these perspectives on spiritual growth and traditional practices

by using two examples from everyday life. He has not come simply to patch up the traditional practices of the Jews. The old Jewish system of traditions is inadequate to the new life of discipleship in the Kingdom of God. New forms are needed for the new garments and wine of the Kingdom, and new practices are needed to accommodate the new life of discipleship to Jesus (2:21-22). This does not supersede or abolish the Old Testament, which Jesus has come to fulfill (cf. Matt 5:17), but instead indicates that discipleship to Jesus supersedes rigid legalistic adherence to traditional practices of Judaism.

#### *Discipleship and the spiritual family*

At the peak of the narrative of Jesus' popularity with the crowds and the mounting conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment, Mark indicates that Jesus' family thought that he was out of his mind, making the claims he was making and disrupting the religious status quo (Mark 3:21; cf. John 7:5).<sup>50</sup> Also, it is probable that his father has died by this time, and Jesus' mother and brothers intend to bring Jesus to his senses as the eldest son (Mark 3:32), the one responsible to care for his mother and younger brothers and sisters after the death of the father.

But Jesus will not be deterred from his messianic mission, even if it means disruption of biological loyalties. Instead, he makes a programmatic declaration of what the relationship of discipleship entails. Jesus looked at those seated in a circle around him, whom Matthew identifies explicitly as his disciples (Matt 12:49) and specifies that the central feature that creates and characterizes his spiritual family is doing God's will (Mark 3:34-35). Whoever has obeyed his call to enter the

Kingdom of God and has become his disciple is part of the new family of God.

A person's genealogical relationship to Israel did not guarantee a place in the Kingdom of God, and neither does a person's family relationship. Each individual must respond to God's will and obey Jesus' call to the Kingdom and become his disciple. Jesus is the ultimate example of the will of the Father revealed and obeyed (14:36), so to follow his example in discipleship and become like him will enable his disciples to do God's will on a daily basis.

Jesus will accentuate to his disciples the inevitable separation that will occur between family members because of the decision to make a commitment to him (13:12-13). But Jesus did not come to abolish the biological family, because he will continue to uphold the law that demands children to honor their father and mother and will rebuke those who develop traditions that allow them to circumvent responsible care of family obligations (7:9-13). Jesus does return to Nazareth to where his family was still living to preach in the synagogue (6:1-6). Instead of abolishing or rejecting his family, Jesus is demonstrating the preeminence of a person's commitment to him and the Kingdom of God. This commitment forms a new spiritual family in relationship to him and to the Father. Such a spiritual family would, ideally, include one's own biological family.

#### *Male and female disciples in the spiritual family*

The implication is that Jesus intentionally broadens the gender references to include women as his disciples by alluding to "sister" as well.<sup>51</sup> Jesus now indicates explicitly that his message and

ministry initiates a unique form of discipleship with regard to gender. Within Judaism at that time, especially among the rabbis, only men could become a disciple of a rabbi and study Torah. A later passage in the Mishnah gives what was probably a general feature during Jesus' time. It discourages too much conversation between men and women, even one's own wife, because it distracts the rabbinic disciple from studying Torah: "He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law and at the last will inherit Gehenna" (*m. 'Abot* 1:5). But with Jesus, any person—woman or man, young or old, Gentile or Jew—who responds to the gospel of the Kingdom and believes in him for eternal life is his disciple.

Therefore, discipleship to Jesus is not to be defined by rabbinic models, but in relationship to Jesus, which means obedience to the will of God.<sup>52</sup> This is the hallmark of Jesus' disciples, whatever the family, whatever the gender, creating a new family of God.<sup>53</sup> This is the experience of the early church, where "disciple" refers to both men and women (Acts 6:1-7; 9:10, 36; 16:1), all of whom are called "believers" (Acts 5:14), those who comprise the "church" (Acts 8:3).<sup>54</sup> Luke even uses the rare feminine form of the word "disciple" (*mathētria*) to refer specifically to the woman Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts 9:36). In distinction from Jewish forms of discipleship, all men and women who obey the will of God enter into a saving discipleship relationship to Jesus.

