

The Gospel of Mark

by Dennis Kinlaw

The Gospel of Mark is a model for discipleship, focusing on who Jesus is and why he came, and highlighting the inadequacy of the twelve disciples.

Duration: 32:22

Scripture: Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the unity and message of the book of Mark in the Bible. They refute the idea that the book was written by multiple authors and emphasize its coherence and contribution to the overall message of Jesus Christ. The speaker highlights the succession of stories in Mark that reveal who Jesus is, including miracles and teachings. They also explore the concept of discipleship as developed by Mark throughout the book. The sermon encourages the audience to read and study the book of Mark to gain a deeper understanding of Jesus and discipleship.

Transcript

Recently, I had an invitation to speak in the seminary chapel at Asbury. There are about 500 students in the seminary at Asbury, and so it's an interesting assignment and a responsible assignment to speak in the seminary there. So I began praying, Now, Lord, what should I speak about? And so as I sought the mind of the Lord, the thought came to me that I should speak on discipleship, something that young preachers need and something that some of us that are older need to note about, too.

So I thought, How could I approach it differently, both for myself and for my audience? So I decided to take one of the Gospels and go through it from beginning to end and see how one evangelist develops, through the life and teachings of Jesus, the concept of discipleship. I suppose this is an indication of my own character that I chose Mark, the shortest of the Gospels and the one I can handle the most easily. So I sat down to read it through from beginning to end, from start to finish, at a single sitting.

I learned a long time ago the joy that comes when one verse breaks open to you and you see its truth and its blessing come to you. I learned also something of what a wonderful thing it is when a paragraph of Scripture will open up and you can see it as a whole, and then something even more delightful when you can see a chapter or a segment of Scripture. But I haven't gotten to the place where very well I can handle a whole book at a time and see it clearly, though there are some that have broken that way for me.

But I found myself reading through Mark from beginning to end and getting that overview that you get from one simple exposure to the totality of the book. I was intrigued by what I saw, something that I certainly had never seen before. There is a marvelous unity to the book of Mark.

The higher critics would indicate to us that the book was not written by a single hand, but that rather it's a succession of stories that were pulled together and that somebody put them together like beads on a string. But as I read it, it began to come home to me that this thing has a unity to it that is as clear and as great as that that you feel in something like Schubert's Unfinished Symphony or maybe Beethoven's Fifth. It belongs together, and every part has its own contribution to make to the whole and to the single message that is being proclaimed, and that message is the good news of Jesus Christ.

It begins the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. Now what is that good news that is given there? It is very obvious that it has to do with the person of Jesus, the Son of Mary, who came from Nazareth. It is fascinating to me the way Mark develops that.

He develops it not discursively the way a Greek would do it or even the way Paul would do it, but you sense something of his Semitic, Hebrewness in the way he does it. I don't know whether you've ever thought about it, but it would be interesting if Paul had written the Gospels instead of the Evangelists, wouldn't it? You look at the style of the Book of Romans and compare it with the Book of Mark. In the Book of Mark there is hardly any teaching that you think of like that which you find almost the totality of the Book of Romans.

You get a keen, analytical, systematic, logical mind that has been heavily influenced by Greek logic and Greek discursive reasoning in the Book of Romans. But you come to the Gospels and you ask Jesus a question, and he doesn't give you an argument, he says, Let me tell you a story. There is something about the Evangelists, they are much more Old Testament-ish than New Testament-ish in that.

In the New Testament you can get something like 1 Corinthians 13, and you'll never find that in the Old Testament, but who would want to swap Hosea if he had to? Because in one you get the principles and the description laid out, in the other you get the illustration classically done so that even the child who hears the story goes away and knows exactly what was being said, and the wisest head in the group goes away saying there are profundities here that I haven't yet fathomed. So I began to sense that Hebraic color to the Gospel of Mark and the argument that's being given. Now, it seems to me that as Mark develops this concept of discipleship, he says it begins with one thing.

