

Introduction

Paper title

The Marcan concept of discipleship: An exegesis of Mark 8.27-10.52.

Focal theory

The concept of discipleship which involves ‘taking up one’s cross’ within the daily Christian experience remains a challenging and often distant concept for modern Christians within affluent communities.

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of the paper is to explore the Marcan concept of discipleship through an exegesis of Mark 8.27-10.52. The paper’s hypothesis is that whilst recognizing that Mark provides a complex soteriology,¹ and a multi-faceted Christology, the ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ motif contained within the focus passage, understood in the light of the Son of Man’s earthly and eschatological roles, incorporates key Marcan theology that directly addresses the understanding of discipleship within the modern context.

¹ The complex soteriology within Mark has attracted much debate, particularly focusing on the so-called ‘ransom saying’ of 10.45, a debate that can be traced back to the subjective and objective view of the atonement as classically understood by Abelhard (subjective) and Anselm (objective). Stott provides an excellent overview of the history of the debate between the objective and the subjective views of the atonement (see John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), pp. 17-351). Within modern scholarship, some such as Allison opting for a more ‘Jewish’ understanding of Jesus’ death (partly as a result of the understandings gained in the so-called ‘Third Quest’ for the historical Jesus), and others such as Hengel opting for an approach based on an understanding of the early kerygmatic preaching of the apostles. See J.B. Green, ‘Death of Jesus’ in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), pp. 146-63, Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 1-50, and Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1981), pp. 1-75.

Significance of the paper

This paper's hypothesis is significant because whilst modern scholarship focuses on discipleship in the light of Jesus' earthly ministry and the cross, this paper proposes that discipleship, participating ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ whither Jesus leads, can be more fully understood in both the context of Jesus' earthly and eschatological roles as the Son of Man. If discipleship ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ is understood purely retrospectively, Jesus' commands become little more than one amongst many ethical options available, with no ultimate significance. If discipleship ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ however is also lived with an appreciation for Jesus' eschatological role as the Son of Man, then participation ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ has ultimate significance, leading the disciple into the Kingdom of God.

Method and methodology

The paper will utilize the following method: a) introduction (parameter setting); b) outlining the Marcan background of the focus passage; c) a brief exegesis of Mark 8.27-9.29; d) a brief exegesis of Mark 9.30-10.31; e) a brief exegesis of Mark 10.32-52; f) identification of Marcan discipleship theology within the focus passage; and g) conclusions. The paper will use the above method because any valid conclusions about the Marcan theological concepts of discipleship require a systematic exegesis of the focus passage.²

After the prologue (1.1-15), Jesus is the focus of the entire gospel, appearing in all pericopes except for the two concerning John the Baptist,³ and He is presented from 1.16-8.26 primarily as a man of

² The Marcan portrait of the disciples, and their role in his Gospel, are still the subject of much debate. The disciples play a central role, but there remains no consensus about what that role is. See M.J. Wilkins, 'Discipleship' in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), pp. 182-189.

³ Mark 1.2-8, 6.14-29.

action or a ‘divine man’:⁴ casting out demons; quelling the forces of nature; healing the sick; and demonstrating ἐξουσία.

However, apart from 4.1-34,⁵ the exact content of Jesus’ teaching is not provided, even though the crowds refer to the ‘new teaching – with authority’.⁶ The focus passage provides the first sustained record of Jesus’ teachings within the Marcan account, teachings that are directed primarily at those who (would) follow Him. Such discipleship teachings follow the following structural pattern:⁷

Geographical reference:	8.27	9.30	10.32
Prediction:	8.31	9.31	10.33-34
Misunderstanding:	8.32-33	9.32-34	10.35-41
Teaching:	8.34-9.1	9.35-37	10.42-45

Limitations and delimitations

Whilst recognizing the complexity of the Marcan portrait of the disciples, the Marcan soteriology and Christology, the paper will not a) engage in a systematic analysis of Marcan soteriology or Christology; b) seek to provide a systematic analysis of the function of the disciples throughout the Gospel; c) seek to ascertain the exact personal traits of any of the actors in the focus passage; d) seek to evaluate the historicity of the events in the focus passage; e) seek to provide an

⁴ The concept of the ‘divine man’ postulates that the role of Jesus portrayed in Mark 1.16-8.26 represents a portrayal of Jesus as a ‘divine man’. Such a concept is taken from mythical, legendary or historical religio-philosophical heroes who were characterized by ‘moral virtue, wisdom and / or miraculous power so that they were held to be divine’. Within Mark, scholars have argued that the author ‘synthesized the portrait of Jesus as a ‘divine man’ found in the miracle traditions with the perspective found in the sayings source Q and the passion and resurrection narratives’. See B.L. Blackburn, ‘Divine Man’ in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), pp. 189-92.

⁵ The linked (linguistically through the use of catchwords) parables of Mark 4.1-34 are understood from a form-critical perspective (e.g. Bultmann) to be a composite unit of linked material that comes from an earlier oral tradition. See E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 10-30.

⁶ Mark 1.27.

⁷ See Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction – Proclamation and Paraenesis, Myth and History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974), p. 155

exegesis from all possible hermeneutical approaches;⁸ f) seek to provide a critique of seminal Marcan works such as those by Wrede or Marxsen.⁹

The paper will however a) outline the Marcan background of the focus passage; b) seek to understand the role and function of the focus passage within the overall structure of Mark's gospel; c) conduct an exegesis of the constituent pericopae within the focus passage; d) seek to identify the underlying theology of discipleship contained within the focus passage; and e) provide conclusions which summarize the Marcan concept of discipleship.

Having defined the parameters of the paper, we now turn to a brief overview of the Marcan background for the focus passage.

⁸ Different hermeneutical approaches to Mark have been developed over and above the 'traditional' forms of historical-criticism. These more recent approaches have developed further their own unique hermeneutical perspectives and presuppositions. Such approaches, when used in study of the Gospel of Mark, include narrative criticism (e.g. as used by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon), reader-response criticism (e.g. as used by Robert M. Fowler), deconstructive criticism (e.g. as used by Stephen D. Moore), feminist criticism (e.g. as used by Janice C. Anderson), and social criticism (e.g. as used by David Rhoads). See Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, (eds.), *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg-Fortress, 1992), pp. vii – 159.

⁹ Whilst recognizing the importance of these works to the understanding of Mark, such works do not directly address the Marcan concept and theology of discipleship. William Wrede argued for an understanding of Mark not just as an author but as a theologian concerned with trying to synthesize the seeming discontinuity between the lack of Messianic understanding in Jesus' ministry and the Messianic understanding of Jesus in the post-Easter church. Marxen argued that the predominant form-criticism of his time did not recognize sufficiently the unity and internal coherence of the Gospel, and that there was a new approach required.

Exegesis I - The Marcan Background

Introduction

Understanding of the Marcan background to the focus passage may be enhanced by a consideration of the related questions of the synoptic problem, authorship, date and purpose. The putative conclusions to each of these questions are mutually interdependent, so the conclusions must demonstrate an internal coherence or be viewed as untenable.

Synoptic problem

The so-called 'synoptic problem' arises out of the question of literary relationships between Matthew, Mark and Luke because of observed convergences¹⁰ and divergences. Whilst recognizing this critical problem, it is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate all the solutions proposed. This paper will therefore presuppose Marcan priority, based on an understanding of the Holtzmann-Streeter hypothesis.¹¹

Author

There is minimal internal evidence within Mark concerning the author's identity, but the external evidence from the early Church is consistent: 'Papias,¹² Irenaeus, probably the Muratorian Canon, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Jerome all refer to Mark's authorship of the Gospel.

¹⁰ See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 4th edn., 1990), pp. 136-08 both for the above data, and for an extended discussion of the history, nature and current main positions concerning the synoptic problem.

¹¹ This paper does not reject the possibility that Q, M and L as individual entities were individual or multiple, primarily oral or primarily written sources. J.J. Griesbach argued in 1783 'that the Gospel of Matthew was written first, that Luke used Matthew, and that Mark abridged and conflated Matthew and Luke. This view, known as the "Griesbach Hypothesis" became the dominant scholarly view for nearly a century'. Following further studies by B.F. Westcott and K. Lachmann, H.J. Holtzmann argued for an early form of Mark ("*Urmarkus*"), which 'was written first and that Matthew and Luke, independently of one another, used this draft of Mark and another source of sayings'. This 'other source' eventually became known as "Q", hence the arrival of the Two-Document Hypothesis. B.H. Streeter however modified the Two-Document Hypothesis with his argument for sources "M" and "L", thus providing a total of four sources, Mark, Q, M and L. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. xliii-lviii.

¹² According to Eusebius (c. 260-340 C.E.), one of the earliest church historians, Papias (c. 140 C.E.) wrote that '...Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord'. See Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: Volume 5* (Washington, D.C.; Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), p. 563.

Moreover, all of them connect Mark¹³ with Peter in the production of the Gospel'.¹⁴ This paper takes the position that, cohering with the above assumptions of Marcan priority and of the Holtzmann-Streeter hypothesis (an important factor behind the Two-Document hypothesis was the alleged Petrine connection to Mark: the Petrine connection provided the authoritative rationale for the use of Mark by Matthew and Luke), the author was John Mark using Petrine testimony.

Date

Assuming Marcan priority, consideration of the date can take place without reference to the synoptic problem. However, given the lack of clarity as to the exact nature of the Petrine association amongst the Church Fathers (i.e. did Mark write before or after Peter's death?), the above assumption that John Mark was the author does not provide a clear date, so we must consider the internal evidence.¹⁵ Although the internal evidence does not point clearly to a particular date,¹⁶ this paper will tentatively presuppose a date between 65-70AD, a position internally consistent with the above assumptions.

¹³ It is argued by conservative scholars that the Mark in question is none other than John Mark, son of Mary (Acts 12.12), first name John (Acts 12.12, 25), cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4.10), who had been resident at one time in Cyprus (Acts 4.36), who owned the upper room in Jerusalem where the last supper was held (Matt. 26.18) and where post-Easter church members met (Acts 12.12), who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts. 13.5, 13), who later accompanied Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts 15.36-39), and who seem to have later worked with both Peter and Paul (1 Peter 5.13, Col. 4.10, 2 Tim. 4.11). See Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: Volume 5*, pp. 563-64.

¹⁴ See Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: Volume 5*, p. 563. For this and other considerations, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 81.

¹⁵ A consideration of the internal evidence would focus on Mark 13, but the evidence is opaque. If we accept a date after 70AD, why is the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple not reflected in any way in Mark 13? An event of such magnitude could hardly fail to be referred to, even obliquely, within what is presented as prophecy. The τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως may refer to Titus' imperial standards in the temple, but if this is *vaticinium ex eventu*, why then does Mark 13 imply a flight to the hills of Judea rather than where they are reported as going, to Pella in Trans-Jordan?

¹⁶ Guthrie provides a good overview of the different arguments concerning the date of the Gospel. Some scholars such as J. Wenham, Harnack and Allen argue for an earlier dating of the Gospel, e.g. between 40-50AD, whereas other scholars argue for a later dating, e.g. Brandon argues for a date following the Flavian triumphal procession in Rome following the destruction of Rome by Titus, and B.W. Bacon argues for a date after 75AD, at which time a cynic philosopher was beheaded for denouncing Titus' immoral conduct with Bernice, sister of Agrippa II – a seeming direct parallel with the story of the death of John the Baptist contained in Mark. See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 84-89.

Purpose

Linked to the question of destination, Mark's purpose remains to be adequately defined, particularly given the different assumptions of form and redaction-criticism.¹⁷ A number of different proposals have been put forward, e.g. Mark was countering a false Christology, seeking to preserve the apostolic traditions as a corrective against false teachings, or seeking to portray Jesus of Nazareth as a competitor to the imperial cult,¹⁸ and Guthrie critiques other mooted Marcan purposes.¹⁹ These theories however have limited merit only, as each does not recognize the full theological complexity of the Gospel. Given the complexity of theological themes within the Gospel, the position of this paper is that Mark wrote a letter to any (would-be) disciple of Jesus of Nazareth (initially those in Rome), explaining who Jesus of Nazareth really was and the nature of true discipleship for those would follow Jesus of Nazareth.

Summary

The position of this paper vis-a-vis the synoptic problem is that of Marcan priority, adhering broadly to the Holtzmann-Streeter hypothesis, authorship by John Mark with direct Petrine

¹⁷ It should be noted that a form-critical approach would argue that many of the pericopae found would have been created by the post-Easter community of faith to suit their own theological or other needs, and that Mark in putting the existing pericopae together was not imposing his own theological outlook on the materials but merely stitching together what already was. However, from a redaction-critical approach Mark has a much more important role, understood as having his own definite theology which he uses in the process of refining existing, and creating new, pericopae.

¹⁸ Firstly, Mark was writing to counter a false Christology which emphasized the glorious deeds of Jesus, but which negated the need for suffering, either on the part of Jesus, or of His disciples. Mark 1.16-8.26 is alleged to reflect the false 'divine man' Christology of Mark's opponents, which is then corrected through the passion predictions of the focus passage and the emphasis in the Gospel on the passion of Christ. Secondly, it is proposed that Mark was writing to preserve the apostolic traditions and teachings as the last of the eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus were dying. Mark was therefore preserving the traditions to prevent distortions or loss over time when there would be no corrective eyewitnesses, but Guelich enumerates a number of significant weaknesses of this theory (see R.A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary 34A: Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), p. xli, and Theodore J. Weeden, 'The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel' in Telford, William (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 2nd edn., 1995), pp. 89-24). Thirdly, it is argued that Mark is written to present Jesus 'as the true Son of God and in doing so deliberately presents Jesus in opposition to Rome's candidates for a suitable emperor, saviour, and lord'. Evans presents extensive parallels between the Marcan Christology and the cult of the Julian and Flavian emperors, arguing that Mark is presenting Jesus as a viable alternative to submission to the emperor, inviting submission to Him and not them. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. lxxx-xciii.

¹⁹ For instance, Guthrie notes that a purported purpose is that of presenting catechetical or liturgical material; an apologetic purpose, providing arguments for wandering Christian charismatic preachers; to combat false eschatologies, Christologies, and nascent Docetic tendencies that had arisen through contact with Hellenistic concepts; and to urge reform in his church, encouraging missionary zeal. See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 65-71.

association,²⁰ composition between 65-70AD, and essentially a pastoral / paraenetic purpose, outlining the true nature of Jesus' ministry and person, with the concomitant requirements in discipleship for any who would follow Jesus of Nazareth. These positions are understood to be internally coherent, mutually supportive, and provide the Marcan background necessary for an understanding of the overall structure of Mark and the immediate context of our focus passage, which two issues will now be the focus of our attention.

²⁰ By 'direct Petrine association' the author is recognizing Petrine involvement, either directly or through John Mark remembering what had been passed to him directly whilst Peter was still alive. This position allows for the ambiguity found in the early Church sources.

Exegesis II – The Marcan Structure and Immediate Context

Introduction

To help in understanding the focus passage, and building on the above conclusions, it is now necessary to consider the focus passage both within the overall Marcan structure and within its immediate context, and it is to the first of these that we now turn.

Marcan structure

Little scholarly agreement exists about identifying a governing principle for Mark,²¹ partly because of difference in method used (for instance, an understanding of Mark based on redaction-criticism methodology will emphasize the author's theological concerns more than an understanding based on a form-critical approach), and particularly following Wrede's conclusions which emphasized the Marcan theology rather than the narrative's historicity.

Amongst critical readers however, and despite the number of schemes that have been proposed,²² there remains a general consensus that Mark can be understood in two major components: 1.1-8.26; and 8.27-16.8.²³ The lack of scholarly consensus however on the structure of Mark should not deter

²¹ For instance, Kummel (*Introduction to the New Testament*) and Taylor (*The Gospel According to St. Mark*) argue for a geographical governing principle, with the first eight chapters occurring in Galilee, chapters 9-10 occurring in a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem via Judea, whilst other commentators such as Gnilka and Luhmann argue for thematic or theological themes, e.g. Christological, whilst other commentators seem to bring together the geographical outline of the Gospel with the theological themes, e.g. Ernst and Koch. See R.A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary 34A: Mark 1-8:26*, p. xxxvi.

²² In addition to the schemas noted, Blomberg, Best, Robbins, Guelich, Lohmeyer and Taylor all proposed slightly different schemas focusing on differing aspects of Mark. For the above proposals, please see Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), pp. 116-17, Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1983), pp. 1-147, Howard C. Kee, *Community of the New Age*, pp. 50-76, and Vernon K. Robbins, 'Summons and Outline in Mark: The Three-Step Progression' in Orton, David E. (ed.), *The Composition of Mark's Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum* (Leiden, The Netherlands; E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 103-120.