### *The Unique Messenger of Discipleship*

Mark contrasts two fundamentally opposing points of view concerning Jesus' gospel message: "thinking the things of

God" and "thinking the things of humankind" (cf. 8:33). Mark highlights the difficulty of understanding Jesus' message and ministry by painting a portrait of the disciples that may be the most ambiguous among the Gospel accounts.<sup>55</sup>

On the one hand, the disciples receive a positive treatment. They are introduced as being specially selected and commissioned with authority by Jesus (1:16-20; 3:13-19a) to hear the secrets of the Kingdom (4:10-12) and to promote his ministry (3:14-15; 6:7-13, 35). Empowered by Jesus for ministry in Israel, the disciples do as Jesus does: they preach, heal, and exorcise demons.

On the other hand, the disciples are painted with unflattering colors. Although enlightened by God and empowered by Jesus, the disciples show themselves to be uncomprehending. The disciples do not understand parabolic teaching (4:13; 7:17-18), do not understand the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God in the calming of the seas (4:35-41; 6:45-52), and do not understand Jesus' potential to feed the multitudes miraculously (6:34-44; 8:1-10). The disciples do not truly understand the nature of Jesus' ministry or teaching (8:14-21), which in essence involves the way to the cross (8:31-33; 9:30-32) through servanthood (10:32-45). This incomprehension eventually leads Judas to betray him (14:43-46), the disciples to forsake him (14:50), and Peter to deny him (14:54, 66-72).<sup>56</sup>

But true discipleship to Jesus means to open oneself to hear God's message, align one's priorities to unwavering commitment to Jesus, and ultimately commit oneself to God's way, not humanity's.<sup>57</sup> This is the challenge for all who hear Jesus. These themes are highlighted in three crucial passages in Mark's Gospel:

Jesus' teaching in parables (4:1-34), Peter's confession (8:27-38), and the women at the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection (15:33-16:8).

#### *Appropriating Jesus' Parables of the Kingdom (4:1-34)*

Many of the people in the crowd that followed Jesus around were hoping for the arrival of the Kingdom with an overt display of a political and militaristic might. But the hope for physical and material blessings hardened them from recognizing their own spiritual condition. Through his parables Jesus tests the hearts of the crowd to reveal whether the message of the gospel of the Kingdom of God has taken root and is producing fruit, or whether it has been unproductive (4:13-20). They must decide whether they are with him, or against him.

And through these parables Jesus also reveals to his disciples the secrets of the Kingdom of God, making known that during this age the Kingdom will exist in an inconspicuous form. It will be an undercover Kingdom, not the overpowering political, militaristic, and dominant cultural manifestation of God's rule that many expected (4:30-32). So the parables reveal what it means for Jesus' disciples to live as Kingdom subjects in a world that has not yet experienced the fully consummated Kingdom of God.

The parables further reveal that Jesus' disciples will be demonstrably different than others in this world, and they will have produced in them fruit that will mark them out clearly as Jesus' disciples. Jesus reveals that the Kingdom has arrived with power, but it is a hidden, spiritual, transformational power. This is what discipleship to Jesus will be like in this age of the clandestinely inaugurated,

but not fully consummated, Kingdom of God.

With this revelation in parables of the secrets of the Kingdom of God, the reader might think that the crowds should be excused if they did not understand these cloaked messages. But Mark emphasizes that Jesus spoke his parables for the purpose of blinding the crowd: "so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" (4:12).<sup>58</sup> Within the crowd is a mixture of attitudes toward Jesus—some lean toward becoming Jesus' disciples, while others lean toward following the Pharisees and opposing Jesus, and still others ride the commitment-fence. Jesus uses the parables to force a decision. God knows those who will harden their hearts against Jesus' message, so the parables are used to harden sovereignly people's hearts to the point where eventually they will be unable to respond (cf. 4:12; Matt 13:15). God also knows those who will respond to the message of the gospel, so the parables elicit a positive response to come to Jesus, become his disciple, and ask for explanation (cf. Mark 4:10).