You have to get one question answered first, and that question is this, Who is this man Jesus? And so the Gospel begins answering that question. In the first chapter you get some interesting witnesses as to who he is, but Mark is really not concerned about them primarily, because they should have known. You get John the Baptist who says, first of all, he's a greater than I, he is the one that will baptize you with water, but he's the one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

You get God the Father speaking from heaven and saying, I know who he is, he's my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. You get the evil spirits in the first chapter saying, we know who you are, you're the Holy One of God, and you've come to trouble us. But now, for the ordinary people to whom Mark is writing, it's a different picture.

He does not begin with any statement to them or from them as to who he is, but there begins that marvelous buildup of data to answer that one question as to who Jesus is. And it is an incredible

succession of stories that just seem to tumble out of the evangelist. There is the story you will remember right in the beginning, in that opening chapter, there is the succession of miracles.

You will remember first there is the man with the unclean spirit who is deaf and dumb, and there in Capernaum Jesus speaks the word and he is delivered and he is made whole. The next thing you hear is that Jesus has gone to Peter's house, and when he gets to Peter's house, or at least his mother-in-law's house, he finds that his mother-in-law is sick with fever. And you know something of what fever was like in that ancient world.

They did not have antibiotics. It oftentimes was a signal that death was on the way, and here is a major member of the family who is ill with fever, and Jesus lays his hands upon her and she is well. Before the first chapter is over, you have a man catching Jesus in the street, looking at him saying, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

I'm a leper. And Jesus says, I will, lays his hand upon him, and he cleanses him. There is a man that is brought by four of his friends who is a paralytic, and as he is being lured through the roof, Jesus looks at the man in his need and says, Son, your sins are forgiven you.

People around the walls begin to discuss who does he think he is that he can forgive sin, and then he says, whichever is easier, whichever way you want it, Son, your sins are forgiven you, but pick up your bed and walk, and he goes away well. There is a man with a withered hand at the beginning of chapter 3 on the Sabbath day that Jesus healed, and then the stories continue like that of Legion, the feeding of the 5,000, the other stories, until in the end of the 7th chapter, they just sort of tumble together and Mark gets two miracle stories mixed up all in one. There is a man who comes by the name of Jairus to Jesus, and he says, Master, I have a child that is sick and needs to be healed.

Would you go and heal the child? And so Jesus says, Let's go. And on the way, he is stopped by a woman who has an issue of blood that has caused her to consume all of her living, all that she owns, with physicians to get her problem solved, and there has been no solution, and her situation has become more desperate and more desperate, and now pushing through the crowd, she says, If I can just touch him, that will be enough. If I can touch his garment, I'll be all right.

And without him knowing what is happening, she reaches through the crowd and touches his clothing, and virtue comes to her and she is healed, and Jesus stops the trip to Jairus' home to turn and say, Who touched me and who drew virtue and healing from me? And then he goes to find not a person who is at the end of her resources, but a person who now is in that stage of hopelessness that comes after death, and Jesus looks at a corpse and says, Rise, get up, be on your way, behold, be alive again, and the dead person is resurrected. Now the stories tumble out, and they tumble out to give that mounting impact that this is no ordinary person. You might be interested in going through it sometime if you haven't.

I had never done this before to notice the questions that are developed. That first time that he was in Capernaum that Mark tells about, he stood in the synagogue there where he delivered the man from the unclean spirit, and as he preached to them, they were astonished and said, What kind of doctrine is this? You will remember that as he continued his miracles, they said, and as he spoke forgiveness of sins to one man, they said, Who can forgive sins but God? And it's a good progression to move from what about Jesus to who. Then you get to the place where they said, We know who he is, we know he has Beelzebub in him, and so they plotted to kill him.

That was his enemy. But then there came that day when he turned in Caesarea Philippi to his disciples and said, Whom do men say that I am? And they gave the nominations, and then he said, Whom do you say that I am? And Peter looked up and said, It's obvious. You are the answer to all of our needs.