²³ The lack of consensus on subsequent divisions may be attributed primarily to the fact that whilst there is general recognition of constituent pericopae and Marcan seams or summaries, there is a lack of subsequent agreement over where exactly the constituent pericopae, seams and summaries actually begin and end. For instance, Pryke argues for 'approximately 106 pericopae', using the insights gained from form-criticism, particularly the works of Bultmann, Dibelius, Lambrecht, Neiryck and Pesch and then building on the linguistic studies into Mark by C.H. Turner to develop an understanding of Mark based on the redactional study of the linguistics and syntax used by the author. See E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 30-31.

us from attempting to work with a structure, and such a structure needs to recognize the complexity of the Marcan geographical and theological motifs, and the underlying pericopae and summary statements from the Marcan redaction.

The structure proposed by Perrin²⁴ attempts to incorporate the geographical and thematic shifts, and is based on an analysis of the underlying pericopae and summary reports that drive the narrative forward.²⁵ Recognizing Perrin's deficiencies,²⁶ his approach is adopted for the purposes of this paper as providing as coherent an outline of Mark as any provided to date within critical scholarship, and is as follows:

- 1.1-13 Introduction
- 1.14-15 Transitional Marcan summary
- 1.16-3.6 First major section: the authority of Jesus exhibited in word and deed
- 3.7-12 Transitional Marcan summary
- 3.13-6.6a Second major section: Jesus as Son of God and as rejected by his people
- 6.6b Transitional Marcan summary

²⁴ The structure proposed by Perrin should be read together with the brief exegetical survey of Mark that Perrin provides. This brief exegetical survey incorporates and recognizes where necessary the multiplicity of theological and geographical motifs to be found in Mark, thereby addressing the weaknesses which are apparent in the actual structural outline itself. See Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction – Proclamation and Paraenesis, Myth and History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974), pp. 151-61.

²⁵ According to Perrin, 'Mark did not have the resources of such externals as divisions and headings to outline the structure of his work. He had to rely on internal indices of the movement of his narrative, and he did so in two ways; by giving geographical references and by offering summary reports'. See Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction – Proclamation and Paraenesis, Myth and History*, p. 146-47.

²⁶ Perrin adopts and utilizes the insights gained from form, redaction (linguistic and syntax-related studies) and narrative-critical studies, although his approach does have a number of deficiencies, which include the following: 1) the outline tends to focus on the Christology of Mark in its headings of the major sections, a focus which does not sufficiently incorporate other key Marcan themes such as discipleship, geography and geographical movement, the messianic secret, soteriology, faith, insiders and outsiders, the journey motif, and the use of irony in the Gospel, all of which need to be recognized; 2) individual headings within such outlines can be so broad that they become meaningless, e.g. the focus passage, 8.27-10.52, incorporates teaching on personal discipleship, discipleship amongst a community of faith, disciples' attitudes towards hospitality, marriage, wealth and belongings and persecution, often included in the form of haggadic debate, e.g. 10.2-10, a complex and polyvalent compound of related subjects which is not captured effectively by Perrin's heading for this section, 'Christology and Christian discipleship in the light of the passion'; and 3) there is no mention to the parabolic teachings of Mark 4 in Perrin's outline. See Howard C. Kee, *Community of the New Age*, p. 64.

6.7-8.21	Third major section: Jesus as Son of God and as misunderstood by his own disciples
8.22-26	Transitional Marcan summary
8.27-10.45	Fourth major section: Christology and Christian discipleship in light of the passion
10.46-52	Transitional Marcan summary
11.1-12.44	Fifth major section: the days in Jerusalem prior to the passion
13.1-5a	Transitional Marcan summary
13.5b-36	Apocalyptic discourse
14.1-12	Introduction to the passion narrative with intercalation, verses 3-9
14.13-16.8	Passion narrative

Within the above outline of Mark, the focus passage is clearly highlighted as one of the major sections, indeed, ‘it is now generally accepted that 8.27-10.52 forms the centre of Mark’s instruction to his readers on the meaning for them of Christ and their own discipleship’.²⁷ A brief schematic outline of the focus passage is as follows:²⁸

Geographical reference:	8.27	9.30	10.32
Prediction:	8.31	9.31	10.33-34
Misunderstanding:	8.32-33	9.32-34	10.35-41
Discipleship teaching and appended incidents:	8.34-9.29	9.35-10.31	10.42-45

The focus passage within the overall Marcan structure outlined above functions to portray a southward journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem using the ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ motif to delineate

²⁷ See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 15.

²⁸ This brief outline is taken and amended from Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction – Proclamation and Paraenesis, Myth and History*, p. 155.

geographical progress,²⁹ thereby providing a pivotal transition within the Gospel from the Galilean ministry of 1.16-8.26 to the passion narrative in Judea and Jerusalem (11.1 onwards). The focus passage also contains the theological (Christological and soteriological) rationale for the events of the passion which the reader / hearer simply would not have were the Gospel to move directly from 8.26 to the events of 11.1 onwards, thereby providing the geographical and theological fulcrum for the Gospel, and contained within the focus passage are the main teachings by Jesus to (would-be) followers.

Having considered the focus passage within the overall Marcan context, and remaining cognizant of the above positions taken on Marcan priority, date, authorship and purpose, we now turn to the immediate context.

Immediate context

The focus passage follows the major section (6.7-8.21) in which John the Baptist is executed, a Marcan intercalation that provides the conceptual time between the commissioning (6.7-13) and the return of the disciples (6.30ff.). Jesus is then portrayed as performing mighty miracles, notably in the Marcan doublet of the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000, followed by parallel narratives of crossings of Galilee (6.45-56, 8.10), controversies with the Pharisees (7.1-23, 8.11-12), narratives involving 'bread' or 'leaven' (7.24-30, 8.13-21), and healing stories (7.31-37, 8.22-26),³⁰ during which time the disciples consistently misunderstand Jesus.

²⁹ In 8.27, the narrative is in Caesarea Philippi, in 9.30 in Galilee, in 9.33 in Capernaum, in 10.1 in Judea and beyond the Jordan, in 10.32 on the road going up to Jerusalem, and in 10.46, in Jericho, with the final words of the focus passage, ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, referring to the journey up the steep road from Jericho in the Jordan valley to Jerusalem itself.

³⁰ Fowler presents a penetrating critique of the many redaction-critical studies into the perceived Marcan doublets of Mark 6-8. He argues that instead of looking at the various pericopae within this section of Mark from a form-critical perspective, which tends to result in atomistic results, we should rather be looking at the pericopae from a redaction-critical perspective, in which we seek to differentiate between the Marcan redactions and the underlying sources, and thereby develop an understanding in which pericopae are purely Marcan creations, but which are taken from underlying or previous sources. See R.M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1981), p. 99, 181.

Having thus portrayed the mighty deeds of Jesus and the disciples' consistent misunderstanding, climaxing with Jesus' exasperated question to the disciples, καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· οὐπω συνίετε;, Mark then provides a transitional summary in 8.22-26 in the narrative of the double healing of the blind man.³¹

In the transitional summary, Jesus and the disciples come to Bethsaida and are met by a crowd begging Jesus to touch a blind man. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd, and only after laying His hands twice on the man can the man properly see, the only such staged miracle narrative in the synoptic traditions. The pericope is constructed around the motif of 'seeing', including eight different Greek words for nine instances of seeing in 8.23-25.³² The pericope analeptically picks up the themes of the disciples' blindness and lack of comprehension from 8.14-21, providing through the deliberate juxtaposition with the preceding pericope³³ and the staged nature of the healing of physical blindness a clue that the consistent motif of the disciples' misunderstanding likewise will only be cured by the continued touch of Jesus.

Proleptically, the pericope points forward to the experience of the Peter and the disciples in the focus passage. They will fail to understand Jesus, and their repeated misunderstandings require repeated 'touches' by Jesus. Their failure to 'see' can be remedied only by divine intervention, not through human reasoning. The disciples' vision of Jesus will remain blurred, not only throughout the focus

³¹ According to Johnson, 'the placement of the pericope is particularly important because it appears at a decisive point in the gospel. It is generally recognized that 8.27-9.1 stands at the centre of Mark's presentation of Jesus and of His teaching on discipleship, and that with Peter's confession and Jesus' open announcement of the passion Mark begins the second half of the gospel'. See E.S. Johnson, 'Mark 8.22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida', *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979), p. 375.

³² See E.S. Johnson, 'Mark 8.22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida', pp. 370-83. Johnson argues that the eight Greek words (which he analyses) used in the pericope reflect considerable evidence of Marcan redaction to emphasize the motif of 'seeing'.

³³ For instance, Jesus' question to the disciples in 8.18, 'do you have eyes, and fail to see?' and to the blind supplicant in 8.23, 'can you see anything?'

passage, but throughout the passion week itself, until they ‘see’ the resurrection, at which point only their understanding of Jesus will be complete. Paraenetically, the passage serves for Mark to inform all disciples that their understanding of Jesus’ nature and ministry, about to be enunciated in the focus passage, will only be possible through the repeated and ongoing ‘touch’ of Jesus.

Summary

The focus passage comes at a crucial turning point in the Marcan narrative, providing not only the geographical fulcrum between the ministry in Galilee and the passion events in Jerusalem, but also the passion week’s theological rationale and the concomitant requirements for (would-be) followers of Jesus. Having thus looked at the focus passage within both the overall Marcan structure and the immediate context, and based on our understanding of Marcan priority, date, authorship and purpose outlined above, we now turn to the focus passage itself, focussing initially on 8.27-9.29.

Exegesis III – Mark 8.27-9.29

Introduction

The first hearers / readers may well be asking themselves at this point just who this Jesus of Nazareth is, this man who quells storms, exorcises demons and teaches with such authority? Who is this man? Why is He doing what He is doing? Why do His disciples so consistently misunderstand Him? What sort of response is He actually looking for? With such questions in mind the Marcan narrative now moves to the Gospel's turning point – the Petrine confession. At last, a partial answer to who He is, but if He really is who He says He is, then His subsequent teachings demand serious consideration. The focus passage may be understood sequentially through the constituent pericopae (8.27-30; 31; 32-33; 34-9.1; 2-8; 9-13; and 14-29), each of which will be examined in turn.

8.27-30 – the Petrine confession

Enveloped in Marcan redaction,³⁴ Jesus and His disciples set out³⁵ for Caesarea Philippi.³⁶ The Galilean ministry is ending, and Jesus is turning His face towards Jerusalem. Unlike Jewish rabbis or Hellenistic philosophers who were asked questions by their disciples,³⁷ He asks the disciples, ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ who people say He is? The reader / hearer has known to date from the narrator, God Himself and demons that Jesus is 'Son of God', but so far no contemporary has correctly

³⁴ Marcan redaction is seen in the beginning of the pericope with Καὶ with a verb of motion and the use of a singular verb ἐξῆλθεν with plural subject. See Best, Ernest, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 19-20. Pryke also lists the significant Marcan syntactical and linguistic features of this pericope together with the following pericope (8.31-33), e.g. the use of πολλα in the accusative, εὐθὺς, the use of a redundant participle, and the use of two participles after a main verb. See E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel*, p. 143.

³⁵ The use of ἐξῆλθεν implies a deliberate setting out, not the rather undirected circumambulating around Galilee presented in chs. 1-8.

³⁶ Caesarea Philippi was located about one day's walk north of Bethsaida, at the foot of Mt. Hermon. The city had been refurbished by Philip and named in honour of Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor. The city was famous for its sanctuary to Pan, a mythical half-man and half-goat figure that was worshipped as the guardian of flocks in a shrine at the foot of Mt. Hermon. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 245-46.

³⁷ Rabbi's discussed questions of Torah with their disciples, Hellenistic philosophers discussed questions of the nature of truth with their adherents, but Jesus asks a question about Himself: this is the key question for Mark.

identified Jesus. The disciples report the (ostensibly flattering) answers current amongst their contemporaries, John the Baptist, Elijah,³⁸ or one of the prophets.³⁹

Jesus then asks them directly who they say He is – the disciples are asked not to report others' views of Jesus, but to confess their own views. They cannot hide behind the opinions of others. Furthermore, they are asked whilst ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ directly after a transitional summary which emphasizes their lack of understanding, not when they have arrived at their destination and when all their questions are answered. Their confession therefore is predicated on faith, not on a full understanding. Jesus asks ὑμεῖς δέ,⁴⁰ and Peter responds on behalf of the disciples, σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός, the Messiah.

Peter's confession, though in ultimate Marcan terms accurate,⁴¹ is inadequate, predicated on a distorted understanding of the Messiah.⁴² The contemporary Jewish milieu looked forward to a political-military deliverer from the might of Rome, and emphasized Israel at the expense of other nations. Given the enthusiasm with which Jesus has been received and followed by the populace in 1.15-8.26, their existing high estimation of Him as stated by the disciples, and the politically

³⁸ The exact role of Elijah in the apocalyptic timetable was debated within Judaism. Mal. 4.5-6 refers to an eschatological appearance of Elijah, and the disciples refer to the debates of their time about the exact nature of Elijah's role in 9.11, however there was no clear understanding of what exactly Elijah was to do, hence the rabbinic speculations.

³⁹ This is a possible reference to the prophecy of Deut. 18.15-19.

⁴⁰ The disciples have seen His authority, His power over demons, over the natural elements, over illnesses, and His sway over the crowds, and now, despite their constant misunderstandings throughout the Gospel, they are asked to confess who they believe Jesus is.

⁴¹ The question by the High Priest to Jesus in 14.61 links the concepts of 'Messiah' and 'Son of God', to which Jesus replies in the affirmative without caveats or prevarication, referring to Himself as the 'Son of Man', thereby providing theological texture to His primary self-designation throughout Mark.

⁴² It is beyond the scope of this paper to present an analysis of Jewish messianic hopes, but it is assumed that the general conception of the Messiah amongst Jesus' contemporaries was understood primarily in political and military terms, linked with national deliverance from Roman oppression and the establishment of a glorious kingdom in Jerusalem to which all nations would ultimately pay obeisance. Cullman provides an excellent discussion of contemporary messianic hopes, and shows how the Psalms of Solomon 17.21ff. contains 'a classical expression of the prevailing messianic expectation in New Testament times'. See Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 115.

explosive nature of any claim to Messiahship against the backdrop of Jewish expectations, it is not surprising that Jesus⁴³ immediately warns the disciples to silence.⁴⁴

The immediate context (8.22-26) proleptically points to the disciples' lack of understanding, fulfilled when Peter gives the right title to Jesus, but with the wrong meaning. The disciples remain disciples, but they are now ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, so their journey to a full understanding can only begin when Jesus starts to correct their misunderstandings in 8.31ff., as proleptically indicated in 8.22-26.

8.31 – first passion prediction

For the first time in Mark, we hear the content of Jesus' teaching.⁴⁵ Jesus predicts His suffering, death and resurrection,⁴⁶ the first of three such predictions.⁴⁷ Jesus' self-designation is as

⁴³ This passage raises an interesting question: does Jesus accept the title of Messiah attributed to Him by Peter? A straight reading of His confession before the High Priest in Mark 14.61-62 would seem to imply that Jesus did accept such a designation, and that whilst Jesus does accept Peter's confession, He then moves to correct the understanding of Messiah. However, Cullman disagrees, presenting a persuasive case that Jesus simply neither accepts nor rejects the title Messiah, based partly on his reading of the *ebed Yahweh* understanding of Christ, and on his comparison of the synoptic exchanges between Jesus and the High Priest. However, the position of this paper is that, whilst persuasive, Cullman's arguments do not recognize the Marcan context sufficiently, the explicit affirmation of His messiahship by Jesus to the High Priest, and the strong implication and natural reading of 8.30ff., which is that Jesus accepted the title of Messiah, but then moved to radically change the underlying meaning of Messiah. See Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, pp. 124-26, and Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah – From Gethsemane to the Grave: A commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels Vol. 1* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), p. 480.

⁴⁴ Mark uses ἐπετίμησεν, which he again uses in 8.32 when Peter 'rebukes' Jesus. In 8.30, following the distinctive Marcan καὶ to being the sentence, there is no following infinitive, as in normal Classical Greek usage, but we have a Marcan use of ἵνα, showing evidence of Marcan redaction. This summary statement for this pericope is therefore a Marcan redaction that follows the motif of the 'messianic secret'. However, whether this messianic secret is to be understood as proposed by Wrede is not so clear: the readers are aware of the secret, and the existing cultural milieu provide a strong imperative for Jesus to command to silence without any recourse to Wrede's theory.

⁴⁵ With the exception of 4.1-34 and the summary statement at the end of the prologue (1.14-15), Mark consistently portrays Jesus' actions, but relatively little of His teachings per se. It is in the focus passage, that Mark provides us with the first detailed teachings of Jesus.

⁴⁶ It is not clear from the reference to the resurrection in the passion prediction itself whether Jesus was alluding to the prophecy of Hos. 6.2, or whether He was referring to the general Jewish belief (not shared by the Sadducees) in the general resurrection.