#### *Understanding and confessing Jesus' identity (8:27-28)*

At the turning point where he has concluded his Galilean ministry and begins the fateful, final journey to Jerusalem and the cross, Jesus expects a direct answer from the disciples about his identity.<sup>59</sup> Peter steps forward as a leader and spokesperson for the others.<sup>60</sup> He declares, "You are the Christ" (8:29). "Christ" is a title linked in the Jewish mind to David as the anointed king of Israel, and with the promise of the "anointed one" who would be the light of hope for the people of Israel

(cf. 2 Sam 7:11b-16). Although understood in a variety of ways,<sup>61</sup> that promise became a fixture of the hope of a coming age of blessing for the nation (e.g., Isaiah 26-29, 40) that is inaugurated by a figure who would bring to reality the promise of the eschatological reign of David's line and triumph in the last days over Israel's enemies (cf. Ps 2:2; Dan 9:25-26).<sup>62</sup>

Peter and the other disciples are progressing in their understanding of Jesus' unique identity. The confession "Christ" is not simply synonymous with the popular conception, but they are quite likely expecting Jesus as the Messiah to inaugurate the eschatological age of blessing. But once Jesus receives Peter's confession of his identity as Messiah, he blows open the disciples' remaining popular expectations, and begins to predict that his messiahship will not result in a glorious throne on earth at this time, but in an ignominious death on a cross (Mark 8:31).

This is the first of three primary times that Jesus will predict his arrest and crucifixion (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33). But as much as he tries to get his disciples to understand the necessity of his mission, they continually misapprehend its significance. Instead of being a revolutionary liberator, as many hoped he would be, Jesus will be a suffering Messiah, something that even his own disciples, let alone the crowds, had great difficulty fathoming. By claiming the necessity of suffering death at the hands of the religious leadership of Jerusalem, Jesus reveals the ultimate purpose for his life ministry.

But with audacious presumption Peter steps forward, likely once again as spokesman for the rest of the shocked disciples (who also receive Jesus' rebuke; 8:33), to try to save his Master from the announced

fate of suffering. Within Jewish master-disciple relationships it was unthinkable that a disciple would correct his master, let alone "rebuke" (*epitimaō*) him,<sup>63</sup> as Peter does here (8:32). Peter is once again trying to fit Jesus into his human understanding, but by doing so Peter sinks to new depths of human misunderstanding. Peter partially understood Jesus' messiahship, but when it came to an aspect of God's program that he did not understand he tried to force it to fit into his own understanding. But that is Satan's trick. Peter has set his mind on human interests, not God's (8:33).

*Taking up one's cross to follow Jesus*  
(8:34-38)

After Jesus rebuffs Peter's attempt to impose his own way of thinking on the messianic mission, he reveals one of the central principles of discipleship: a disciple must take up his own cross and follow Jesus. In the first century, crucifixion was a feared form of execution, used effectively by the Romans as one of the strongest kinds of deterrence against insurrection or rebellion.<sup>64</sup> It was a dreadful way to die. Condemned victims were often forced to take up and carry their own crossbeam to the scene of crucifixion (15:21).<sup>65</sup>

The horror of the cross will be Jesus' tragic fate, but in what must have been to the disciples a shocking shift of emphasis, he uses the cross and crucifixion as an image of discipleship (8:34). Although the image is often understood by modern Christians as bearing up under some personal hardship or life's cruel fate, the cross has a much more profound significance: one must die to his or her own will and take up his or her own cross as representative of God's will. Jesus' path of suffering

and death on the cross is the ultimate example of obedience to the Father's will.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the cross symbolizes the central purpose for Jesus' life, as he will cry out to the Father in the garden just prior to his betrayal and crucifixion, "Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). The cross is for Jesus and for those who would follow him in discipleship a metaphor of the Father's will for a disciple's life. It involves the negative—"denying self" (a person's own will for his or her life), and the positive—"taking up the cross" (accepting God's will) and "following Jesus" (putting it into practice).

The apostle Paul will point to the cross as the historical event in which Jesus' death is bound up with all components of salvation and the development of the Christian life—justification (Rom 3:21-26), reconciliation (Col 2:11-14), and regeneration (Gal 2:19-20). This forever makes the cross not only a horrid reminder of the death of the Son of God, but also an irreplaceable symbol of grace, and a stark, matchless image of the Christian life of discipleship.