We have not met a single case of human need in the course of the months and years that we have been following you that you have not been totally adequate to meet, physical, spiritual, whatever it may be. You've been adequate for it all. We believe you are the one that we have been looking for.

You are the Christ, you are the Messiah, you are the Son of God. And that comes in chapter 8, halfway through the book. I saw it more dramatically than I had ever seen it before, like the end of one movement of Schubert's Unfinished and the getting ready for the beginning of the second movement.

Because there it is, the first half of the book, and it is the answer to the question as to who he is. And what does it say? It says that he is the thoroughly adequate one for any human need, no matter what it may be. He is God's gift to us, he is the adequate one.

Now, so the first half of discipleship, the first part of it, is learning who he is. Now immediately with that part of chapter 8 you get a transition, and it is obvious to me now that it is a transition point. Now instead of the stories tumbling like miracle stories, they are there, but they are held somewhat in abeyance and the big thrust is on his teaching, not his doing.

And he begins to speak to his disciples about the mystery of his mission, why he came. Peter said, We know you, who you are, you're the Christ. And Jesus says, That's right, and I'm going to Jerusalem, and when I get there I will be rejected by the Jewish leaders, the church leaders, the religious leaders.

I will be taken out and crucified, and then after three days I will rise. And Peter says, Not so, Lord. It can't be.

You will remember the beginning of the next chapter there on the mountain, and Elijah and Moses appear standing with Jesus, talking with Jesus, and on the way down Jesus says to them, Now we're going to Jerusalem, I'll be crucified, but after three days I will rise. Now don't tell anybody what you've seen until I have risen from the dead. And they say, I wonder what that means.

And then just a little later in that chapter he speaks to them and he says, I'm going to Jerusalem, verse 30 to verse 32, and there I will be rejected, crucified, but after three days I will rise. And in chapter 10, verse 32, it's almost as if Mark can't get past the 30th verse of any chapter from there on without bringing in the crucifixion and the resurrection. He is beginning to explain to them the mystery of his mission, that he, the Christ, has come to die for human need, to give his life a ransom for many.

But now there's something else that happens there. Now there is an intimacy between Jesus and the Twelve. He's got his arms around them.

Far more privacy now. A mount of transfiguration, a trip into the North where he can get them alone. Jesus takes them away from the multitude and from the crowd so he can prepare his disciples, and now they are his.

He has twelve that belong to him. He belongs to them. They belong to each other.

They understand who he is. Now they must understand why he came, and they must understand the deeper dimension of discipleship. And with that begins another succession of stories that I had never seen.

And that succession of stories tumbles out the same way those miracle stories about Jesus and his power and his adequacy tumbled out in the beginning. But the interesting thing to me is that that second set of stories that tumble so are not about Jesus, but they are about the Twelve. And instead of their being about his adequacy or their discipleship, let me remind you just briefly what those stories are.

I catch them in succession. Peter has reached his great moment, the hour of the Christ. Jesus says, That's right, I'm going to Jerusalem, and there I'll be crucified.

But after three days I will rise, and Peter never hears that. He says, No, Lord, it cannot be. Jesus looks at Peter and says, Peter, he has just indicated that he's had divine illumination.

But Jesus looks at Peter and says, Peter, get behind me, you're Satan to me. You do not have the mind of the Spirit, you have the mind of the flesh. They go upon the Mount of Transfiguration, which confirms everything the first half of the book has said.

I had never noticed before that it does not say that Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah, but it says that these greatest men of the Old Covenant talked with Jesus. And Peter and James and John knew him, who he was that day, and as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus says, Don't tell anybody until I've risen from the dead. And like a bunch of systematic theologians, the three disciples get to one side and say, What does the rising from the dead mean? They get to the foot of the hill, and when they get to the foot of the hill, there's a great crowd and great commotion.

And Jesus walks into the commotion and says, What's the problem? There's a desperate father who says, I have a son who has an evil spirit within him that seizes him and tears him, and I brought him to your disciples and asked them to deliver him, and they could not help him. Remember these are the men that not too long before this went out two by two, and the devils were subject to them. You will remember that following this, we are told that on their way from the north to Jerusalem, after Jesus had talked to them about the cross at the end of the day, Jesus said, I noticed you doing a lot of talking today.