⁴⁷ See also 9.30-32 and 10.32-34. There remains much debate about the redactional nature of Mark's Gospel, and whether the passion predictions contained therein reflect a single logion of Jesus or not. A synopsis of the three Marcan predictions denies the evolutionary concept of the development of the saying, as the second account (9.30-32) is the least developed in terms of content and detail. Some scholars argue that 'the original tradition of the three passion and resurrection traditions cannot have had its "Sitz im Leben" within the historical life of Jesus' (see Georg Strecker, 'The Passion and Resurrection Predictions in Mark's Gospel', *Interpretation* 22/1 (January 1968), pp. 421-42). If one accepts the form-critical hypothesis of Bultmann that there is a divide between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, then it is possible to posit a post-Easter origin of these sayings, as the apostolic Church tries to come to terms with the

the ‘Son of Man’, His consistent self-designation throughout Mark.⁴⁸ Based in the vision of Daniel 7 and drawing on the *ebed Yahweh* concepts of Deutero-Isaiah, the ‘Son of Man’ designation serves to partly correct the disciples’ false conception of messiahship, a self-designation that will only receive its fullest explication in 14.61-62 (the Christology of the NT is a complex subject, trying as it does to differentiate between the messianic self-consciousness of Jesus, and the theology of the early Church. However, within this passage, and throughout Mark, Jesus’ self-designation as the ‘Son of Man’ seems to be based on the vision of Daniel 7. In Daniel 7, the mysterious heavenly figure is also designated ‘Son of Man’, possesses ‘authority’ in heaven, whilst Jesus as ‘Son of Man’ in 2.10 has authority not only on earth, but heavenly authority as in 2.28 He possesses authority over the Sabbath itself).⁴⁹

The Messiah is the Son of Man, but that Son of Man ‘must’ suffer, His earthly (non-eschatological) role. Jesus here describes the earthly aspect of His role as Son of Man, which will be contrasted later in the focus passage in 8.38 with His eschatological role as Son of Man. This linked dichotomy between the Son of Man’s earthly and eschatological roles is found also in the trial narrative, where Jesus responds to the High Priest’s question in the affirmative, knowing that the response will lead directly to the fulfilment of His earthly role, i.e. suffering, death and resurrection, whilst then immediately pointing the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, and presumably the readers / hearers, to His

crucifixion of Jesus and develop a theology coherent with Jewish messianic understandings. However, if one does not accept the fundamental divide between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, and given the clear evidence of Marcan redactional activity within the text, and given the assumption of direct Petrine association in the production of the Gospel, one may posit a probable historicity for the three passion predictions.

⁴⁸ See also 2.10, 28; 8.31; 9.9, 12, 31; 10.33, 45; 13.26; 14.21, 41, and 62.

⁴⁹ Once the full explication of the title ‘Son of Man’ is received in 14.61-62, i.e. ‘Son of Man’ = ‘Son of God’ and ‘Messiah’, the mockery of Jesus as the ‘Messiah’ on the cross by the chief priests and scribes in 15.31-32 and the recognition of Jesus as ‘Son of God’ by the centurion at 15.39 take on new significance. The chief priests / scribes by virtue of their rejection open the way for the acceptance of Jesus as Son of God by gentiles, as exemplified by the Roman centurion. Given the acclamation of the emperors as ‘Son of God’ within contemporary Roman society, the centurion’s statement is significant. He who has just killed the divine ‘Son of God’ in the name of the temporal ‘Son of God’ now recognizes his mistake and is brought to conversion.

eschatological role as Son of Man as the bringer of the final judgement, bringing to an end the current age and ushering in the anticipated age to come.

The necessity of Jesus, the Messiah, to suffer in His earthly role as the Son of Man was a shock to the disciples, and the notion of death on a Roman cross for the Messiah was a shameful and provocative concept. However, ‘behind this sense of necessity...is the twin belief of the divine will (14.36) and its concomitant, the fulfilment of Scripture (14.49)’.⁵⁰ Jesus is fundamentally redefining the disciples’ understanding of messiahship, and there is a great irony to the prediction.⁵¹

Jesus’ death will not come at the hands of the mindless mob, but at the hands of τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ τῶν γραμματέων. ‘It is not humanity at its worst that will crucify the Son of God, but humanity at its absolute best...He will be arrested with official warrants, and tried and executed by the world’s envy of jurisprudence – the Jewish Sanhedrin and the *principia iuris Romanorum*’.⁵²

8.32-33 – the disciples’ misunderstanding

Jesus is now speaking ‘the word openly’, whereas before He spoke often in parables. His teaching (‘the word’) is now articular and definite,⁵³ and equates with His suffering, death and resurrection. The use of the iterative imperfect (ἐλάλει) coheres with the disciples’ misunderstanding and the need for repeated touches by Jesus in 8.22-26: Jesus must repeatedly proclaim ‘the word’ to alleviate the disciples’ misunderstanding.

⁵⁰ See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 16.

⁵¹ Irony is commonly used within Mark. For instance, in the narrative of 5.1-20, Jesus heals a demoniac, and thereby restores him to full membership and acceptance within the local society. However, the result of bringing in one person into social acceptance is social exclusion for Jesus Himself, who is requested to leave the district by the local community that has just received back their erstwhile demoniac.

⁵² See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 254.

⁵³ παρησίᾳ can mean ‘boldly’, ‘confidently’ or ‘clearly’, ‘openly’. Given the command to silence in 8.30, and the potentially dangerous context for such discussions, the meaning of ‘clearly’ is preferred. See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 24.

True to his Jewish background, Peter ‘began to rebuke him’. How could suffering be the fate of the Messiah? Peter’s use of ἐπιτιμᾶν matches Jesus’ use to the disciples of 8.30, and reflects the utter abhorrence Peter and the disciples are feeling.⁵⁴ Peter’s response implies a demonic prompting behind Jesus’ linking of suffering and death with the Messiah, but Jesus’ response in turn to Peter (and the disciples) directly explains that it is not the linking of suffering and death with the Messiah which has demonic overtones, but it is the rejection of such a linkage which is of Satan.⁵⁵

Peter, a disciple, is unwittingly opposing the deep mysteries of God’s purposes, the divine δεῖ, and his response to Jesus in narrative terms serves to emphasize the revolutionary association of messiahship with suffering. Even a disciple of Peter’s standing may oppose τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ,⁵⁶ i.e. the concept of a suffering Messiah, through a false conception of the Messiah, which is merely human wisdom, something τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

A false view of the Messiah and of the earthly role of the Son of Man leads inexorably to unwitting but false discipleship in the service of Satan – ‘when disciples play God rather than follow Jesus, they inevitably become satanic’.⁵⁷ Mark therefore links the inadequate⁵⁸ Petrine confession with a corrective explanation by Jesus of the true nature of the Messiah. The disciples still do not

⁵⁴ The use of the verb ἐπιτιμᾶω reflects the utter abhorrence the disciples feel for the notion of a suffering Messiah. The word for “rebuke”...is customarily used for rebuking demons, that is, the worst and most ultimate form of evil’. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 255.

⁵⁵ Whilst the Marcan account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is brief, the synoptic parallels show that one of Satan’s temptations was for Jesus not to take the way of suffering, to reject the way of the cross. Peter’s suggestion that Jesus not take the way of the cross and suffering is therefore to be understood within the synoptic context to be a direct challenge to the way of the cross that God planned for Jesus, and was therefore, however unwittingly, a Marcan parallel to the synoptic parallels’ temptations by Satan.

⁵⁶ The obviously embarrassing nature of the pericope supports the relative authenticity of the account.

⁵⁷ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 255.

⁵⁸ Quite simply, ‘Peter’s confession, correct as it is, is only correct as far as it goes. To the extent that it does not mesh with the total understanding of Jesus Mark projects in his story, it is “insufficient”. In what it connotes, it does full justice to neither the identity nor the mission of Jesus’. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA; Fortress Press, 1983), p. 94.

understand, so Jesus now turns to the nature of true discipleship, which can only be understood once the putative disciple has a full appreciation of both the earthly and eschatological roles of the Son of Man.

8.34-9.1 – Jesus’ teaching on discipleship

Calling both the crowd and the disciples to Himself in Marcan redactional style,⁵⁹ Jesus begins to teach.⁶⁰ Following the sharp rebuke of Peter, Jesus is seeking to outline what it means to truly follow Him. The crowd represents current, potential and (would-be) followers,⁶¹ so it is imperative that they hear the discourse.

Jesus’ opening words εἴ τις θέλει emphasize the open nature of the Kingdom – it is open to any who so wish, but at what price? Followers of Jesus Himself, not of an Hellenistic philosophy, nor of the Torah, must ‘deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’. Switching from the aorist imperatives⁶² to the final present imperative⁶³ is important: it suggests an initial act, or set of actions, followed by an ongoing process, ‘keep on following’.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ The use of καὶ to begin the sentence as a conjunctive, of μαθητης, and προσκαλεσάμενος show Marcan redaction, προσκαλεσάμενος being used elsewhere in Marcan seams in 3.13, 23; 6.7; 7.14; 10.42; and 12.43. The use of this verb emphasizes the solemnity of what is about to be spoken – Jesus ‘summoned’ the hearers to Himself. See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 28, and E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel*, p. 144.

⁶⁰ The immediate context has Jesus and the disciples with no mention of ‘τὸν ὄχλον’ in Caesarea Philippi. Why has Mark now included the crowds, when in the synoptic parallels they are absent? The difficulty may be overcome by assuming a journey south from Caesarea Philippi, and these are the teachings of Jesus as He journeys south, directly into his ‘heartland’ ministry location of Galilee. More likely, Mark is emphasizing that the teachings of Jesus on discipleship are to be proclaimed openly so that (would-be) followers understand what is required in true discipleship.

⁶¹ The crowds through Mark play a number of roles, e.g. being fed, healed, taught, admonished and led by Jesus. They neither play an overtly hostile, nor a very positive role, simply being there. They form the masses of people from whence all disciples must be won, so they form the necessary rhetorical counterparts in all teachings on discipleship.

⁶² ἀπαρνησάσθω and ἀράτω.

⁶³ ἀκολουθεῖτω. The data for this and the previous Footnote are taken from Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ The notion of ‘following’ could imply motion in the spiritual journey of a disciple, which may parallel the physical journey the disciples are taking in Mark from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem and then to their full understanding in the post-Easter environment. It could also mean that one is to imitate Jesus, e.g. to cast out demons, heal the sick, preach the advent of the Kingdom of God, as the disciples did when they were commissioned by Jesus in Mark 6.6-8. Alternatively, it could mean that one is to obey Jesus, a concept that includes the idea of motion – to go where Jesus leads physically and spiritually, and the idea of obedience to the will of Jesus in one’s life. This paper takes the position that Jesus is

The mention of τὸν σταυρὸν would sound macabre to the immediate listeners given the fearful nature of that particular means of execution, but to followers of Christ suffering in the Neronian, Domitianic and subsequent persecutions, Jesus is affirming their sufferings and persecutions as constituent parts of true discipleship.⁶⁵ To subsequent (would-be) followers, Jesus is requiring the willingness to sacrifice everything, including life, for Him.

The concomitant command ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν is not just a denial of things to self, as found in asceticism, it is a more fundamental denial of self per se. Within the immediate Marcan context of the disciples' misunderstanding, the denial of self may be understood as the denial of the human desire for prestige, self-exaltation and authority over others, and the acceptance of temporal abasement, not in and of itself, but for the name of Christ. These two commands parallel each other: the inward denial and rejection of self results in the external willingness to take up one's cross. Jesus then provides four reasons to justify His radical claims: vv. 35, 36, 37 and 38 all begin with the causative (conjunction of purpose) γάρ.

In v. 35, Jesus presents a paradox, paralleling a rabbinical saying, initially using the verbal pair of 'save' and 'lose', and then reversing the pair to present the paradox.⁶⁶ The use of τὴν ψυχὴν can imply simply physical existence⁶⁷ or the more important 'soul' or 'personhood', and here Jesus refers to the both senses. The desire to save one's temporal life (i.e. in the context, the desire for worldly

requiring a discipleship primarily characterized by obedience rather than imitation, as imitation may not be what Jesus requires of a given disciple.

⁶⁵ In the Lucan parallel, Luke adds the word καθ' ἡμέραν, i.e. Luke understands the concept metaphorically rather than literally, as one cannot take up one's cross in a physical sense every day – one would logically be dead after the first day of so doing. The position of this paper is that Jesus is not requiring (would-be) or actual disciples to physically die on a cross for him, but He is affirming the total and exclusive demands of discipleship on the individual, demands which transcend all other claims.

⁶⁶ The Marcan redaction provides evidence of the use of memory devices to enable listeners to remember the words read to them, e.g. the repeated use of catch-words, such as the repetition in this verse of the words σώσαι and ἀπολέσει.

⁶⁷ The sense of physical life is implied in the reasons provided by Jesus in vv. 36-37, where the physical sense of life is implied by the context of taking up one's cross in v. 34.

authority) is not profitable because it leads to the eternal loss of one's soul. Conversely, being unashamed of Jesus, of His words, and of the gospel, is profitable because it secures one's eternal life, 'the pursuit of authority is not the way of Jesus; instead, servanthood is His way'.⁶⁸

Introducing the radical elements of Himself and the gospel to a rabbinic saying,⁶⁹ Jesus seeks to prevent subjective unions with Him divorced from the historical events of the passion: true discipleship is inextricably linked to an appreciation of, and identification with, the passion (earthly role) of the Son of Man.

Understood together, in vv. 36-37 Jesus draws on OT sources⁷⁰ to answer a (would-be) disciple's question, 'given the potential suffering involved, why should I follow Jesus?' Assuming His authority and the truth of His self-testimony, Jesus seeks to reason with disciples. Why strive for temporal riches when doing so precludes your following of Jesus and being prepared to suffer for the proclamation of the gospel? One may achieve temporal gains, but in so doing one will lose what is most important, τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ.⁷¹ Once again the exclusive nature of Jesus call to follow is clear – seeking temporal advancement directly endangers a disciple's ψυχὴ.

⁶⁸ See Narry F. Santos, 'Jesus' Paradoxical Teaching in Mark 8:35; 9:35; and 10:43-44', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (January – March 2000), p. 20. Santos proposes a method of identifying the underlying metaphors to work out the meaning of the paradoxes used by Jesus in His discipleship discourses. His method, building on Fowler's 'transfiguration' method is interesting, and helpful in ascertaining the meaning of a paradoxical statement, but its main weakness is that it leaves the determination of the underlying metaphors to the current reader, and not to the immediate textual or religious context of the paradox in question.

⁶⁹ 'Jesus' saying about saving and losing one's life also finds a parallel in a later rabbinic tractate: "Everyone who preserves one thing from the Torah preserves his life, and everyone who loses one thing from the Torah will lose his life". See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ The OT passages in question are Eccl. 1.3 and Ps. 49.7-9. Jesus reworks these OT texts in a new Christological light, providing a Christocentric understanding. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 26.

⁷¹ The pericope concerning the rich young ruler in 10.17-31 shows precisely the sort of choice Jesus is referring to. Disciples must intelligently weigh the options: temporal security and wealth with eschatological doom - or eschatological glory with temporal sufferings?

ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν ἐπαισχυνθῆ με καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους in v. 38 serves to emphasize to both original and modern hearers that even if Jesus is still not present, one may still adhere to Jesus through adherence to His words (τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους in the immediate context may be both the passion of the Son of Man,⁷² or the concomitant requirements for disciples).

In v. 38, Jesus parallels the call for His disciples to participate in the earthly role (suffering) of the Son of Man through referring to the Son of Man's ultimate eschatological role – the certainty of His role in the future judgement. The underlying logic of Jesus' words presupposes that He refers to Himself as the 'Son of Man' – why would the coming eschatological judge be ashamed of those who have been ashamed of Jesus if He Himself were not that self-same judge? Of one's attitude to whom else then is a disciple to be judged, if not Jesus Himself?⁷³ Taking up one's cross, denying self, and following Jesus is therefore eminently sensible given the Son of Man's eschatological role, when temporal like will be repaid with eschatological like.⁷⁴

The teachings on discipleship in vv. 34-37 are 'sandwiched' between references to the earthly (v. 31) and the eschatological (v. 38) roles of the Son of Man, a technique of intercalation used consistently in the Marcan redaction, enabling the 'bread' and the 'filling' to throw mutual light on one another.⁷⁵

Understood exclusively in the light of the Son of Man's earthly role (v. 31), the call to discipleship ἐν

⁷² Jesus' use of τὸν λόγον in 8.32 refers to His passion prediction of 8.31, whereas the plural use in 8.38 may refer also to the discipleship discourse of 8.34-9.1 (such an understanding is supported by the divine command to 'hear Him' in 9.7), and more broadly all the discipleship discourses of 8.27-10.52.