*Encountering Jesus' shocking crucifixion and his incredible resurrection (15:33-16:8)*

One of the most poignant facets of Mark's narrative is the faithfulness of the women disciples who followed Jesus from Galilee and who witnessed his crucifixion and burial. Equally poignant is the fact that God used them as witnesses not only to the central redemptive act of history—Jesus' death on the cross and the sealing of the tomb (cf. 15:40-41, 47)—but also as witnesses to his resurrection from the dead (16:1-8). God was bestowing a special honor on these women. They are exemplary of true discipleship to Jesus

because of their faithfulness and courage.

The dramatic conclusion to Mark's gospel—with the women disciples running away from the tomb trembling and bewildered because they were afraid—fits with Mark's message of discipleship. From beginning to end Jesus does not fit any typical categories of human understanding. The women disciples have witnessed the horror of their Master's crucifixion. And now the unthinkable has occurred—the angel announces that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The resurrection scene provides fulfillment of Jesus' predictions (9:9; 14:28) and obligates the reader to anticipate reconciliation of the disciples and Peter with Jesus, since they will see him in Galilee, just as he told them (16:7).<sup>67</sup> The summons to Galilee provides the assurance that Peter and the disciples, in spite of denying and forsaking Jesus, have not been rejected by the risen Lord.<sup>68</sup>

Jesus' disciples were challenged consistently to think God's thoughts, not typical human thoughts, but this is almost more than the women can handle. Their discipleship to Jesus fails, yes (16:8); but the angel announces a promise of restoration to all who fail, even Peter who has denied Jesus at his time of greatest need (16:7).<sup>69</sup> Morna Hooker affirms,

The disciples may have failed to follow Jesus to death, and the women may have failed as well, but now others are called to become disciples and to spread the gospel. The young man's message is a command to Mark's readers to follow the same path of discipleship and to pass on the good news to others.<sup>70</sup>

## *The Unique Message of Discipleship in Mark's Gospel*

### *Experiencing Jesus*

The starkness of Mark's treatment of Jesus and his disciples is the clue to understanding the portrait he draws for us. Mark writes to people who need to experience the stark reality of Jesus, who need to have their lives touched and challenged by his message and his ministry. Mark wants his readers to experience anew what the disciples experienced as they walked with Jesus. People of the church face the danger of being too familiar with Jesus: we have heard about him in church, read four different Gospel accounts of his life, seen movies of his life on television or in the theater. That familiarity with Jesus can reduce him to the level of our preconceptions or to a stereo-typed figure. The disciples of the first century continually had to make mental and spiritual adjustments to Jesus as he revealed himself and his purposes to them. He took them to the cutting edge of faith where sometimes they triumphed, other times they faltered, other times they completely misunderstood. Mark wants us to experience that same stark reality of experiencing Jesus, yet he wants us to learn from the original disciples' example and grow into an unwavering faith.<sup>71</sup>

To experience Jesus is to have our mental images blown open, because as familiar as we are with Jesus, he is beyond our imagination. In fact, we may be too familiar with him and have, thus, boxed him into our limited ability to experience him as the Son of God who profoundly displayed full deity and full humanity. The religious leaders could not comprehend him, so they condemned him (14:55-64). The crowds would not change their expectations of what they wanted, and so

they demanded Barabbas be released, and Jesus crucified (15:6-15). And even Jesus' own closest followers could not fully commit to the profundity of his true identity and mission, so they either betrayed him or denied him (14:43-50, 66-72). To experience Jesus truly demands that we place all of our inadequacies at his feet and enter into a relationship with him as the one who will expand our comprehension, our expectations, and our commitment.