What were you talking about? They blushed a bit, and Peter, so quick to speak normally, was very reticent now. Jesus said, Come on now, tell me what you were talking about. There was no spokesman, and finally when he pulled it out, they said, Master, we were discussing who would be greatest in the kingdom.

He was talking about the cross, and they were talking about first and second feet, and who would get them. They come to Jesus with a considerable amount of pride and say, Master, we found a man casting out devils in your name, and we forbade him because he doesn't follow us. They brought the children to Jesus for him to lay his hands on them and to bless them, and the disciples said, Get these people out of the way.

Jesus took a child and said, Fellows, if you're not like one of them, you won't make it. These are the kinds that the kingdom is made of, and he had to rebuke his own. He turned to them one day and said, You know, all of you are going to be offended at me.

And two verses later, Peter said, Maybe others, Lord, but never I. And two verses later, the rest of the eleven said, Nor we. And nineteen verses later, the text says, And they all forsook him and fled. And then

to make it perfectly clear, it says that Peter stood and with cursing and swearing denied him.

And when you get Jesus on the cross, it's only a few women that stand in the distance. And on Easter morning, it's two Marys and Salome who come to the tomb, and they don't even have a man to roll the stone away. And I don't know about those endings of Mark, but I notice it is not until the last ending of Mark that Jesus even appears to his disciples.

And from the moment of Peter's confession at the end of age, until the end of the gospel of Mark, it is an incredible picture of disciples who lack understanding the best Jesus has to say about him, Peter. You don't have the mind of the spirit, you have the mind of the flesh. The best three who had been at the transfiguration couldn't understand what he meant by rising from the dead.

Lack of understanding, unbelieving, Jesus had to say, O faithless generation, how long do I have to put up with you? And he was talking about his twelve. Impotent, the Father said, I brought my son to your disciples and they could not help him. Attitude, disposition, carnal.

Master, we didn't understand what you were saying about the cross. We were too busy talking about who would be first in the kingdom, James and John included. And as far as commitment, all forsook him.

I saw something else I had never seen before, and I believe this is fair. I think I understand why some of the names are used in Mark now. Mark is pretty rough on Peter, and tradition says that Mark was an understudy to Peter and that Peter was the one who briefed him on a lot of this.

But it's interesting that Mark very carefully names Peter as the one to whom Jesus says, You don't have the mind of the spirit, you have the mind of the flesh. He very carefully identifies Peter as one that didn't understand the concept of the rising from the dead and said, I will never forsake you. And then he did forsake him, but not only did he forsake him, he denied him with cursing and with swearing, with a reversion to the old ways.

He names Peter. Now, it's interesting that he names James and John. He names them on the Mount of Transfiguration, and then he gives a special paragraph to their catching Jesus alone privately, saying, Master, we wonder if we could have the right hand and the left hand in your kingdom.

Jesus says, Can you drink the cup I'm going to drink? Oh, they said, Yes, no problem there. He said, Drink that cup you will, but to have the right hand and the left, that's not mine to give, and you don't understand yet the nature of the kingdom. You know what I've decided? I have decided that Mark gives their names to let you know that the bet of the twelve disciples was not any better on this score than any of the rest of them, that a Peter who could confess him could deny him.

And when he did, he was simply doing what all the rest did, and a James and a John who could go to the Mount of Transfiguration could also say, Lord, you know, we carnally, we'd like to be taken care of, too. And one of the most intriguing things is that when Mark tells that Peter says, I'll never be offended at you, and the rest two verses later said, we likewise will never be offended at you, and nineteen verses later it says, And they all forsook him. Then Mark sticks in a little story about a nameless certain young man who had a linen wrapper on, and when they laid hands on him, he became the first stalker.