⁷³ The phrase ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ μοιχαλίδι καὶ ἁμαρτωλῷ implies that Jesus is not discussing a creedal or liturgical situation, but is referring more to the acknowledgement of Him in the world as an unbelieving and potentially hostile environment. To confess Jesus therefore is not within the safe environs of one's own communion, but is a public confession that brings the risk of persecution or suffering due to rejection.

⁷⁴ In 4.24 (and in the synoptic parallels) this general principle is laid out: '...And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you' (NRSV).

⁷⁵ 6.14-29 outlines the circumstances of John the Baptist's death and is a good example of Marcan intercalation, the technique Mark uses of inserting a story or pericope into the middle of an existing story or pericope. In this technique, Mark uses an A1-B-A2 structural approach, in which according to Edwards, '...the B-episode forms an independent unit of material, whereas the flanking A-episodes require one another to complete their narrative'. See James R. Edwards, 'Marcan Sandwiches' in Orton, David E. (ed.), *The Composition of Mark's Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum* (Leiden, The Netherlands; E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 192-15.

τῆ ὁδῶ in vv. 34-37 provides merely an ethical model for living, which may be rejected or accepted without ultimate consequences, but when also understood in the light of the (parallel) eschatological role of the Son of Man (v. 38), the call to discipleship ἐν τῆ ὁδῶ has an ultimate significance, a significance which will be outlined later in the focus passage's dominical teachings.

Showing signs of Marcan redaction,⁷⁶ 9.1 has inspired different understandings:⁷⁷ was Jesus referring (mistakenly) to the parousia within the lifetime of contemporaries or to the end of the age? Alternatively, given the Neronic persecutions, Mark may be adapting an earlier tradition (13.26-27) to provide paraenetic comfort to persecuted Christians.⁷⁸ The Marcan καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς suggests Mark is splicing a disconnected tradition onto the discipleship discourse, yet the saying is important, linking with the theme of glory from 8.38 and pointing forward to the transfiguration.

Given the immediate context, this paper suggests that Mark is providing a picture of discipleship within the structure of the pericope that reflects the movement within of the passion prediction of 8.31. Jesus has spoken at length of the necessity to deny one's self, to take up one's cross, and to face persecution, reflecting His own suffering (earthly role), but has offered nothing positive yet to reflect the positive outcome of the passion prediction (the resurrection). Hence Jesus now provides a promise for disciples that balances His own predicted resurrection. The promise primarily points

⁷⁶ For instance, we note the use of 'seeing', (a Marcan feature found elsewhere, e.g. 9.9; 13.26; and 14.62), the use of 'power', (found elsewhere in 8.38; 10.37; and 13.26), the relation in form to the solemn statement of 13.26, the Marcan use of καὶ, the Marcan phrase ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς to indicate the beginning of new material, the solemn beginning ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν (distinctive for Jesus in the synoptic traditions) followed by an ὅτι clause with an emphatic form of negation. See Norman Perrin, 'The Composition of Mark 9:1', *Novum Testamentum* 11 (January – April 1969), p. 68 and John J. Kilgallen, S.J., 'Mark 9.1 – The Conclusion of a Pericope', *Biblica* 63 (1982), pp. 6-8.

⁷⁷ W.G. Kummel argues that 9.1 is a genuine saying of Jesus, whilst A. Vogtle argues that it is an amendment of the earlier Jesus tradition found in 13.30, whilst it has also been argued that this is a prophetic *Trostwort* in the face of the delay in the expected parousia. Building on the position of Ernst Haenchen following his essay in 1963 entitled *Die Komposition von Mk. 8.27-9.1*, Norman Perrin argues for an understanding of 9.1 that holds that 'Mark 9.1 is a saying produced by Mark on the model of 13.30 as the promise antithetical to the warning contained in 8.38, rather than a Marcan adaptation of a genuine saying of Jesus or a *Trostwort* from early Christian prophecy'. See Norman Perrin, 'The Composition of Mark 9:1', pp. 67-70.

⁷⁸ Kilgallen argues that 'this effort of Mark, to turn the history and meaning of Jesus to define and give meaning to the lives of his contemporaries, is his hallmark'. See John J. Kilgallen, S.J., 'Mark 9.1 – The Conclusion of a Pericope', pp. 6-8.

forward neither to the parousia nor to the transfiguration⁷⁹ but to the promised resurrection of 8.31, which did occur during the hearers' lifetime,⁸⁰ and it is to the transfiguration pericope that we now come.

9.2-8 – the transfiguration

The interpretation of the transfiguration represents a rich seam of NT scholarship,⁸¹ but as this paper accepts in principle the inbreaking of God into time and history, rather than seeking a naturalistic explanation, we return with humility to the text itself and the apostolic witness.

⁷⁹ It must be made clear that these two interpretations cannot be excluded, particularly given the linguistic inclusio of the verb 'to see' in 9.1 and 9.8, bracketing the transfiguration and suggesting that at one level at least, Jesus was referring to the transfiguration in 9.1.

⁸⁰ 'The interpretation of 9.1 with reference to the resurrection claims a long history of support that goes back to many fathers in the early church'. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 261.

⁸¹ The essential dividing line within scholarship is whether or not one accepts the Troeltschian principles of analogy and correlation. Those who do accept these principles seek a naturalistic explanation with an attributable cause or multiple causes, and those who do not accept these principles do not seek a naturalistic explanation. The very singularity of the event precludes us from seeking modern parallels or paradigms within secular humanist understanding. The event challenges our very worldview, and forces us to be precise and explicit in our exegetical presuppositions. Edwards outlines a number of given alternatives: the transfiguration is to be understood according to the 'divine man' concepts of contemporary Hellenistic religion, the transfiguration 'portrays a metaphysical apotheosis of Jesus similar to the apotheoses of divine men in Hellenism', however, there was no precedent for those experiencing apotheosis to return to a way that led to the awful death of a cross! 'Divine Men', following apotheosis, dwelt amongst the gods; the transfiguration was 'a vision similar to Peter's vision in Acts 10, or as an epiphany or angelophany similar to the appearance of Yahweh in Genesis 18'. The problem with this position is those who propose it, seeking a naturalistic explanation for the event, then provide ambiguous understandings of the cross-referenced events themselves, cross-referencing the other events with the transfiguration, a kind of vicious circle; the transfiguration was a 'resurrection story retrojected into the life of Jesus'. This is a common position by those seeking to impose the Jesus of the faith of the post-Easter community back into the historical accounts. However, this position is not without its weaknesses, e.g. Jesus speaks in the post-resurrection appearances and not in the transfiguration, Jesus appears with Elijah and Moses in the transfiguration whilst being alone in His appearances after the resurrection, there is no divine voice in the post-resurrection narratives, there are signs from Jesus to the disciples in the post-resurrection appearances but none in the transfiguration, and in narrative terms, the transfiguration serves a vitally important function in the narrative where it is placed, linking the baptism in Mark 1 with the passion. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 269-71. Wink further outlines a number of the interpretations, e.g. according to Paulus, 'the disciples were blinded by the morning sun on dazzling snow as Jesus spoke with two men in white mantles, whom Peter mistook as Moses and Elijah...just before a cloud moved in and sheltered them from view', (see Walter Wink, 'Mark 9:2-8', *Interpretation* 36 (1982), pp. 63-67). An interesting point of view is presented by Del Agua, who argues that given the hermeneutical context of the early Church within the Second Temple milieu, we can understand the transfiguration pericope as being a 'darash', or a Christian version of Jewish midrash, which 'is a derashic explanation and correction of a faith confession (homology) in the light of Scriptures...the complex and various OT allusions found in the narrative postulate a scholarly milieu. Everything leads to a Christian derashic school of Palestinian origin'. Whilst agreeing with Del Agua in principle that NT writers used midrashic techniques, the analysis presented by Del Agua does not add any new insights to the understanding of the transfiguration. See Agustin Del Agua, 'The Narrative of the Transfiguration as a Derashic Scenification of a Faith Confession (Mark 9.2-8 & PAR)', *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993), pp. 340-54.

Mark's description of the transfiguration is remarkably brief, καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, and the account of Peter's response is brutally frank, οὐ γὰρ ἤδει τί ἀποκριθῆ, ἔκφοβοι γὰρ ἐγένοντο, whilst Peter's later reflections confirm the apostolic witness to the event.⁸² What happened on that mount?⁸³ Why did Moses and Elijah appear?⁸⁴ Why did Peter suggest the building of booths?⁸⁵ Even recognizing the clear (typological) parallels with Moses,⁸⁶ we are left none the wiser. He was transfigured, and until the full appearing of the Kingdom of God when the Son of Man fulfils His (Marcan) eschatological role, we shall never fully understand, for, to paraphrase the eye-witnesses themselves, οὐ γινώσκομεν τί ἀποκριθῆναι.

However, this ambiguity about what physically happened does not prevent us understanding the transfiguration within its context. In narrative terms, no contemporary of Jesus fully appreciates Jesus' nature until 9.7. Jesus is affirmed by God as His Son in the prologue (1.9-11), and recognized as such by demons (1.24; 3.11; and 5.7), but no contemporary recognizes Him for who He is. In the

⁸² See 2 Pet. 1.16-18.

⁸³ The text does not provide a direct clue as the location of the transfiguration. Given the immediate context, Jesus and the disciples have been at Caesarea Philippi, and it is very possible that they are on Mt. Hermon. The traditional site of Mt. Tabor is possible but not as likely, because at the time the summit was fortified and inhabited, unlike Mt. Hermon, and therefore it would not have provided the seclusion required by Jesus in taking the three disciples alone.

⁸⁴ The appearance of Moses and Elijah is somewhat puzzling, as nowhere in inter-testamental or OT literature are both portrayed together as forerunners of the Messiah. They appear together elsewhere in the NT, in the synoptic parallels and in Revelation, but not in this role in the OT. However, whilst the precise reasons why Elijah and Moses appeared are unclear, in general they may be taken to represent the law (Moses, who also functioned as a prophet), and the prophets (with Elijah being viewed in Judaism as one of the greatest of the prophets on account of his ascension to heaven, and the prophecy about Elijah in Mal. 4.5-6). Thus as representatives of both the law and the prophets, Moses and Elijah's presence serves to validate Jesus, providing authoritative witnesses, and affirming the divine approval of 9.7.

⁸⁵ Peter may have believed like many pious Jews of his time that God would one-day tabernacle again with His people (e.g. Tob. 13.11 says '...make a right confession to the Lord and bless the King of the ages, so that once again his dwelling may be erected with you in joy'). Peter's inarticulate response to the transfiguration is therefore taken over by his instinctive Jewish reaction to the glory of what he sees: God is coming to dwell with man, so Peter offers to make a tabernacle / tent. However, what Peter is seeing is God affirming a new way of tabernacling with men: through fellowship in Jesus Christ (a Christology very close to that of John's prologue). See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 266, and Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 37.

⁸⁶ There are clear parallels with the Exodus account of Moses' ascension to Mt. Sinai where he met with God and descended with a shining face. Moses' sojourn on Mt. Sinai was 6 days (Ex. 24.16), and the transfiguration happens 'after six days'; a cloud covers both mountains (Ex. 24.16; Mark 9.7); God speaks from the cloud (Ex. 24.16; Mark 9.7); there are three companions with the primary ascendant (Ex. 24. 1,9; Mark 9.2); a transformed appearance of the primary ascendant (Ex. 24.16; Mark 9.3); a reaction of fear (Ex. 34.30; Mark 9.6). As a result of these clear connections, a typological relationship may be mooted for the two events, but the actual significance of the typological relationship is unclear. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 35-36.

transfiguration however, the ‘inner circle’ disciples are let into Mark’s real ‘messianic secret’. Jesus is God’s Son.⁸⁷ These two divine affirmations bracket the wondrous works and teachings of Jesus’ itinerant ministry, functioning both to provide the Christological context for understanding the previous ministry and anticipated passion, and provide an internal prolepsis to the centurion’s confession. As hinted at in 8.22-26,⁸⁸ such an understanding of Jesus is not of humans, but is possible only through divine intervention.

Furthermore, the transfiguration occurs μετὰ ἡμέρας, but to what does this refer? There is no redactional sense in inserting a timeframe if the timeframe has no referent.⁸⁹ In the immediate context, 8.34-91 are dominical sayings, not a discrete event. The Petrine confession however, the subsequent passion prediction and discipleship discourse are a distinct event(s), linked thematically if not in a direct temporal sense. Linked thus to the Petrine confession, God is affirming Jesus as His chosen Son, the Messiah; linked with the passion prediction, God is affirming the earthly (passion) role of the Son of Man; and linked with the subsequent discipleship discourse, God is requiring obedience to the logia of the Son of Man in the light of His anticipated eschatological role. Disciples are to walk ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ in the light of both roles.

⁸⁷ Matera provides a strong argument that the Marcan prologue is the interpretative key to Mark’s Gospel. In the prologue, according to Matera, Jesus’ true identity and His relationship with John the Baptist are clearly outlined, but for the readers / hearers alone. It is only in the transfiguration that God provides humans (Peter, James and John) with the interpretative key to Jesus’ itinerant ministry – the fact that Jesus is Son of God, and the nature of the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, the ‘Elijah’ figure. See F.J. Matera, ‘The Prologue as the Interpretive Key to Mark’s Gospel’ in Telford, William (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 2nd edn., 1995), pp. 289-06.

⁸⁸ This fact is highlighted in the Matthean parallel, Matt. 16.17, ‘...For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven...’ (NRSV).

⁸⁹ It is important to note that the synoptic parallels include a time-reference in the transfiguration, linking the transfiguration with the Petrine confession (Matt. 17.1 and Luke 9.28, although Luke records ‘eight days’ and not six).

The divine command ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ,⁹⁰ as with the time-frame, refers primarily to the teachings of Jesus in the immediate context, but also in a broader context to the teachings of Jesus in the focus passage and throughout Mark.

Discipleship therefore is not merely imitating Christ. Καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι does not merely imply imitating Jesus. It means to obey Jesus.⁹¹ Discipleship is found in obeying, not imitating, for imitating is based on the disciple's imperfect perception of what Jesus has done, much of which a disciple cannot do, whilst obeying is based on Jesus' perfect understanding of what the disciple needs to do or be.

The transfiguration fades, Elijah and Moses disappear, and only Jesus is left before the disciples. In contradistinction to the *apotheosis* of 'divine men', He returns, to continue ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ with the disciples. He does not abandon them. Discipleship requires obedience to the command of Jesus, and divine revelation is provided when necessary for the disciple, but the disciple is never alone.

9.9-13 – Jesus' teaching about Elijah

Accompanied by consistent signs of Marcan redaction,⁹² Jesus and the disciples descend from the glory of the transfiguration, and Jesus issues a command to silence, until 'after the Son of Man

⁹⁰ It should be noted that the prophecy of the prophet to come in Deut. 18.15 includes the same Greek words in the LXX, albeit in a different syntactical order αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε. If we are to understand a direct linkage, then we may expect a more direct correspondence with Moses typology throughout the pericope, e.g. Moses may have appeared on his own instead of with Elijah. Conversely, Moses did prophecy about a prophet whom God would raise up, and Jesus' self-understanding evident in the Johannine account of the woman at the well (John 4) suggests that Jesus did understand Himself to be the fulfillment of this prophecy. On balance, and given the instructions to the disciples to 'hear Him', i.e. Jesus, and not 'hear them', i.e. Jesus, Elijah and Moses, the position of this paper is that Mark is using the Deut. 18.15 account to directly link Jesus with that prophecy.

⁹¹ Such an understanding is predicated on the Jewish understanding of the *Shema* of Deut. 6.4ff., and in particular of the concept of 'hearing', which is more than just oricular reception, but requires a response of faith and obedience.

⁹² In the current pericope we see Marcan themes such as the command to silence from Jesus, which appears in eight other places in the Gospel, although none of the other commands to silence have a time-frame. We also see distinctive Marcan use of vocabulary, such as ἀναστῆναι, καταβαίνειν, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι, καὶ, and πολλά. Best argues further that we might be looking at another Marcan sandwich: the outer halves being 8.27-33; and 9.2-13, with the inner

had risen from the dead'. The only Marcan time-related command to silence, Jesus is highlighting two important points to the disciples: the passion and resurrection are the 'only vantage point from which Jesus' life and ministry can be understood according to their divine purpose';⁹³ and secondly, to emphasize that discipleship is not based on knowledge or understanding, but continued fellowship with, following of, and where necessary, participation in the suffering of, Jesus.