### *Thinking the things of God*

The disciples' response to Jesus is a major portion of the narrative. They were given the mystery of the Kingdom; they experienced in their own lives God's redeeming activity. Privy to special instruction, they were even empowered to act in Jesus' name to preach the gospel, to heal, to exorcise, and to teach. Yet, on the other hand, they misunderstood. They became confused and afraid. When adversity set in, they reflected little faith and hardness of heart. This confusion ate away at their fundamental perception of who Jesus was, as well as the implications of Jesus' identity for their discipleship.<sup>72</sup>

Thus Mark deals with a fact of history: during Jesus' earthly life the disciples did not completely understand him. Mark uses the historical disciples to show his readers how difficult it is to grasp the mystery of Jesus and the cross. Although Jesus has come as God's promised, Spirit-anointed, royal Son to herald and inaugurate the Kingdom, Mark writes to correct those who would look to the glory of the final consummation of the Kingdom instead of its vulnerable beginnings. The Kingdom is here in hidden fashion, and Jesus the Messiah, Son of God (1:1) must be understood in terms of suffering and the cross (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34).

Mark understood the danger of relying only upon human understanding. Throughout the narrative he leads us to see that even partial human understanding is ultimately catastrophic, and calls his readers to accept Jesus' identity and mission on God's terms, not our own.<sup>73</sup> Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ/Messiah is certainly the core creed of Mark and his church,<sup>74</sup> but it is much more than humans can understand on their own. Jesus is more than even Peter fully understood, and more than the kind of deliverer that many of the oppressed crowds of Israel expected. Jesus is the Messiah who will deliver the people from their sins. The route that he will take to Jerusalem will not be one of political and military conquest, but of suffering and dying and rising again (8:31); the Father's purpose for his life is to become a redemptive Servant (cf. 10:45).

To understand Jesus' identity and mission, Mark's readers, and that includes us, must not attempt to force Jesus to fit into our own understanding, but must give over our minds and hearts to God's revelation. It is only in doing so that we will find the true life that comes, paradoxically, from Jesus' cross, and the cross that all those who would follow him must take up (8:34-38).<sup>75</sup>

### *Finding greatness in servanthood*

Mark places Jesus' third prediction of the crucifixion at a critical juncture of his narrative (10:32-34). Immediately after giving this prediction, two of Jesus' inner circle, James and John, ask an intriguing question. They want to know if they can sit with Jesus when he enters into his glory (cf. 10:35-39). This was not the first time that the disciples showed concern about positions of prominence. Earlier Jesus had

caught the Twelve arguing about who was the greatest (cf. 9:33-37). The disciples had something deep within their nature which drove them, which, when focused in the wrong direction, led them to go contrary to the will and work of God. It was what may be referred to as the "ambition of greatness." The brothers were willing and ready to endure any kind of sacrifice so long as they were rewarded with personal prominence in the Kingdom of God (10:37-39).

Along with the other disciples, James and John thought that Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom, and they rightly understood that the disciples would have places of authority in this kingdom. But what they did not perceive was that Jesus' Kingdom was to be of a completely different sort than the typical earthly kingdom, and, therefore, Jesus' disciples were to be of a completely different sort than important people in the other types of kingdoms.

Jesus' pivotal pronouncement underscores the depth of incongruity between Jesus' understanding of life and ministry and that of the disciples—"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). Servanthood is a concept not expected by the disciples. By comprehending the essence of *Jesus' ministry* as servanthood, the disciples will comprehend the essence of *discipleship* as servanthood,<sup>76</sup> including their motivation, position, ambition, expectations, and example. Jesus did not come as a potentate who expected groveling servants to cater to his every personal whim; he came as a servant to give his life to save those who were his subjects. That is a completely unique type of Master, who demands an equally unique type of discipleship

from his followers. Servanthood is to be a primary motivation for the discipleship community.

We can understand the self-seeking motivation of the brothers, because this is the way of the world that we know all too well. But this kind of motivation will tear apart the unity of the community by producing manipulation and competition among disciples. When we understand the gift of the position that disciples hold as members of the Kingdom of God, we can take our eyes off ourselves. There never will be any higher position for us, because we are all equal brothers and sisters of one Father (3:31-34), and all equal disciples of one Teacher and Master (cf. Matt 23:8-12). Since our position is established, we can turn the world's pattern of greatness upside down and find our greatness in looking after the needs of those within the community of disciples and give ourselves to the life-ambition of serving them.<sup>77</sup>

The compelling example is Jesus himself. He was so secure in his identity as the Son of God that he could give himself unconditionally, in spite of the appearance of any of his earthly circumstances, to serve us. The paradigm of power is turned upside down, so that the apparent weakness of a man on a cross is the greatest display of power that the world has ever known.<sup>78</sup> In that single substitutionary act of service all of the needs of humanity were met as Jesus became the ransom for sin. And that act stands before us as the single example of the servanthood to which we are called within the reciprocating community of disciples, and to which we witness to a stupefied, waiting world.