And it may well be that that is included to let you know that the author of the book says, you know, I wasn't any better than any of the rest. And if the first half of the book shows the adequacy of Jesus, it is as if the latter half of the book is written specifically to show the total inadequacy of his twelve. And that's the book.

I got through, and I thought to myself, well, there ought to be more to this than that. What a miserable way to end! Jesus out of the grave, but what about these miserable wretches? Now, you know, I think I learned something there. It's never safe to take any one portion of the book.

It isn't the word of Mark by which we live, it's the word of God by which we live. And Mark didn't give it all. Luke picked up the story and finished some of it for us.

The beautiful thing is, he gives the chapter that I needed to hear. You pick that story up in the book of Acts, and what do you find? Group of people who didn't have any understanding and couldn't grasp even what rising from the dead meant? Somebody turns to Peter and says, What's this all about? Peter stands up and says, Don't you know, this is what Joel told us about. Whoever told Peter about Joel? Something had happened to Peter, and an understanding had been illuminated.

Unbelieving, oh, faithless, lacking in faith generation, they were ready to take on the kingdoms of this world in the name of their Lord. Impotent, they say, silver and gold we don't have. We've got something better.

Get up and walk. And as far as carnal attitudes were concerned, now it was not a concern as to who could have the first place, but it was a matter of how they could exalt the Lord Jesus even unto death. And then a last word, commitment, courage, all forsook him.

Now they look at the people who killed Jesus and they say, What do you think we should do? Should we obey you or obey God? It really doesn't matter a great deal what you think. We know what we're going to do. We are going to obey God.

And they took knowledge of their boldness. They died well. Now what happened? You know and I know that in between the end of Mark and this picture, there was the coming of the Holy Ghost in Pentecostal fullness and power and cleansing upon them.

And inadequate men became adequate in the power of God. Now, you know, let me tell you what began to intrigue me. How could Mark write a whole gospel and never say anything about it? I began to fault him a little until something gently began to tug at my memory and say, Wait a minute, how does the gospel of Mark begin? First paragraph of the gospel of Mark, there's a man by the name of John the Baptist, and they say, Who are you? And he says, I'm not he.

There is one coming after me greater than I. I can baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And then he told about how the Spirit came upon Jesus, and then Jesus went out as the adequate one. Now, you know, it's a marvelously clear picture, isn't it? You know, I've decided my first reaction to the second part of Mark was, yes, the first step in discipleship is to know who he is, his adequacy.

The second step is just as crucial, and it's to know who we are, our inadequacy. There is no goodness in us. There is no flesh that shall glory in the presence of the Lord.

The glory is in him, and the adequacy of the Holy One, the Spirit, who can come in Jesus' name and fill us. Now, you know, why did Mark drag it out so dramatically? I think he did it so we would understand that they learned it bitterly. My, how they must have looked back upon those last six months as one continual succession of evidences of their total inability.

You know, I think that's what got them ready for Pentecost, and at Pentecost there started a mighty stream that went out of healing, life-giving, fruit-producing power that was to change the course of human history, and we're here today because of it. But I don't think it could have ever started if they had not learned their inadequacy. Now, may I go to an Old Testament text quickly and I'm through.

You know that text in Zechariah, "'Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.' I checked up on the Hebrew words there in might and power. One is the Hebrew word koach, the other is the Hebrew word chayot. I just went through a lexicon to see how they were used in the rest of the Old Testament.

Do you know something? I was fascinated to find that between those two words, practically every conceivable human resource is covered. Both words are used for military might. The horse, like the atomic bomb, had koach, and an army was chayot.

They're used for material wealth. Both of them are used for material wealth. It is interesting that one of them is used for human gifts.

Pharaoh turned to Joseph and said, "'Sir, these brothers of yours that have come from Canaan, if you can find any among them that are gifted, we will put them in positions of administrative leadership.' And one of those words is used. We don't have time to develop it, but just let me say it. Zechariah used two words which are used biblically to cover all human resources.

And Zechariah said, "'Not by thee, but by my spirit.'"

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