The disciples appear to misunderstand,⁹⁴ unable or even unwilling to accept the concept of death for the Son of Man.⁹⁵ Their question about Elijah ostensibly reflects contemporary rabbinic debates, but is essentially a more subtle reproach than the Petrine rebuke to the concept of the suffering Son of Man. If Elijah is to restore all things, why then the need for the Son of Man to suffer and die? Jesus affirms the concept of Elijah's return, but then poses a question, καὶ πῶς γέγραπται.⁹⁶ Jesus is probably alluding to Isaiah 53,⁹⁷ and the suffering *ebed Yahweh* – yes, Elijah is to come, but why then do the Scriptures refer to a suffering figure who precedes the final Day of the Lord?⁹⁸

Jesus then surprises the disciples even further – Elijah has indeed come. As with the divine affirmation of Jesus in the transfiguration vis-a-vis the Marcan prologue, it is in this pericope that the

'meat' of the sandwich being the discipleship discourse of 8.34-9.1. This argument, whilst seemingly attractive and based on a commonly understood Marcan redactional technique, has not gained significant scholarly support, as the flow of the narrative seems to suggest an existing clear thematic and linguistic linkage between the 'meat' and the 'bread' without the need for imposing the 'Marcan sandwich' technique onto the text. See E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel*, p. 144 for the analysis of Marcan vocabulary and syntax.

⁹³ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 272.

⁹⁴ The use of the verbs ἐκράτησαν and συζητοῦντες implies that for Mark the disciples simply did not understand, rather they did not want to understand. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 273.

⁹⁵ The disciples' inability to understand the concept of a resurrection is somewhat strange. Although it is hard to find normative statements on the resurrection in the OT, there had arisen in the inter-testamental times a strong belief in the final resurrection of the righteous.

⁹⁶ Whilst the Marcan Jesus often uses the γέγραπται concept or the concomitant δεῖ concept to refer to OT references to justify current or anticipated events, the Marcan Jesus however does not tend to specify precisely where in the OT He is building His theological rationale, an elliptical approach that is paralleled by the use of the divine passive in NT syntax.

⁹⁷ It is very difficult to pinpoint precisely to which OT passages Jesus is referring in 9.12, but the most commonly understood passage is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

⁹⁸ Casey argues for an understanding of the putative underlying Aramaic of this pericope, pointing out from the Aramaic that Jesus' use of *barnasha* could be merely referring in the third person to John the Baptist rather than to Himself (echoing G. Vermes' understanding of the 'third person' use of the Son of Man concept). Whilst interesting, the argument remains possible rather than probable because the case is built on his unproven Aramaic reconstruction of the 'original' words. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 41-42.

exact relationship between Jesus and the Baptist is explicated for the disciples,⁹⁹ who can now transcend contemporary confusion¹⁰⁰ and properly understand the relationship between the two.¹⁰¹ Where exactly Jesus is taking the OT imperative for Elijah to suffer is unclear (καθὼς γέγραπται ἐπ’ αὐτόν),¹⁰² but Jesus has provided a *schema* of for His disciples: the Son of Man as the *ebed Yahweh*, and John the Baptist as Elijah are to suffer – why therefore should His disciples reject suffering?

For the disciple, suffering is participation in, and fellowship with, the suffering Son of Man (earthly role), a suffering that will ultimately enable participation in the Son of Man’s eschatological role. Having given the disciples a glimpse of ultimate glorification in the transfiguration, Jesus now emphasizes that rejection of temporal suffering, of being a disciple ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ of Jesus’ choosing, is to reject that ultimate glorification, and having emphasized the necessity for disciples to participate in Jesus’ suffering, the small troupe descend to encounter human suffering outside of the context of participation ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.

⁹⁹ Up to this point only the reader / hearer is aware of the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, which has been provided in the Marcan prologue. John had come to ‘prepare the way’ for Jesus, a ‘way’ which Jesus is now treading with His disciples. As John’s ministry ended in an unwarranted execution, so will Jesus’. See F.J. Matera, ‘The Prologue as the Interpretive Key to Mark’s Gospel’ in Telford, William (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark*, pp. 289-06.

¹⁰⁰ 6.14-16 records the confusion over Jesus amongst His contemporaries.

¹⁰¹ From the prologue, we are to understand that John is the precursor of Jesus’ ministry, called to prepare ‘the way’ which Jesus is to tread. ‘The quotation from Isaiah (in the Marcan prologue) is the beginning of Deutero-Isaiah’s prophecy announcing that God is about to redeem Israel from exile by a new exodus....its function is to identify who John is. It answers that he is the messenger of the covenant, the eschatological prophet foretold by “Isaiah”...his task is to prepare the way of the Lord for God’s final act of salvation, a new exodus....from the opening of the narrative, therefore, the reader knows the correct relationship between John and Jesus. John is not the Messiah; he is the precursor, the promised Elijah as even his garb suggests’. See F.J. Matera, ‘The Prologue as the Interpretive Key to Mark’s Gospel’ in Telford, William (ed.), *The Interpretation of Mark*, pp. 293-94.

¹⁰² As in 9.12, it is unclear to which Scripture Jesus is referring when he refers to the ‘writteness’ of the Baptist’s suffering. It is possible that Jesus is reading John the Baptist’s ministry also in Isaiah 53, or reflecting His more general view of how Jerusalem treated the prophets (12.1-12 and the lament over Jerusalem).

9.14-29 – the case of the paralytic boy

The current pericope remains the subject of critical debate: is it the result of two stories spliced together,¹⁰³ or has Mark (or the tradents) just edited an existing tradition?¹⁰⁴ Exclusively form or redaction-critical approaches however do not fully recognize the impact or function of the pericope within the narrative structure.¹⁰⁵ During the transfiguration and subsequent didactic discourse (9.9-13), the remaining disciples have been busy – attempting to exorcise a demon, and failing.¹⁰⁶ In the disputation with the scribes, the possessed boy is ignored by scribes,¹⁰⁷ crowd and

¹⁰³ An exponent of this view was Bultmann, who argued that the present pericope was the result of two different stories united in the oral, pre-literary period. The two stories are to be identified as being vv. 14-20, a story contrasting the power of the master and the powerlessness of the disciples, and vv. 21-27, a story that shows the paradox of unbelieving faith. Bornkamm and Taylor have offered modified versions of this theory. See Gregory Sterling, 'Jesus an Exorcist: An Analysis of Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a', *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 55/3 (1993), p. 489.

¹⁰⁴ An alternative understanding is that proposed by Sterling, who argues that the present pericope consists 'of a pre-Markan story which tradenters and (or) the evangelist have expanded'. Sterling provides a rigorous study of the problem using a multi-stage approach, firstly seeking to determine the sources used in the pericope, secondly seeking to eliminate the redactional evidence, thirdly seeking to eliminate the secondary or tertiary traditions which have crept into the pericope as it now stands, and then seeking to postulate the origin of the original tradition within its *Sitz im Leben*. He concludes that the underlying oral tradition did in fact narrate the story of 'an actual event in the life of Jesus', but provides a timely caution against reading too much into a story, or excluding too much, based merely on interpretation and not on the evidence provided by the text itself. See Gregory Sterling, 'Jesus an Exorcist: An Analysis of Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a', pp. 489-92. Sellwey however argues for a comparison of the didactic scenes within Mark and for comparing the focus pericope, as well as 10.1-12, against the didactic scenes of Mark 4, 7 and 8. He argues that the use of a didactic format (comprising the elements of public teaching, change of locale, private request for explanation by the disciples, retort by Jesus and explanation by Jesus) concluding that '...enigmatic sayings no longer receive elaborate, point-by-point interpretations; instead, the format of the didactic scene permits Mark to illustrate important stages in the relationship between Jesus and His disciples...now the position and function of the enigmatic saying in the scene's formal structure can be replaced with other material that Mark considers "teaching", especially miracle stories'. Sellwey's systematic and rigorous approach, combined with a cautious attitude that differentiates between speculation and probabilities within the text, support his conclusions. However, he makes no attempt to understand the focus pericopes within their immediate context or their narrative function, purely comparing similar 'forms' and, as he is seeking for similarities within quite broad headings, he quite naturally finds them, e.g. if you believe *a priori* in underlying sources, if you look hard enough you will find them. For these reasons Sellwey's conclusions, whilst interesting, are noted rather than accepted by this paper. See Philip Sellwey, 'Composition of Didactic Scenes in Mark's Gospel', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108/4 (1989), pp. 613-34. The position of this paper is that the present pericope was a single oral tradition which has been heavily edited by Mark into its current form, with vv. 14-55 and 22b forming Marcan linking statements in the overall redaction. The actual pericope reflects consistent Marcan vocabulary throughout, e.g. καὶ ὄχλον πολὺν, γραμματεῖς, συζητεῖν, εὐθὺς, ὁ ὄχλος, and ἐξεθαμβήθησαν. See E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel*, pp. 10-138.

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted that the ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ motif brings some geographical debate here. Jesus is moving southwards from Caesarea Philippi, and meets the common elements of His Galilean ministry: scribes; crowds; disciples; and demons, indicating a location in Galilee rather than around Caesarea Philippi.

¹⁰⁶ The transfiguration and subsequent didactic discourse therefore function to provide the focus on Jesus, Peter, James and John, allowing the remaining disciples to be 'off-stage', and it is during this time that they are portrayed as being unable to exorcise the demon.

¹⁰⁷ Mark consistently records the scribes as being present during Jesus' ministry (see 1.22; 2.6, 16; 3.22; 7.1, 5; 8.31; 9.11; 10.33; 11.18, 27; 12.28; 12.32; 12.35-38; 14.1, 43, 53; and 15.1, 31), but the closer the ministry moves to Jerusalem, the more hostile the scribes become, culminating in their support for His execution.

disciples, and on seeing Jesus approach, the crowd are ‘greatly amazed’,¹⁰⁸ and run to Jesus, who takes control of the confused situation,¹⁰⁹ asking the scribes, τί συζητεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς;¹¹⁰

The scribes do not respond – the desperate father does, recounting his child’s tragic¹¹¹ history.¹¹² The disciples, separated physically from Jesus, are powerless before human and demonic witnesses. Jesus’ exasperated response, ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος, ἕως πότε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔσομαι; is aimed primarily at the crowd,¹¹³ and serves to highlight for the readers / hearers both the previous and immediately forthcoming passion predictions – for how long is Jesus to be present? The disciples’ inability to heal is a limitation due to their physical separation from Jesus and lack of prayer, instigating subsequent

¹⁰⁸ Why is the crowd so greatly amazed? Given the above stated parallels with the Mosaic traditions of Moses’ ascent of Mt. Sinai and descent with glowing face, one could argue that Jesus’ clothes and / or person were still glowing from the transfiguration. The syntax and vocabulary of the passage do not lead inevitably lead us to this conclusion, and given Jesus’ command of silence to the disciples of 9.9, it is unlikely that Jesus’ clothes would still be glowing – what then would the point of the command to silence be? Luminous clothes are found in any culture to excite attention and wonder. Rather, a common Marcan motif is the amazement of the crowd at Jesus’ actions, and this paper prefers that the wonder of the crowd be at the appearance of Jesus Himself, who is now approaching a crowd with a proven ability to cast out demons.

¹⁰⁹ Jesus’ command to ‘bring him to me’ asserts His authority over the situation. Jesus’ authority is shown in His simple command to bring the boy to Him. He does not enter in the disputes between the scribes, the disciples and the on-looking crowd about how and where to exorcise, rather His command simply assumes His authority to cast out the demon.

¹¹⁰ It is unclear precisely whom Jesus addresses with His question, but as the verb συζητεῖν is used in Mark (8.11; 9.14, 16; and 12.28) to reflect dominical disputes with scribes, the understanding proposed for this paper is that Jesus addresses the scribes with His question. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 277.

¹¹¹ Did the child have epilepsy or not? Did he have the so-called *grand mal*? The Matthean parallel labels the illness epilepsy, but the Marcan narrative does not mention that the boy had epilepsy, merely that the boy had a mute spirit in him. The debate about the clinical diagnosis of the boy continues today in scholarly publications, with some arguing that the boy had epilepsy, and that the symptoms correspond with significant correlation to those of a severe form of epilepsy, whilst others argue that the evidence presented is insufficient to justify making such a diagnosis, e.g. no information is presented after the pericope, so we are not in a position to evaluate a full case-history. The position of this paper is that whilst Mark does not label the disease epilepsy, the Matthean parallel does, and that the boy did have epilepsy. However, as epilepsy is a symptom and not a cause, and as epilepsy today can only be managed with clinical interventions rather than the underlying causes cured, the position of this paper is that there is no evidence which can be used to deny the Marcan record which attributes the illness to underlying demonic possession. See John Wilkinson, ‘The Case of the Epileptic Boy’, *The Expository Times* 79 (October 1967 – September 1968), pp. 39-42, and J. Keir Howard, ‘New Testament Exorcism and its Significance Today’, *The Expository Times* 96/4 (January 1985), pp. 105-09.

¹¹² The father says that διδάσκαλε, ἤνεγκα τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς σέ, when in fact he had not brought the child to Jesus, but to the disciples. However, within the contemporary understanding of disciples / followers acting on behalf of their teachers / rabbis / philosophers, and the Marcan context of the commission to the disciples of ch. 6 which included authority over unclean spirits, the father is correct in saying that he brought the child to Jesus. The pericope of the unknown exorcist later in the focus passage (9.38-41) highlights this conceptual relationship between teacher and delegated (or appropriated) authority of followers to act in the teacher’s name.

¹¹³ Jesus rebukes the disciples in 8.14-21, but the Marcan redaction never refers to the disciples as a γενεὰ, rather, this word is used exclusively to refer to the crowd (8.12, 38; 9.19; and 13.30). See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 278.

dominical teaching, whilst the crowd's ἄπιστος excites a divine rebuke, particularly apt given the Marcan content of Jesus preaching in 1.15.¹¹⁴

Jesus' presence excites the demon,¹¹⁵ introducing a portrayal of the father who tremulously comes to belief,¹¹⁶ which, as for all Marcan discipleship, is only possible within the context of Jesus' touch.¹¹⁷ Mere amazement is not enough for Mark. The father can remain amazed, and his son will remain possessed. It is only by progressing beyond amazement at Jesus' deeds to belief in Him for who He is that God's power can be manifest in the boy.

Jesus' question to the father invites the father to tell the boy's history, affirming the long history of possession, thereby serving to emphasize Jesus' authority.¹¹⁸ Jesus is also inviting the father to move not merely through clinical history but from amazement to personal belief. The father's tale moves from a tragic story to a plea for help, ἀλλ' εἴ τι δύνη, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς. Jesus responds in surprise, repeating the father's words, εἰ δύνη...¹¹⁹ The father seems to be no different from the rest of the γενεὰ ἄπιστος, but his response is βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ. The father confesses his faith publicly in the face of the γενεὰ ἄπιστος, the gathering crowds, the sneering scribes and doubtful disciples, and his public confession evokes a corresponding divine response. Recognizing

¹¹⁴ Following the extensive ministry outlined in 1.15-8.26, Jesus now refers to those around Him as being ἄπιστος, a searing condemnation of their response to His explicit call to belief. The disciples are not portrayed as being unbelieving, rather as being limited in their ability to fulfill their dominical commission by their lack of faith and prayer. Jesus has no vested interest in seeing His (would-be) and actual disciples fail, even though when they are away from Jesus they may often fail.

¹¹⁵ Throughout Mark the presence of Jesus excites an agitated response from demons. As Jesus as already bound 'the strong man' (3.27), His presence represents a plundering of the possession of that 'strong man', hence the strong and adverse demonic reactions to the advent of His presence throughout Mark. See 1.12-13, 21-28; 2.20-27; and 5.1-13.

¹¹⁶ The seeming lack of faith on the part of the father may be understood in the context of the previous events. The disciples of Jesus had not been able to cast out the demon, so if they couldn't, would Jesus be able to?

¹¹⁷ As with the immediate context of the focus passage, in 8.22-26 where it is the repeated touch of Jesus that brings about sight, it is Jesus who takes control of the situation, and who eventually brings the father to the point of faith. The father is admittedly weak, but it is a human cry that is heard, and it is to this cry that Jesus responds.

¹¹⁸ The father has presumably taken the boy to other exorcists. A long history like that recounted, with very public manifestations of possession, and the inability of the father to get help from any other source, all combine to heighten the sense of Jesus' authority in the narrative.

¹¹⁹ As Jesus says that 'all things are possible for the one who believes', the corollary is also implied: no things are possible for the one who does not believe, even for those who profess to be His disciples.

his sheer powerlessness, the father places all his hope in the compassion of Jesus. Demons and the forces of nature cannot face Jesus, but human unbelief presents a far more serious problem for God.

Seeing crowds coming together, Jesus brings the affair to a swift conclusion with a signal demonstration of His authority¹²⁰, ἐγὼ ἐπιτάσσω σοι.¹²¹ The demon recognizes Jesus even if the γυνὴ ἄπιστος do not, and leaves the boy forthwith. The spectators' subsequent charge that the boy is dead is not refuted by Jesus, who merely raises the boy, who then stands on his own, καὶ ἀνέστη. The text's ambiguity about the boy's deathlike state¹²² functions as an internal commentary for the disciples on the previous and forthcoming passion predictions. Jesus' authority extends over (seeming) death.