## Implications

Mark portrays conflicting portraits of the disciples. Often interpreters who focus solely on the negative aspects see the Twelve simply as literary figures who represent a faction of the Church against which the evangelist polemicizes.<sup>79</sup> However, looking at both the positive and negative features of the disciples allows us to see that Mark has a pastoral motivation. Although Mark has the highest regard for the disciples as they struggled to understand their unique Master, he also uses the disciples' failures to instruct his community.<sup>80</sup>

Mark points to the difficulty the disciples had understanding Jesus' message and ministry. Jesus did not fit within the expectations and stereotypes of the disciples, and therefore they had difficulty understanding him. Mark uses the historical disciples to show his readers how difficult it is to grasp the mystery of Jesus and the cross. Those passages that stress the incomprehension of the disciples instruct Mark's church about the necessity of thinking the thoughts of God rather than the thoughts of humans (e.g., 8:33). The evangelist points to the obtuseness of the disciples to instruct his readers about the meaning of authentic discipleship—selfless servanthood.<sup>81</sup>

As the unique Master of his disciples, Jesus provides the only true paradigm of our discipleship. Larry Hurtado says well,

In Mark's account, Jesus is both the basis for and the pattern of discipleship. His death is the salvific ransom (10:45), the covenant-making sacrifice (14:24), the index of commitment for his disciples (e.g., 8:34), and the servant-pattern that they are to follow (10:34-45). In fact, Mark makes Jesus the only adequate model of discipleship.<sup>82</sup>

The disciple who is privileged to be a member of Jesus' Kingdom is a servant, which means thinking God's thoughts (8:31-33), pursuing the life of the cross (8:34-38) through the message (9:1-8) and example of Jesus (9:9-32), and, hence, rejecting status (9:33-37), exclusivism (9:38-10:16), and the treasures of this world (10:17-31). The disciples in Mark's Gospel are privileged members of the Kingdom of God, but their incomprehension comes from their worldly expectations. Mark's portrait of discipleship points first to Jesus as the unique Master, who went to the cross so that others could experience the redemption and the transforming power of a relationship with him. Jesus' example and teaching directs them, and us, to think God's way, the way of suffering and the cross through servanthood, which will result in a unique form of discipleship to him.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Michael J. Wilkins, "Mark: Servants of the Redemptive Servant," in *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 172-240.

<sup>2</sup>See Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Mathētes* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 59; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), chapters 1-3. An updated edition was published as *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>3</sup>See Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple*, 32-42. See also Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, trans. James C. G. Greig (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 25-31.

<sup>4</sup>Henri I. Marrou, *A History of Education*

*in Antiquity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 49-50.

<sup>5</sup>Philo, *Sacrifices* 7:4; 64:10; 79:10.

<sup>6</sup>*m. Abot* 1:1; *b. Šabb.* 31a.

<sup>7</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 13:289; 15:3, 370; Mark 2:18; Matt 22:15-16.

<sup>8</sup>Midrash *Shir Hashirim Zuta*.

<sup>9</sup>John 1:35; 3:25; Mark 2:18.

<sup>10</sup>Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple*, 124-125.

<sup>11</sup>David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 59-63.

<sup>12</sup>See Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and generally Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000).

<sup>13</sup>Fernando F. Segovia, "Introduction: Call and Discipleship—Toward a Re-examination of the Shape and Character of Christian Existence in the New Testament," in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 2. See also Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel according to Mark* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 1-2.

<sup>14</sup>John J. Vincent, "Discipleship and Synoptic Studies," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 16 (1960): 464.

