

Route 66

Mark: Suffering Servant

Part 41 - October 24, 2010

Mark is the Gospel for short attention spans; and, it's fondly referred to, among Bible teachers, as the "AD/HD¹ Gospel". No one sits still in Mark. And Mark doesn't focus on any one thing for more a minute.

The Greek word "eutheos" [yoo-theh'-oce] means: *immediately; at once; as soon as*. And, 33% of the time (one out of three) that it's used in the *entire* Bible, it's in Mark's Gospel.



At once the Spirit sent him out ... - Mark 1:12 NIV

Immediately the leprosy left ... - Mark 1:42 NIV

As soon as they got out of the boat ... - Mark 6:54 NIV

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed ... - Mark 9:24 NIV

Immediately he received his sight ... - Mark 10:52 NIV

Immediately the rooster crowed ... - Mark 14:72 NIV

Everything happens "*right now*"! 42 times in just 16 chapters, the action *leaps* from the page with this word, "eutheos". I timed myself reading the first chapter:

- | | |
|---|------------|
| A. The ministry and message of John the Baptist | 25 seconds |
| B. Jesus is baptized and filled with the Spirit | 12 seconds |
| C. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness | 7 seconds |
| D. Jesus calls the first four disciples | 19 seconds |
| E. Jesus drives out an evil spirit | 26 seconds |
| F. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law | 11 seconds |
| G. Jesus cures the diseased and demon-possessed | 10 seconds |
| H. Jesus goes off and prays alone | 14 seconds |
| I. Jesus heals an incurable leper | 24 seconds |

And that concludes chapter one (2.5 minutes)! And this frantic, action-packed pace is sustained for 16 chapters.

Mark's Gospel is the polar opposite of Matthew's, in style. I said that each Gospel writer offers a unique perspective, and a distinct aspect of Jesus, to a specific audience. And my goal is to tell the story of the author, the audience, and the theme.

¹ Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder



So, why did Jesus need an *action* Gospel? Well, Matthew wrote to the Jews, but Mark wrote to the Romans. And the Romans seem to be culturally addicted to action.



Just as the Jews prized their genealogies and prophecies and details of the law, the Romans cherished their adrenalin rushes.

This led to the blood sports and spectacles of the 50,000 seat colosseum in the heart of Rome (built about 10 years after Mark was written).

The Gospel of Mark is actually the Gospel of *Peter*. Mark served as Peter's assistant in Rome. And when Peter sent his greetings from Rome, he said:

... and so does my son Mark. - 1 Peter 5:13 NIV

We have an incredible letter from the earliest church historian, Eusebius (c. 263-339 AD), wherein he quotes Papias (one of the first church leaders) who actually *interviewed* the apostles. And here's what the Apostle John told Papias regarding Mark:

Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers ...²

Mark was Peter's interpreter. So, he didn't just *hear* these stories once or twice, he *translated* them again and again. And since Peter was a man of action (think ear slicing) and not so much *eloquent articulation*, Mark's Gospel is heavy on action, light on discussion ... and *perfect* for the Romans.

Mark is the only one who tells us that Jesus was a carpenter,³ an even more physical profession back then than it is now. And I can hear Peter with his fisherman's ethic, saying, "That Jesus was a hard worker. He wasn't some namby-pamby philosopher. He was tough as nails. He had skills. He could hold his own."

Tell a Roman about the man and his miracles, and *then* they'll care about fulfilled prophecy. Tell a Jew about fulfilled prophecy, and then they'll care about the man and his miracles. Matthew's theme was: Jesus the Promised King.

And, just as Matthew upended the Jewish expectation of a warrior Messiah and a physical Kingdom, Peter (and Mark) upends Roman sensibilities, by presenting Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

The *key* verse in Mark is when Jesus lays out His mission:

² Schaff, P. (1997). *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. I* (172-173)

³ Mark 6:3

... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. – *Mark 10:45 NIV*

The idea of a “Servant Messiah” was *as* offensive to the Romans as a pacifist Messiah and a spiritual kingdom was to the Jews. They were the *masters* of the *world*, and their massive slave population were the outcasts of society. However, it resonated so deeply with the slave population, and was so readily embraced and spread by them that in Rome Christianity became known as the “religion of slaves”.

It is shocking that God became our *servant!* But only if you misunderstand true servanthood, or think that we *deserved* it.

Picture a surgeon working desperately to save an accident victim. But, think of accident victim as a drunk driver, repeat offender, who has just hit and killed a young family. Yet the doctor, fully aware of this, labors none-the-less urgently to save him. We’re the patient and Jesus is the doctor. He doesn’t serve us because we deserve it, but because we *need* it. And this is Mark’s Gospel: Jesus did for us what we can’t do for ourselves.

Without His serving us, we are dead, on the slab, in our sin.

... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. – *Mark 10:43b-44 NIV*

This isn’t a pep talk to make ‘em feel better about serving. Jesus is explaining a fundamental law of His Kingdom. God didn’t “stoop down” to serve; this is what true greatness looks like. We have it all upside down. Greatness is not defined by how many people serve *you*, but by how many people *you serve*.

Do you really want to be like Jesus?

Well, who are you sacrificing yourself for?

Peter and Mark present Jesus as a compassionate, obedient, Servant-Of-Action who serves relentlessly and courageously.

... Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’?” – *Mark 11:15b-17a NIV*

Why does Jesus include this line, “for all nations”? How is that part of an explanation for what He’s done?

Matthew and Luke also record this event; but, *only* Mark documents those last three words (that Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7).



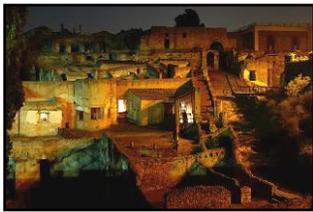
Here is a scale model of the temple (from *The Israel Museum*, in Jerusalem). The surrounding courtyard was called the “Court of Gentiles”. It’s where non-Jews, like the Romans would gather and worship, because you had to be Jewish to enter the inner courts. The Royal Stoa (covered walkway on the left) was added by King Herod as a public marketplace and center of commercial activity.

By Jesus’ day, the outer courts overflowed with vendors hawking souvenirs, sacrifices, food, currency, and even guided tours. So, when Jesus says, “My house will be called a house of prayer **for all nations**”, He’s emphasizing the fact that God had directed this area to be preserved as a worship center for all non-Jews. And He’s indicting them for not only failing to *serve* as a witness to the world, but for mixing merchants, animals, moneychangers, and cheats in the very area God had ordained for the purpose! The Romans would’ve enjoyed this story on many levels.

Peter was ready to serve the moment he and his brother met Jesus.

At once they left their nets and followed him. – *Mark 1:18 NIV*

Mark, on the other hand, wasn’t quite ready to serve when he met Jesus.



Mark’s mother was a good friend of Peter’s. In fact, when an angel miraculously freed Peter from prison, where did Peter go?

... he went to the house of Mary the mother of John [**his Jewish name**], also called Mark [**his Roman name**], where many people had gathered and were praying. – *Acts 12:12b NIV*

Mark had a comfortable life. His wealthy parents had a house spacious enough to function as one of the first house-churches.

There’s a mystery concerning Jesus’ in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed. Remember how He asks His sleepy disciples to keep watch while He goes on alone to pray?



And this is His well-known prayer:

... [Jesus] prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” – *Mark 14:35-36 NIV*

So here’s the mystery: If Jesus was all by Himself, and His disciples were asleep, how does Mark know what Jesus prayed? Just after this prayer He’s arrested, tried, and crucified. But, it’s after His arrest that Mark offers this interesting tidbit:

Then everyone deserted him and fled. A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, **was following Jesus**. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. – *Mark 14:50-52 NIV*

Most scholars believe this is Mark. Only *he* includes it. *How else* would he know about it? And *why else* would he tell it? Because of this, many suppose that the Last Supper was at Mark's house.

The term: "linen garment" indicates wealth, and literally means "cloth" or "sheet" (that's why it comes off so easily). Imagine Mark, lying in bed, listening to the excitement when suddenly they leave. He jumps out of bed (no time to dress), wraps a sheet around himself, and follows the action!

It's possible that Mark was spying on Jesus as He poured out His heart in the Garden. Of course, Jesus would've been aware of Mark (He was the Son of God!), but perhaps Mark *needed* to see, first hand, the radical servanthood required in God's kingdom.

Some time after that, Mark's cousin, Barnabas⁴ invited Mark to join him and Paul on their first missionary journey. Mark is eager to serve, but not mentally prepared yet. So, after some conflict and hardship and danger, Mark deserts the team and sails back to the comforts of his spacious home.⁵ True servants serve when it's inconvenient and uncomfortable.

Now, with their second missionary journey, Mark *is* the conflict.

Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia ... They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus ... – *Acts 15:37-39 NIV*

Barnabas mentors, and Mark matures and learns to serve. So much so, that later, when Paul is facing execution in his second Roman imprisonment, he writes to Timothy:

Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. – 2
Timothy 4:11b NIV

That must've been quite a transformation. God doesn't expect perfection, but He does require full-time faithfulness, and sensitivity to the needs of His children.

And the Gospel closes, not with a King and His Great Commission (as in Matthew), but with a humble servant, who was sold for 30 pieces of silver (the price of a slave), continuing His great work.

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and **the Lord worked with them** and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. – *Mark 16:20 NIV*

⁴ Colossians 4:10

⁵ Acts 13:13