In Marcan style, the disciples ask Jesus a question privately in a house,¹²³ their question implying that they normally could cast out demons.¹²⁴ Jesus' response is that this kind of demon can come out only through prayer.¹²⁵ Prayer therefore functions for the disciple as the despairing cry for the father – it is the call of faith upon God for God to act, recognizing the inherent inability of the disciple to act, and recognizing God as the sole source of spiritual ἐξουσία. For disciples therefore, effective service for Jesus necessitates an ongoing awareness of inherent inadequacy. The inadequacy comes not from an inherent lack of belief per se but from participation in Jesus' own mission. When Jesus

¹²⁰ The command of Jesus is implicitly contrasted with that of the disciples – the demon can ignore the disciples' injunctions, but the personal command of Jesus brooks no other response than obedience. In the Marcan context the humans who ostensibly want to follow Jesus find it hard to obey, whereas it is demonic forces, implacably opposed to the rule of the Kingdom of God, who obey instantly.

¹²¹ The Marcan use of the verb ἐπιτάσσω reflects the intractable opposition and hostility between Jesus and demonic forces.

¹²² The boy could have been in a catatonic state after an epileptic fit, or he may indeed have been dead. The fact that Jesus does not reject the suggestion by the onlookers may suggest that the boy may indeed have been dead.

¹²³ Elsewhere in Mark the disciples receive private explanations from Jesus in a private place, e.g. 4.10-20, 34; 7.17-23; 10.10-12; 13.3ff.

¹²⁴ The use of ὅτι as an interrogative instead of as a subordinating conjunction that leads to the subjective view of the speaker / writer in question implies that the disciples could normally in the course of their commissioned ministry cast out demons, but that this was a particularly difficult case.

¹²⁵ This is the first (implied) injunction to prayer in Mark, reflecting the action-packed and minimalist approach to recording the actual teachings of Jesus in 1.16-8.26.

calls disciples to follow ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, He gives tasks beyond their human abilities. This human inadequacy 'is evidence that the ministry is Christ's, not theirs',¹²⁶ thus necessitating prayer from the disciple for ministry to be effective.

Summary

Providing the turning point of the Gospel, 8.27-9.29 provides the first detailed Marcan dominical teachings - on discipleship. But this is not enough. His disciples still misunderstand, so as the troupe moves geographically ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ southwards through Galilee, Jesus provides further dominical teaching, emphasizing again the earthly and eschatological roles of Himself as the Son of Man, and the implications for any who would follow Him in daily discipleship ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.

¹²⁶ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 281.

Exegesis IV – Mark 9.30-10.31

Introduction

The original hearers / readers at this point may well more questions than answers. Jesus has predicted His death, and has then provided instructions to individuals who would follow Him, but the first hearers / readers live in a persecuted and somewhat tenuous community. What does Jesus have to say to His followers living in such a community, to those in the community of faith with marital difficulties, to those who have wealth whilst fellow community members are mired in poverty, to those striving for positions of authority, or to those who seem to delight in putting stumbling blocks before fellow believers?

With these questions in mind, and hoping for answers, the narrative's focus changes from the denial of self and individual discipleship to an emphasis on communal discipleship, outlining the mutual responsibilities for His followers within a community of faith. The focus passage may be understood sequentially through the individual pericopae (9.30-32; 33-37; 38-41; 42-50; 10.1-12; 13-16; and 17-31), each of which will be examined in turn.

9.30-32 – second passion prediction

Leaving the scene of discipleship teachings,¹²⁷ the small troupe passes through Galilee, ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ to Jerusalem. Jesus 'did not want anyone to know it',¹²⁸ and the reason is then given, ἐδίδασκειν γὰρ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ. The content of the teaching is, as above in 8.30, so shocking that it is only

¹²⁷ The use of the aorist active participle ἐξελθόντες is a typical Marcan linguistic feature which serves to keep the narrative moving forward at a dynamic pace.

¹²⁸ There is a certain pathos to the Marcan account. Galilee has been the focus of Jesus' ministry – yet, Jesus is now moving southwards, incognito, towards Jerusalem. He cannot go openly, as the content of His teaching is so shocking that it could lead to the collapse of His ministry in the public perception, and subsequent rejection of His teachings by those who have received His word. There is not even a moment for a last farewell to His immediate family or His mother.

for the disciples – and the ongoing Marcan motif of their misunderstanding necessitates repeated teaching by Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.¹²⁹

The shortest of the three passion predictions,¹³⁰ Jesus begins with a play on words: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is to be handed over into the hands ἀνθρώπων.¹³¹ This is the earthly role of the Son of Man. In the first prediction, Jesus ‘must undergo great suffering’, and ‘be rejected’ by ‘the chief priests, elders and the scribes’. In the second prediction responsibility is broadened: it is mankind itself that bears responsibility, not just the Jewish cultic hierarchy.¹³² Culpability is a complex question though, for Jesus παραδίδοται. This may be the use of the divine passive, i.e. God will hand Jesus over - His handing over will be deliberate and according to the divine will (δει), not just that of fallen mankind.

As with the first passion prediction, the question may be asked, whence in the OT was Jesus drawing His teaching? The LXX of Isaiah 53 reads quite differently to the MT rendition, giving ‘...the Lord has handed Him over for our sins’ for v. 6 and ‘...His soul was handed over to death...and on

¹²⁹ The repeated use of the iterative imperfect in ἐδίδασκεν γὰρ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔλεγεν emphasizes that Jesus was teaching the disciples on the way, not once, or twice, but repeatedly. The text therefore goes some way to making redundant the critical question concerning how often Jesus spoke the passion predictions. Jesus therefore predicted His passion on a number of occasions, and the disciples consistently misunderstood.

¹³⁰ This does not necessarily mean that this is the most primitive account of the three passion predictions in Mark. It may indeed be argued that the second passion prediction is the most primitive account, or the closest to the pre-literary oral traditions, primarily on the basis that the first and third predictions represent accumulated accretions to an existing primitive saying, accretions which were edited in by Mark to more accurately reflect the actual events of the passion week. However, the question of relative order may be somewhat misleading, as this question does not seem to be on Mark’s mind. Rather, he is presenting a slightly amended theology in the second passion prediction to the first, and it is this which provides the significance of the second prediction, rather than any speculations about whether it was the most primitive saying or not.

¹³¹ The play on words is evident in the Greek text of Mark, but this paper does not take the position that the Marcan Greek narrative as is understood today in various critical texts such as Nestle-Aland²⁶ actually records the words themselves of Jesus.

¹³² This passion prediction removes primary responsibility for deicide from the Jewish race. Jesus is not defining responsibility for His death according to any national delineations, but according to special designation – mankind is responsible, not just the Jewish race.

account of their sins He was handed over' for v. 12.¹³³ Jesus may also be drawing His understanding of the divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$ from Isaiah 53, or on the Aramaic of Dan. 7.25, 'and they shall be given into His hand'.¹³⁴ Understood alternately in Isaianic terms, Jesus' death will be vicarious and expiatory, and in Danielic terms, His death will be part of a cosmic conflict that will end when the Son of Man will receive a kingdom that 'will never be destroyed'.¹³⁵

Wherever Jesus is drawing His self-understanding, the immediate Marcan import is clear: He is going to die, and then He will rise again. Jesus' confident assertion of His resurrection may be understood in the Marcan context of His confident teaching about the Kingdom of God, which $\etaγγικεν$. The Kingdom of God is at hand, has drawn near, is breaking into human experience, and as Jesus' ministry represents the inauguration of the age to come, Jesus' resurrection will therefore occur quickly.

The disciples however were afraid, and did not understand¹³⁶ - their reluctance to ask Jesus for an explanation reflects their fears that Jesus may actually be about to die. Those closest to Jesus still do not understand, and the following pericope emphasizes their lack of understanding. Jesus however is preparing His disciples not for discipleship today, but for discipleship in the future, in the post-Easter environment. His concern $\epsilon\nu\ \tau\eta\ \acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$ is to provide vantage points from which His disciples may

¹³³ The MT for Isa. 53.6 reads quite differently ('...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all'), and for Isa. 53.12 we read (in the MT), '...He poured out His soul unto death...and made intercession for the transgressors'. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 57.

¹³⁴ The *ebed Yahweh* concept seems to be a major part of Jesus' self-understanding in Mark, and forms a major theological underpinning to the three passion predictions of the focus passage, but the focus of the early post-Easter Church does not seem to be on the role of Jesus as *ebed Yahweh*, rather on Him as exalted $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$. Why did this happen? It seems that the post-Easter Church focused on Jesus' role in the present, i.e. His exaltation to the right hand of God, 'more than the action itself upon which the present Lord's office as mediator rests...this is the reason that, despite the central theological importance which continued to be attributed to the death of Christ, the title *ebed Yahweh* as a designation for Jesus had to take a subordinate place'. See Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, p. 81.

¹³⁵ See Dan. 7.14. It should be noted that the ultimate significance of Jesus' death as being vicarious and expiatory is implied in the current pericope through the possible reading of Isaiah 53 into the thoughts of Jesus, and this significance is finally confirmed in the ransom saying of 10.45. Mark can be argued to be presenting an 'inaugurated eschatology' rather than a Doddian 'realized eschatology'.

¹³⁶ The irony is clear: Jesus has specifically chosen to teach the disciples concerning His impending passion, and they, the chosen recipients, those commissioned by Him with a gospel ministry, simply did not understand and were afraid.

understand retrospectively the actions of the divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$ as they journey $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$ which He has called them along, thence gaining confidence to move further along $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$ even when Jesus is no longer physically present.

9.33-37 – *the disciples’ misunderstanding*

The troupe’s (incognito) journey $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$ now brings them to Capernaum, the last visit during Jesus’ ministry, and they are $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\omicron\iota\kappa\acute{\iota}\alpha$.¹³⁷ Jesus asks the disciples a direct question, $\tau\acute{\iota}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$ $\delta\iota\epsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\sigma\theta\epsilon$; The (Marcan)¹³⁸ silence of the disciples’ response exposes both their discomfort and their nascent understanding.¹³⁹ The disciples discern a dissonance between their debates about relative position and the self-sacrifice and service for others contained within Jesus’ recent passion prediction.

The juxtaposition is jarring. Jesus has just predicted the necessity for the Son of Man in His earthly role to suffer and die, and the disciples’ response is to debate temporal advancement, all whilst still $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$! They may be physically $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$, but spiritually they are presented as akin to the Pharisees, requiring as earlier in the focus passage the further touch of Jesus.

¹³⁷ Teaching in a house within the Marcan context implies teaching for a select group of insiders, e.g. the Twelve, rather than teaching or instruction for the crowd, who remain outside. This Marcan feature is seen elsewhere in Mark, e.g. 2.1-2, 15-16; 3.20; 7.17, 24; 10.10; 11.17; and 14.3. The articular nature of the house they are in implies a definite house rather than any house in Capernaum – possibly Peter’s own house (1.29).

¹³⁸ The use of the phrase $\omicron\acute{\iota}$ $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$ $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\iota\acute{\omega}\pi\omega\upsilon$ is noteworthy, as this construct is used only elsewhere in Mark in 3.4, when the Pharisees were shamed by Jesus’ question concerning the man with the deformed hand before Jesus healed the selfsame man on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees and the disciples are both portrayed as being shamed by the piercing questions of Jesus.

¹³⁹ The juxtaposition of this pericope with the second passion prediction (9.30-32) is striking as the synoptic parallels are entirely unconnected to the relative passion predictions. Mark’s use of this tradition has been to juxtapose it with the second passion prediction to emphasize the lesson that such debates are inherently inconsistent and diametrically opposed to the divine will. The disciples’ silence implies not only that they feel guilty about what they have been discussing, but also that they have a basic awareness or sense that what they have been discussing is incompatible with what Jesus has been teaching them whilst $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ $\tau\eta$ $\acute{\omicron}\delta\acute{\omega}$.

Emphasizing Jesus' authority over the disciples through the dominical actions of sitting and calling the disciples unto Himself,¹⁴⁰ Mark presents a paradoxical teaching, 'whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all'.¹⁴¹ The parallel use of πάντων provides the interpretive clue: to be πάντων ἕσχατος means to be a πάντων διάκονος. As the Son of Man would give His life a ransom ἀντὶ πολλῶν,¹⁴² so disciples are to serve, to be servants of, all. To be great in the Kingdom of God is not for the gifted, articulate or well connected: it is for those who serve others.¹⁴³ The more humble the task, the greater the deed. Jesus is seeking to reverse the attitudes of His disciples, as only thus can they partake in the great reversal of the eschaton, in the actions of the Son of Man in His eschatological role.

To illustrate, Jesus takes a little child, gathers the child into His arms,¹⁴⁴ and stands the child in their midst. Children in the Graeco-Romano world had a very low status,¹⁴⁵ and although in Judaism they theoretically were viewed as a blessing from God,¹⁴⁶ they also enjoyed a marginal status. In this

¹⁴⁰ The act of sitting down was viewed within Jewish culture as being appropriate for a teacher, and emphasized the authority of the one sitting. Those who were inferior were to stand, whilst those in authority sat, hence the dominical prediction of 14.62, in which the Son of Man will be 'seated' at the right hand of God.

¹⁴¹ It is important to notice that this dominical saying occurs within the Marcan context whilst the disciples and Jesus are ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ to Jerusalem, and not in the triumphant narrative of 1.16-8.26. Such a saying by Jesus would be incongruent with the general tone of the first half of the Gospel, and it is only congruent within the focus passage.

¹⁴² See 10.45. In the context of the ransom saying, it is important to note the general scholarly consensus that the use of 'the many' in the Marcan ransom saying, the dominical logia of the Last Supper within the synoptic accounts, and the Pauline use in Rom. 5.15-21 all incorporate a broader sense than just 'the many', referring primarily to 'all'.

¹⁴³ It should be noted that in contemporary thought to be a servant was thought despicable, Plato arguing that 'how can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?'. Jesus' call therefore is radical and challenges not only the Jewish messianic expectations of His immediate disciples, but also the desires for position, advancement, and status amongst all subsequent (would-be) followers.

¹⁴⁴ The use of ἐναγκαλιζάμενος is repeated elsewhere in the focus passage in 10.16, the only other occurrence in Mark. The repeated use of this somewhat obscure verb suggests a common tradition behind both pericopae, Mark retaining the distinctive flavour of the vocabulary rather than editing the verb out and replacing it with some other Marcan verb.

¹⁴⁵ Within the Graeco-Romano world children had a very low status, 'they were considered not yet fully human. According to the institution of *patria potestas*, children had no legal rights. A father had the right to brutally punish, sell, pawn, expose, and even kill his own child. Newborns could be exposed – abandoned in a public place – where they would generally either die or be picked up by strangers and raised for profit as slaves, prostitutes or beggars. Baby girls were especially vulnerable to this fate...in one ancient letter a husband writes to his pregnant wife, "if by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out"'. See Judith M. Gundry-Volf, 'Mark 9:33-37', *Interpretation* 53/1 (1999), p. 58.

¹⁴⁶ The general view of children was more positive within Judaism than within the contemporary Graeco-Romano world. 'Children were considered a blessing from God. Exposure and infanticide were prohibited. Nevertheless, the disciples' rebuke of those who were bringing little children to Jesus (Mark 10.13-16) shows that within Judaism too children could be deprecated as socially or religiously insignificant'. See Judith M. Gundry-Volf, 'Mark 9:33-37', p. 58.

somewhat surprising role,¹⁴⁷ Jesus presents a parallel statement to that of v. 35, throwing further light on what it means to be πάντων διάκονος.

The narrative's emphasis is not on the child itself, the child being merely the passive object of adult activity, but on Jesus' actions in drawing the child unto Himself. Implied attributes for discipleship such as childlike innocence or humility do not occur within the pericope.¹⁴⁸ Rather, it is in receiving one socially insignificant (as a child) that one receives Jesus, and thereby receives God.¹⁴⁹

The parallelism with v. 35 indicates that being a διάκονος means receiving children (the socially insignificant), and therefore Jesus' actions of v. 36 show that He considered Himself a διάκονος, a stark contrast to the disciples' debate about τίς μείζων. Disciples are not called upon to be like children, but like Jesus. Jesus is calling for discipleship of specific and selfless action directed towards others whilst unconcerned with social norms or expectations, not for a discipleship of inherent, cognizant but passive attributes.