<sup>15</sup>See Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

<sup>16</sup>See Richard N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Michael J. Wilkins, "Discipleship," in *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels*, eds. Joel Green,

- Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 182-189; and Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 172-240.
- <sup>17</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 118.
- <sup>18</sup>Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 430-438.
- <sup>19</sup>Developed more fully in the light of Matthew's perspective, see Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). This material draws upon that discussion.
- <sup>20</sup>As demonstrated in Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).
- <sup>21</sup>This is a basic principle, which Robert Stein illustrates from Mark: "The Gospel of Mark is a Gospel about Jesus. From Mark 1:1 to 16:8 Jesus is the focus of attention. There is no narrative in the book that does not in some way center on him. He is the main content, the focus, and the object of the entire Gospel" (*Playing By The Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 159).
- <sup>22</sup>For a succinct overview, see Larry W. Hurtado, "Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark—and Beyond," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 9-29. For a complete discussion, see C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 27; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).
- <sup>23</sup>Cf. Robert L. Humphrey, *Narrative Structure and Message in Mark: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Studies in Bible and Early Christianity 60; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2003).
- <sup>24</sup>Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 171.
- <sup>25</sup>Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 50; Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 104-107.
- <sup>26</sup>Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, rev. ed. (Studies in Biblical Theology 28; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1960), 20.
- <sup>27</sup>Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 40-42; cf. Wilkins *Following the Master*, chapter 6; and Wilkins, *Matthew*, 178-179, 187.
- <sup>28</sup>Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 154.
- <sup>29</sup>See Leon Morris, "Disciples of Jesus," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ—Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, eds. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 116; Schweizer, 20.
- <sup>30</sup>Brenda B. Colijn, "Salvation as Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark," *Ashland Theological Journal* 30 (1998): 11; see also Philip G. Davis, "Christology, Discipleship, and Self-Understanding in the Gospel of Mark," in *Self-Definition and Self-Discovery in Early Christianity: A Study in Changing Horizons. Essays in Appreciation of Ben F. Meyer from Former Students*, eds. David J. Hawkin and Tom Robinson (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 26; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 101-119, esp. 107-111.
- <sup>31</sup>Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a; Dallas: Word, 1989), 51.
- <sup>32</sup>Graham Twelftree, "Discipleship in Mark's Gospel," *St Mark's Review* 141 (Autumn 1990): 5-6.
- <sup>33</sup>Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 70.
- <sup>34</sup>Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 42-57.
- <sup>35</sup>Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 100-109, 124-125.
- <sup>36</sup>For discussion of the authenticity of the phrase, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 69; Guelich, 154; Christopher W. Skinner, "'Whom He Also Named Apostles': A Textual Problem in Mark 3:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (July-September 2004): 322-329.
- <sup>37</sup>For discussions of the historicity of the Twelve within Jesus' ministry, see Scot McKnight, "Jesus and the Twelve," *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 11 no. 2 (2001): 203-231; John P. Meier, "The Circle of the Twelve: Did It Exist During Jesus' Public Ministry?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997): 635-672; idem, *A Marginal Jew: Companions and Competitors, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, volume 3 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 125-163; contra Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search*