Although Jesus is teaching the Twelve, as in 8.34ff. He broadens discipleship beyond their exclusive attitudes through εἴ τις...ὃς ἂν ἐν τῶν...ὃς ἂν. It is 'whoever' (not just the Twelve) will receive a child and 'anyone' who will serve who is accounted a disciple, not just those physically following

¹⁴⁷ Gundry-Volk provides a fascinating interpretation of the pericope from a feminist perspective, suggesting that 'the model of community which Jesus represents, which is epitomized in the taking of a little child into one's arms, is "gendered" in Mark: it is a "feminine" model of community in that it is characterized by stereotypically feminine behaviour...the two models of community mirror two ways of relating to Jesus. One way leads to true knowledge and reception of Jesus, who identifies Himself with the little child; the other way bars true knowledge and reception of Jesus'. Gundry-Volk balances her argument by recognizing the weakness of her arguments, namely the charge that the women's roles in Jesus' time of looking after children were primarily socially driven rather than any as a result of any overt theological understanding on the part of the women concerned about the Kingdom of God. A more general criticism of Gundry-Volk's lucid arguments is that she simply reads into the focus pericope what is not there. See Judith M. Gundry-Volk, 'Mark 9:33-37', pp. 57-61.

¹⁴⁸ It is to the parallel Marcan pericopae in the focus passage concerning a child that one is to look for how one is to receive the Kingdom of God – as a child (10.1.3-16).

¹⁴⁹ The implication of this statement within the Marcan context is that in receiving Jesus, one receives God, and therefore one receives the Kingdom of God.

Him ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ. God will decide who His disciples are, not other disciples. This broadening of discipleship beyond the immediate Twelve provides the rationale for Jesus' attitude in vv. 38-41 to the mystery exorcist, and serves to remind disciples of the inherent futility of debates about τίς μείζων.¹⁵⁰ This dominical saying is predicated on Jesus' understanding of His eschatological role – He is assuming the authority to declare how disciples' actions in response to His earthly role as the Son of Man will be judged.

9.38-41 – the case of the unknown exorcist

Linked orally by with the immediate context by the catchword ὀνόμα,¹⁵¹ John¹⁵² is reported as presenting a self-congratulatory report to Jesus: the disciples have forbidden an exorcist from exorcising in Jesus' name.¹⁵³ The report that ὅτι οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν indicates an attitude of presumptuous pride as yet untouched by Jesus' teachings of vv. 33-37. John still does not see Jesus' call to discipleship as a call to service. Rather, it is understood as entitling John to privilege, authority and position.

¹⁵⁰ The logic is that if you consider only those within your immediate circle or communion of faith to be disciples, and debate amongst yourselves who will be the greater in the Kingdom of God, your debates are essentially futile because the definition of discipleship as just expounded by Jesus is so broad that you cannot possibly know who is a disciple beyond your immediate circle or communion, and cannot take them into account in your debates.

¹⁵¹ This catchword appears in vv. 37, 38, 39 and 41. The use of verbal repetitions indicates an earlier oral tradition in which catchwords were used to assist in memorization. Best argues that whereas vv. 33-37 include references to a child, and then v. 42 also includes a reference to a child, we must not assume that the Marcan redaction has simply inserted vv. 38-41 in a clumsy manner that has broken up the flow of thought concerning children. Rather, in the view of Best, the use of catchwords throughout vv. 38-41 that are consistent with vv. 33-37, and the actual dissonance achieved in narrative terms if one were to insert v. 42 immediately after v. 37 because of the change in terminology when referring to children are reasons to argue that Mark has simply recorded the oral tradition as he has received it. See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 82-85.

¹⁵² John's membership of what may have been perceived by the disciples as the 'inner circle', his presence at the transfiguration, and his potential family relationship with Jesus may have led him to believe that he had the authority to rebuke others who used Jesus' name.

¹⁵³ It is unclear in the immediate context when this event could have happened. Mark is constructing a somewhat artificial trip south from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, so the event could have happened on this trip, but this seems unlikely given the fact that the troupe are moving south incognito to avoid recognition. The event seems more probable during the separation from Jesus by the disciples between 6.13 and 6.30, from when they were commissioned to cast out demons, left on their ministry and then subsequently returned.

John exhibits no concern for the victims of demonic possession, who to follow his logic are better possessed than delivered by such an interloper, nor does he remember that the disciples themselves could not cast out a demon in 9.14-30. Personal authority and prestige are put above personal deliverance for others.¹⁵⁴ The Kingdom of God has become subject to the disciples' personal whim.

Jesus' response is immediate and direct – 'do not stop him'.¹⁵⁵ The reason is then straightway given, γάρ... 'Works and wonders in Christ's name are evidence of the call and commission of Christ, and fellow disciples should be cautioned against thinking ill of those who bear such "fruit"'.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, 'whoever is not against us is for us'.¹⁵⁷ As in 8.34ff. and 9.35ff., Jesus broadens discipleship beyond the Twelve to ὅς γάρ. Genuine discipleship is recognized and affirmed by God, not by self-appointed arbiters themselves merely traversing ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ and themselves in need of Jesus' repeated touch.

¹⁵⁴ This passage should serve as a timely caution to any disciples who seek to criticize or undermine the work of other Christians. The work of the Kingdom of God is bigger and broader than any individual or communion, and to question its advance through the ministry of others may in fact be to stand in the path of that self-same advance. Indeed, it is to stand in the same place as those who questioned Jesus' authority in casting out demons in the synoptic parallel found in Matt. 12.22-32, a sin which Jesus denounces as being against the Holy Spirit, and therefore unforgivable.

¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that the use of the present imperative rather than aorist imperative suggests an ongoing prohibition against stopping such persons working in Christ's name. Using this understanding of the Greek grammar in the focus pericope, a modern-day disciple would conclude that such an injunction applies today as in the original context to the original hearers of the injunction.

¹⁵⁶ 'Anyone so acting in Jesus' name is empowered by God, and one so empowered cannot lightly discard or disregard his vocation'. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 290.

¹⁵⁷ This saying by Jesus may have its origins within the contemporary milieu in the words of Cicero, who says to Julius Caesar that 'we have often heard you say that, while we considered all who were not with us as our enemies, you considered all who were not against you as your friends'. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 65. It should be noted the valid question that may be raised at this juncture: how are to we understand this dominical saying with the parallel Matthean account in 12. 22-32 in which Jesus seems to say the opposite, i.e. 'whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters'? Both sayings occur within the context of exorcisms, in the context of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into human affairs in a way unknown before, and in the context of a cosmic struggle between Jesus and demonic forces. 'The whoever is not against us' in the Marcan account refers to someone actively involved in casting out demons, actively involved in expanding the Kingdom of God. The 'whoever is not with me' in the Matthean account refers to those who are actively opposing the self-same exorcisms, who are proposing a demonic origin to Jesus' work of exorcism rather than recognizing it as the work of God. Those who are 'not with me' in the Matthean account are actually as actively opposing the work of the Kingdom of God as the unknown exorcist is actively expanding it. The Marcan parallel (3.20-30) of the Matthean account (Matt. 12.22-33) includes the same basic idea as the Matthean account: those who oppose the work of Jesus as manifest in exorcisms are directly opposing the work of God and the actions of the Holy Spirit, thereby committing an 'eternal sin'.

Linked by the catchword ὀνόμα, Mark now provides a dominical gnomic statement predicated on His eschatological role as the Son of Man:¹⁵⁸ any outsider will receive a reward through a simple act of kindness to a disciple of Christ. As above, participation ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ is not merely a temporal ethical exercise, but has ultimate significance. Jesus' only self-designation as 'Christ' in Mark's Gospel, this gnomic saying is possible within the context of the Petrine confession and subsequent passion prediction. However, instead of providing a fuller understanding of the term 'Christ',¹⁵⁹ Jesus rather affirms disciples as being Χριστου. All disciples are Christ's, and this necessitates the radical rejection of putative ecclesiastical structures that seek to restrict, control or impede access to Jesus by any actual or disciples. Human desires to control access to salvation are rebuked, as are attitudes that cause other disciples to stumble as they travel falteringly ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, and this prohibition becomes more explicit as Jesus continues His discipleship discourse in 9.42-50.

9.42-50 – stumbling blocks to the Kingdom of God

The dominical discourse moves on to emphasize the importance of humility, and is framed within repeated catchwords that link the sayings back to v. 33ff¹⁶⁰ that, despite the inference that the

¹⁵⁸ V. 41 may be understood as a gnomic statement or prophecy provided by Jesus referring to those who come into contact with His disciples and their reward when the Son of Man fulfills His eschatological role.

¹⁵⁹ In the current pericope, Jesus emphasizes the fact that disciples belong to Him, and by inference not to any self-appointed human arbiters. This recognition of the ownership of Christ of all disciples serves to rebuke any attitude amongst disciples that hinders the discipleship of another in their following of Jesus in any way.

¹⁶⁰ According to Fledderman in his study of 9.33-50, 'the catchword composition of 9.33-50 has often been noted. The short narratives and sayings are joined together by the catchwords 'in the name' (vv. 37, 38, 39, 41), 'to cause to sin' (vv. 42, 43, 45, 47), 'fire' (vv. 43, 48), and 'salt' (vv. 49, 50). Fledderman goes on to argue for an understanding of 9.33-50 which goes beyond a mere joining together of loosely related material to a more consistent and underlying unity within the passage in question, a unity that focuses on the responsibilities of disciples both one to another and to themselves. Fledderman provides an incisive analysis of the sayings of 9.33-50, arguing strongly for evidence of Marcan redaction of Q materials, concluding not only that Mark 'has taken over traditional material and modified it (vv. 43-48). The Marcan redactor has also taken over material he uses elsewhere and generalized it, forming completely new units (vv. 33b-35 from 10.35-45 and vv. 36-37 from 10.13-16). He has also redacted a saying from the LXX (v. 49 from Lev. 2.13a LXX), and he has made extensive use of Q material. In a section of some sixteen verses Mark has adapted four Q sayings. In each case the differences between the reconstructed Q saying and the Marcan material can be accounted for by Marcan redaction. It is becoming increasingly difficult to deny that Mark knew and used Q'. Fledderman's analysis is persuasive given his historical-critical (Troeltschian) presuppositions, and even if one does not accept these presuppositions, his exegesis of the passage and conclusions on discipleship remains persuasive. See Harry Fleddermann, 'The Discipleship Discourse (Mark 9.33-50)', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43/1 (1981), pp. 57-75.

current pericope is merely a collection of unrelated sayings thus linked, belie the underlying thematic unity of the pericope.

Who are τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων? Is Jesus referring to the child of v. 36, or those who bear His name of v. 41? The ‘little ones’ of v. 42 are qualified, they believe, i.e. they are disciples. No inference is provided in v. 36 about whether the child believes or not, rather the focus is on the attitude of believers (i.e. disciples, not the child) to socially insignificant persons as represented by the child. However, whereas v. 41 presents a positive injunction towards disciples (i.e. believers), v. 42 presents the corresponding negative injunction. The underlying principle of v. 42 parallels that of v. 41: ‘whatever is done to a follower of Jesus, whether for good...or bad, is done to Jesus Himself’.¹⁶¹ The τῶν μικρῶν τούτων of v. 42 are primarily those Χριστου of v. 41.¹⁶²

For those who put a ‘stumbling block’ before such ‘little ones’, Jesus pronounces a terrible doom - consignment to a watery grave.¹⁶³ Jesus’ teachings in His earthly role as the Son of Man are therefore not merely ethical guidance for temporal living – they are undergirded by the ultimate recompense He anticipates in His eschatological role. Jesus’ words rebuke the disciples’ attitude towards the unknown exorcist, and emphasize the supreme value of all His disciples to Himself. For a disciple to

¹⁶¹ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 292.

¹⁶² Whilst some commentators posit a link between v. 41 and v. 42, and others between v. 42 and v. 36, Fledderman takes a mediating position and argues for a dual connection. Based on his comparison of Mark 9.42 with Q parallels, he argues that whilst ‘there is no catchword connection between v. 41 and v. 42...both verses refer to v. 37. This is an editorial procedure and not the catchword composition of oral tradition...to receive a little child is to receive Jesus and the Father; to scandalize a little one entails terrible punishment. The saying [of v. 42] also links up with v. 41. There is a contrast between the least good deed done for a believer and the greatest hard done to a little one’. Whilst not denying the possible link between v. 42 and v. 36-37, the position of this paper is that Jesus is providing an inductive exposition of discipleship in which He is enumerating in ever more serious terms the implications of following Him, and therefore vv. 42ff. seem to fit into the flow of the discourse better in their present context immediately after the case of the unknown exorcist rather than immediately after vv. 33-37.

¹⁶³ The imagery Jesus uses seems to be hyperbolic and calculated to emphasize the supreme seriousness of the warning. All disciples are precious to Jesus, not just those within the Twelve, and for any disciple to cause another to stumble in their faith will bring eschatological judgement upon the offending disciple. The millstone referred to was a huge object used in grinding grains, and could only be used by a beast of burden, not by hand. The Jews were primarily of the land, and viewed the sea with a mixture of fear and trepidation, never developing (apart from a brief period under Solomon) significant indigenous sea-faring capacity. To be cast into the sea represented being cast into certain death, a watery tomb, from which there was no possibility of return.

cause another disciple to stumble in his walk ἐν τῇ ὀδῶ there are eternal consequences. The message is stark. The warning is clear. Inhibiting the walk of another disciple directs the offending disciples' walk ἐν τῇ ὀδῶ towards eternal doom.¹⁶⁴

The focus of σκανδαλίζω switches in vv. 43-48¹⁶⁵ from actions between disciples to the consequences of actions by a believer upon himself. Mark presents three parallel conditional clauses,¹⁶⁶ each followed by a second person singular aorist imperative,¹⁶⁷ and then by the underlying rationale. In v. 43, Jesus presents an hyperbolic statement:¹⁶⁸ it is better to cut off your hand than face losing eternal life.¹⁶⁹ V. 43 concludes with a Marcan redactional gloss (εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον) for non-Jewish readers unfamiliar with τὴν γέενναν so that none may claim ignorance of the saying's import.¹⁷⁰

The rationale provided is intriguing. The parallelism between τὴν ζωὴν of v. 43 and τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ of v. 47 implies that entering into the articular 'life' of v. 43 is to enter into the Kingdom of

¹⁶⁴ In this context the Pauline writings to the Corinthian church concerning the responsibilities of those with strong faith towards those who are weak seem to have a direct basis in dominical sayings. See especially 1 Cor. 8.13.

¹⁶⁵ It should be noted that there is some textual confusion over the inclusion of '...where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched' in vv. 44 and 46. Some MSS include this quotation from Isa. 66.24, and others do not, but given the repetitive structure and theme of vv. 43-48 such omissions do not fundamentally affect the exegesis of these verses, being of interest primarily from a text-critical rather than an exegetical perspective.

¹⁶⁶ The three parallel conditional statements display an essential unity of thought that goes beyond the minor linguistic differences necessitated by the references to differing body parts.

¹⁶⁷ Jesus does not provide third person singular imperatives or exhortatory iussive subjunctives, e.g. let the hand be cut off. Rather, he commands the disciple who hears these words to personally take action. The individual disciple therefore is responsible before God for how temptations or causes for stumbling are dealt with.

¹⁶⁸ Jesus statement may be understood within the Jewish context. In 2 Macc. 7.4 there is the record of how Antiochus IV severed the hands and feet of a Jewish boy ('...these were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, whilst the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on', NRSV), who warned him that he would face eternal consequences for his actions. Alternately, Pss. Sol 16.7 records that 'restrain me, O God, from sordid sin, and from every evil woman who causes the foolish to stumble', whilst Sir. 23.8 states that 'the sinner stumbles through his lips, the reviler and the arrogant are tripped by them'. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶⁹ A primary reading of the text would lead to the understanding that Jesus is using hyperbolic language to emphasize the serious point He is making, as it should be noted that masochism and self-mutilation 'were strictly taboo in Judaism' (Deut. 14.1; 23.1; and Zech. 13.6). See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 293.

¹⁷⁰ Gehenna was a steep valley near Jerusalem that had been the scene of pagan worship practices during the various reigns of the kings of Judah in pre-exilic times. Josiah had destroyed the worship places and turned the valley into a rubbish tip (2 Kings 23). To a Jewish audience, the reference to Gehenna is clear, but to a non-Jewish audience far from Jerusalem the reference is not so clear, hence the redactional gloss at the end of v. 44.

God. But to enter maimed? Jesus is unlikely to be referring to the resurrection, when in Jewish thought ‘...the blind are healed...the lame also are healed...everyone shall be healed’.¹⁷¹ ‘Maimed’ entry into the Kingdom of God is therefore in the current age, when the disciple is still ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, when the disciple consciously rejects the causes for stumbling in his own life, a position akin to the teaching of the Johannine Jesus in John 5.24.¹⁷² The Kingdom of God is τὴν ζωὴν in Jesus’ estimation, not one’s physical being, nor one’s ambitions, and entry therein is to be the disciple’s primary objective. The dominical teaching becomes clearer: temporal participation ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ and obeying the earthly Son of Man’s teachings will bring the disciple into τὴν ζωὴν, into τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. Thus speaks the Son of Man in His eschatological role.