- for the *Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco: 1998), 71.
- <sup>38</sup>Urban C. von Wahlde, "Mark 9:33-50: Discipleship: The Authority that Serves," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 29 (1985): 49-67.
- <sup>39</sup>Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, and Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 112-117.
- <sup>40</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 180; cf. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 34-41, 248-256.
- <sup>41</sup>See R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 66-70.
- <sup>42</sup>*en te oikia autou*: the article indicates a particular house and the possessive pronoun indicates Matthew's, as the NIV: "at Levi's house."
- <sup>43</sup>Dennis E. Smith, "Table Fellowship," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:302-304; Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., "Table Fellowship," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, new ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 613.
- <sup>44</sup>J. H. Harrop, "Tax Collector," in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, et. al. (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1980), 3:1520-1521.
- <sup>45</sup>See Wilkins, "Sinner," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 757-760.
- <sup>46</sup>I. Howard Marshall, "'Sins' and 'Sin,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (January-March 2002): 3-20.
- <sup>47</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 174.
- <sup>48</sup>Wilkins, "Sinner," 760.
- <sup>49</sup>Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (January-March 2001): 86-103.
- <sup>50</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 164-165; Guelich, 172-173; George Aichele, "Jesus's Uncanny 'Family Scene,'" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 74 (June 1999): 29-49; contra John Painter, "When is a House Not Home? Disciples and Family in Mark 3.13-35," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 498-513.
- <sup>51</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 125.
- <sup>52</sup>See Michael J. Wilkins, "Women in the Teaching and Example of Jesus," *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 91-112.
- <sup>53</sup>Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 64-70.
- <sup>54</sup>Wilkins, *Following the Master*, chapter 13.
- <sup>55</sup>Paul Danove, "The Narrative Rhetoric of Mark's Ambiguous Characterization of the Disciples," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 70 (1998): 21-38.
- <sup>56</sup>S. W. Henderson, "'Concerning the Loaves.' Comprehending Incomprehension in Mark 6:45-52," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 83 (2001): 3-26.
- <sup>57</sup>Frank J. Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter's Confession (Mark 6,14—8,30)," *Biblica* 70 (1989): 153-172.
- <sup>58</sup>In Matthew's account, Jesus puts the blame squarely on those who have hardened themselves against his message and ministry: "though (or "because") seeing they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand" (Matt 13:13).
- <sup>59</sup>See John Christopher Thomas, "Discipleship in Mark's Gospel," in *Faces of Renewal: Studies in Honor of Stanley M. Horton. Presented on His 70th Birthday*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 64-80, esp. 71-74.
- <sup>60</sup>The question was posed by Jesus to the group of disciples ("you" is plural in "But what about you?" ... "Who do you say I am?"), so Peter functions at least in part as spokesman for the Twelve.
- <sup>61</sup>E.g., priests (e.g., 1QRule of the Community [1QS] 9:11) and prophets (e.g., CD 2:12; 5:21—6:1; 1QM 11:7, 8).
- <sup>62</sup>E.g., 1QRule of the Congregation [1QSa] 2:14, 20; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Study of the Rule of the Congregation* (Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 38; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989).
- <sup>63</sup>Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World*, 116-124.
- <sup>64</sup>David W. Chapman, "Perceptions of Crucifixion among Jews and Christians in the Ancient World" *Tyndale Bulletin* 51 no. 2 (2000): 313-316.
- <sup>65</sup>Plutarch writes, "Every criminal condemned to death bears his cross on his back" (Plutarch, *Moralia* 554A/B; cf. 554D; *De sera numinis vindicta* 9). See also Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia:

- Fortress, 1977), 77.
- <sup>66</sup>Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds., "Cross," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 184.
- <sup>67</sup>Cf. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 112-117.
- <sup>68</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 589-592; Augustine Stock, *Call to Discipleship: A Literary Study of Mark's Gospel* (Good News Studies 1; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982).
- <sup>69</sup>See Joel F. Williams, "Literary Approaches to the End of Mark's Gospel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999): 21-35.
- <sup>70</sup>Morna D. Hooker, *Endings: Invitations to Discipleship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 27.
- <sup>71</sup>Cf. Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 64; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- <sup>72</sup>Guelich, xxiii, xxv, xlii.
- <sup>73</sup>James Hanson, "The Disciples in Mark's Gospel: Beyond the Pastoral/Polemical Debate," *Horizons in Biblical Theology: An International Dialogue* 20 (1998): 128-155.
- <sup>74</sup>Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), esp. 142-155.
- <sup>75</sup>M. C. Dippenaar, "The Disciples in Mark: Narrative and Theology," *Taiwan Journal of Theology* 17 (1995): 139-209.
- <sup>76</sup>Cf. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 112-117; Douglas J. W. Milne, "Mark—The Gospel of Servant Discipleship," *Reformed Theological Review* 49 (January-April 1990): 20-29.
- <sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-29.
- <sup>78</sup>Narry F. Santos, "The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (October-December 1997): 452-460.
- <sup>79</sup>E.g., Werner Heinz Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).
- <sup>80</sup>E.g., Best, *passim*; Matera, 153-172; Hurtado, 24-25.
- <sup>81</sup>Hanson, "The Disciples in Mark's Gospel," 148-149.
- <sup>82</sup>Hurtado, 25.