The quote from Isa. 66.24 in v. 48 presents an abrupt image of the outcome if a disciple does not remove causes stumbling - smouldering putrefaction in a valley of death. Isa. 66.24 refers to ‘the people who have rebelled against me’, and serves in v. 48 for the eschatological Son of Man to present the starkest possible warning to those (disciples) who would rebel against Him and His logia, particularly following the divine command of 9.7. The call to discipleship, to follow obediently ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, and acting according to dominical instruction is of eternal import and cannot simply be discounted or ignored.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 71. Under the presupposition of the internal consistency and unity of thought within Scripture, and of the consistent self-revelation by God throughout Scripture, the Pauline account of the resurrection is entirely consistent with such a position, when he discourses at length in 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection body, an ‘imperishable’, ‘incorruptible’ and ‘immortal’ body.

¹⁷² The ‘realized eschatology’ of the Johannine Jesus is an important concept in NT studies, particularly after the contributions of C.H. Dodd. Whilst Allison argues for an ‘inaugurated’ rather than a ‘realized’ eschatology within Mark, Jesus is here placing the eternal consequences of one’s actions in the temporal reality of today before all disciples.

¹⁷³ Edwards particularly emphasizes this point, arguing that ‘the quotation in v. 48 serves as the strongest possible warning against misjudging or trivializing the call and commission of discipleship. Who would imagine that in the simple and mundane tasks of either enabling or hindering believers in faith disciples are charting eternal destinies for themselves? But they are. The horrible imagery of these verses is intended as a sober admonition to disciples now rather than simply as a prediction of the future. The architectural plans of eternity are being drawn by the behaviour of disciples today’. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 295.

In vv. 49-50 Mark presents an intriguing teaching,¹⁷⁴ linking with v. 48 through the use of the catchword ‘fire’. Numerous interpretations have been offered,¹⁷⁵ but their relative merits depend on whether they understand the γὰρ of v. 49 to be merely conjunctive or explanatory.¹⁷⁶ Recognizing the cryptic nature of the saying,¹⁷⁷ it appears that Jesus is alluding to Lev. 2.13 and saying that to enter the Kingdom of God, εἰς τὴν ζώην, requires purification. Disciples are to be salted ‘with fire’, not ‘with salt’, i.e. an eschatological element is introduced, consistent with the eschatological role of Himself as the Son of Man. Indeed, καλὸν τὸ ἄλας, but what good if it loses its saltiness? The implied answer to Jesus’ question is found in Jesus’ Matthean teaching – it is fit to be thrown out.¹⁷⁸

V. 50 then ends with two parallel imperatives:¹⁷⁹

- 1) ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἄλα καὶ,
- 2) εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις.

¹⁷⁴ The teachings contained in vv. 49-50 are not found anywhere else in the Gospels, so possible comparisons with synoptic parallels are not possible. Rather, we are forced to understand the teachings within their immediate context.

¹⁷⁵ Fleddermann presents a useful summary of the various interpretations offered for vv. 49-50, including references to the ‘purifying fire of the judgement...it refers to the Spirit...it refers to the use of salt and fire in amputations...it results from a mistranslation of a Semitic original’. See Harry Fleddermann, ‘The Discipleship Discourse (Mark 9.33-50)’, p. 70.

¹⁷⁶ If the use of catchwords throughout vv. 33-50 is merely the result of an underlying oral tradition, then we may understand the use of γὰρ to be merely conjunctive. If however, as argued above, there is an underlying unity of theme in the narrative of vv. 33-50, then we may posit an explanatory use of γὰρ, i.e. it is introducing an underlying rationale to vv. 43-48, and possibly going back to the disputed between the disciples of v. 33ff. Within their immediate context, the use of γὰρ and the repetition of the catchword ‘fire’ from v. 48 suggest a link: Mark is presenting a summary to the previous discipleship discourse.

¹⁷⁷ The actual allusions that Jesus is making are very difficult to determine. However, there does seem to be some logic in looking at the primary characteristics of fire and salt, and also understanding them within their Scriptural context. Salt is a preservative, and was used in the Mosaic sacrificial system with all sacrifices (Lev. 2.13), and fire is linked with the twin concepts of destruction (as in Gehenna) or purification, e.g. as in the eschatological preaching of John the Baptist in Luke 3.7-10 or in Mal. 3.2-3. For these and other understandings, see Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁷⁸ See Matt. 5.13.

¹⁷⁹ Both verbs are second person plural, present imperative active, mirroring the command of 8.34 (ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι), also a present imperative. What Jesus commands is to be understood as having ongoing validity and claim on the disciple.

The parallelism in structure suggests parallel thoughts: to have salt in yourselves (pl.) means to be at peace with one another. This supports the suggested link of v. 49 with Lev. 2.13, which refers to salt within covenantal terms.¹⁸⁰

Jesus is summarizing His discourse following the disciples' misunderstanding, strife, and the case of the unknown exorcist in vv. 33-41. Emphasizing His authority through sitting and summoning, He commands His disciples to be at peace with one another rather than be in conflict, a peace which is possible only to the extent that disciples seek to serve each other, endure purifying troubles, remove any causes for stumbling within and between themselves, and embrace humility rather than rulership - therein consists true and obedient discipleship ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, avoiding eschatological doom and leading to ultimate glorification. Having focussed on relationships between disciples, the narrative now moves forward, showing that participation ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ also has temporal implications for a disciple's marriage, children and wealth.

10.1-12 – discipleship expressed in marriage

Evidence of Marcan redaction in v. 10 indicates the deliberate splicing of the subsequent narrative within the current context.¹⁸¹ The troupe has moved south ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ from Capernaum and are now in Judea,¹⁸² ever closer to Jerusalem, and Jesus' teaching on discipleship is moving on to cover the implications of discipleship in fundamental areas of life – marriage, children and

¹⁸⁰ Fleddermann draws a further link between covenant concepts and salt by referring to Num. 18.19, in which the everlasting covenant is referred to as a 'covenant of salt', and to the idea of sharing salt in a meal found in Ezra 4.14. See Harry Fleddermann, 'The Discipleship Discourse (Mark 9.33-50)', p. 73.

¹⁸¹ The evidence for Marcan redaction may be found in the following data: 1) the use of 'καί' as a conjunctive; 2) the use of ἐκεῖθεν (c.f. 6.1; 7.24; and 9.30, all Marcan seams); 3) the use of ἀναστὰς (c.f. Mark 1.35; and 7.24, both Marcan seams); 4) the use of ἔρχεται, exhibiting the common Marcan use of the historic present); the use of εἰς τὰ ὄρια (c.f. 5.17; and 7.24, 31); the overall wording of καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἀναστὰς ἔρχεται εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς Ἰουδαίας [καὶ] πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου closely mirroring the words of 7.24 (Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρου). See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 100-02.

¹⁸² The reference to the regions 'beyond the Jordan' is slightly puzzling, as Trans-Jordan would not normally be understood as being on the way from Galilee to Judea. It is possible that as Mark records in 3.8 that people were coming to hear Him from 'Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon', so the Marcan Jesus is portrayed as explicitly going out to minister to both Jews and gentiles.

possessions. As elsewhere in Mark, the content of Jesus' teaching to the crowd is not stated, merely the statement that ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς, an inceptive imperfect.¹⁸³

The question of the Pharisees as phrased by Mark appears inept: divorce was permitted according to Deut. 24.1-4. However, given the Matthean parallel,¹⁸⁴ the contemporary political situation,¹⁸⁵ and contemporary rabbinic debates,¹⁸⁶ Mark astutely emphasizes that they asked περιάζοντες αὐτόν. Jesus responds by seeking from the Pharisees their interpretive stance on the underlying written Torah. The Pharisees' answer with their oral Torah understanding of the underlying written Torah, but they do not present their understanding of the written Torah's key phrase, 'to find something objectionable about her'. On what grounds is divorce permissible is the unspoken question, not whether divorce is actually permissible or not. For the Pharisees, the Deuteronomic injunction functions to provide a pretext for divorce and not primarily as an attempt to protect marriages and mitigate the worst impact of divorce on women within a patriarchal society.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ This verb is third person singular imperfect active indicative, and may be understood as being an inceptive imperfect, i.e. He began to teach them, they having just gathered around Him.

¹⁸⁴ See Matt. 19.3ff. The Matthean account reflects more fully the rabbinic debates of the time.

¹⁸⁵ The question of divorce was an issue of heated debate within contemporary Judaism, both within religious and political circles. In the political affairs of the time, Herodias had left to marry Herod Antipas, who himself had divorced his wife, the daughter of the king of the Nabateans, in order to marry Herodias. It was this union which John the Baptist had criticized, criticism which ultimately led to his execution at Herodias' whim, Herodias still smarting from John the Baptist's rebuke. The dispute between Herod and the king of the Nabateans ultimately led to war and Herod almost lost his throne but for timely Roman intervention. Mark has already recorded that Herod fears that Jesus is John the Baptist *redivivus*, and Luke records Jesus' comments on Herod, likening Herod to a 'fox' (Luke 13.31-32), comments which incurred the deadly wrath and intent of Herod towards Jesus. If the small troupe is now in Trans-Jordan, they may be in Perea, which was under Herod's direct rule. The question of the Pharisees therefore is potentially aimed at creating problems for Jesus with Herod within Herod's territorial jurisdiction.. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 80-83.

¹⁸⁶ Rabbinic debates centered on the precise meaning of the phrase 'Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her...' of Deut. 24.1-4 (NRSV). What did it mean to 'find something objectionable about her', or 'and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes' as recorded in the KJV? Divorce was permitted under Mosaic writ, but on what grounds? Adultery was already forbidden in the Decalogue, and is treated elsewhere in the Levitical law, requiring a penalty of death (Lev. 20.10), so what does the Deuteronomic clause mean? In Jesus' time, rabbinic debates were split along a number of lines. The school of Shammai took a restrictive view, arguing that the Mosaic injunction was only in cases of adultery. The school of Hillel however argued for a more relaxed understanding in which a man could divorce for any reason, including the metaphorical burning of the toast. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 299-02.

¹⁸⁷ The Pharisees seem to focus on the permissible and on the exceptions, whereas Jesus returns to what was commanded and intended. Their question to Jesus is not on how to uphold marriage, but whether and how marriages can and should be dissolved. The ostensible purpose of the Deuteronomic injunction was to prevent hasty divorces by requiring written evidence of the divorce, thereby seeking to protect the women involved from the social limbo they may find themselves

Jesus does not deny the Mosaic injunction, but ‘challenges the hermeneutical assumption that because something is ‘permitted’ it is therefore according to the will of God’.¹⁸⁸ The Deuteronomic injunction was a concession, never the divine intention. Jesus moves back to the creation account, and in contradistinction to the Pharisees’ (human) hermeneutical deductions from the written text, authoritatively declares the divine intent.¹⁸⁹ God’s will is for a man and a woman to become εἰς σάρκα μίαν, leaving their fathers and mothers.¹⁹⁰ As marriage is God’s divine intent, the created order of things, by what authority does man, the created being, seek to undo the Creator’s created order? Indeed, in v. 9 Jesus declares that man has no authority to undo the divine intent. Marriage is insoluble.¹⁹¹ Men and women’s origin is in the creative action of God, and their respective masculinity and femininity are necessary prerequisites for marriage according to the divine intent. For Jesus, God is the ruler of any marriage,¹⁹² and a man simply may not divorce. Rather, a man’s responsibility towards his wife surpasses even that towards his parents.

if their husbands send them away as divorcees, but with no proof of the divorce. Within the patriarchal culture of Moses’ time, the Deuteronomic injunction goes some way to recognizing the deleterious effects of divorce upon women in a largely rural, socially conservative and illiterate community.

¹⁸⁸ See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 84. Evans goes on to point out that ‘according to Mal. 2.16, God “hates” divorce...even the rabbis admitted that Heaven shed a tear every time a marriage ended in divorce...God permits divorce, not because it is His perfect will but because of human sinfulness...the purpose of the Mosaic law was to check divorce...not to encourage it. The religious authorities had never considered this option’.

¹⁸⁹ The statements by Jesus in vv. 5-9 represent a statement of Jesus’ authority over the written and oral Torah. He is the giver of these selfsame laws, and simply declares the will of God rather than provides a deduction or argued case from any given text.

¹⁹⁰ Jesus explicitly states that marriage is between a man and a woman. No other possible alternatives are provided, and this is because Jesus goes back to the original created order before sin entered the world. The divine intent was for a man to leave his father and mother (themselves a marriage of male and female) and join with another woman, in the process becoming one flesh in God’s sight.

¹⁹¹ It is to be admitted that this conclusion may seem rather harsh within the modern climate of social permissiveness, but for disciples who have experienced divorce and remarriage however, Mark records the offer of divine forgiveness in 3.28, ‘“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter’. Forgiveness is offered, but it does not negate the divine intent, as with all other sins.

¹⁹² As in 8.38-41 where it is God who recognizes His disciples, not self-appointed human arbiters, so in marriage: a man and a woman may decide with their parents in their Jewish culture to get married, but in ultimate terms their marriage is something of God.

The Marcan redaction of v. 10 fades the crowd and Pharisees from view, bringing the disciples into view.¹⁹³ As before, Jesus broadens the scope of His teaching from the immediate Twelve to ὃς ἄν, a repeated linguistic motif which suggests the teaching is, as before, for disciples.¹⁹⁴ The private instruction is provided in the form of two parallel statements, the first addressed to men who divorce and seek to re-marry, the second to women who do likewise.¹⁹⁵ Both men and women¹⁹⁶ in such situations commit adultery. Understood within the context of Jesus' *a priori* denial of valid human grounds for divorce in v. 9, adultery occurs not because of the re-marriage per se, but because the divorce within the original marriage itself was contrary to the divine ideal. A (humanly) divorced individual seeking re-marriage is by divine definition still married. As in the previous pericope, Jesus' earthly teachings are predicated on His eschatological role, when He will judge every human action against the revealed divine intent.

¹⁹³ Typical Marcan redaction signs in v. 10 include the use of καὶ, τὴν οἰκίαν, πάλιν, οἱ μαθηταί, ἐπρωτῶν. See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 99-101.

¹⁹⁴ There is nothing per se in the discussion of vv. 2-9 which intrinsically links the discussion or the conclusions to discipleship, but the position of this paper is that given the redactional placing of the pericope within 8.27–10.52, within the journey motif southwards from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, and the broadening of Jesus' subsequent private instructions to the disciples in vv. 10-12, the redactional intent is to suggest that the traditions contained within vv. 2-9 do relate to discipleship, and are to be understood within the context of Jesus' teaching on discipleship since 8.27ff.

¹⁹⁵ The contemporary rabbinic understanding of divorce and adultery was that if a man committed adultery, it was not primarily against his erstwhile wife, but against her father or husband. Jesus' statement in v. 11 radically alters this understanding. Women are not mere chattels, but consequent to their created status, role in the divine order of things, and foundational status for marriage, male adultery is not against other male relatives but against the woman herself. Furthermore, Jesus' statement of v. 12 leads to the conclusion that as created beings within the divine order of things, women are also responsible moral agents. They are morally accountable before God as are men, both in the immediate context for actions within marriage, and more broadly in the broader context for all their actions. Individual moral responsibility for disciples is the emphasis of Jesus' teaching, not claims to victimhood with the (unspoken) implication of diminished moral responsibility. If the Gospel of Mark was written as supposed above to a predominantly non-Jewish audience within the Graeco-Romano milieu of the time, the concept of women divorcing their husbands was quite well known. The instruction from Jesus in v. 12 could then be viewed as a necessary extension of the principle enunciated in v. 11 to recognize the practice of female-initiated divorce in the culture of the original hearers / readers.

¹⁹⁶ Within Judaism it was more normal for men to seek to divorce their wives, but it was not unknown for women to divorce their husbands. The example of Herodias who divorced her husband Philip serves well here, although it is unclear the extent to which she and Herod, her new 'husband', actually practiced Judaism in form or spirit. Josephus records the commonly understood position amongst many nineteenth century scholars on this issue, stating that 'some time afterwards Salome had occasion to quarrel with Costobarus and soon sent him a document dissolving their marriage...which was not in accordance with Jewish law. For with us, it is lawful only for the man to do this, and not even a divorced woman may marry again on her own initiative unless her former husband consents'. However, the Mishnah granted a Jewish woman the right to a divorce based on certain conditions, e.g. a coerced marriage, impotence, or if there had been an underage marriage, and a recently discovered second century Jewish divorce certificate (Papyrus Se'elim 13) from a woman to a man confirms that women could, and did indeed, divorce from their husbands. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 85, and James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 304-05.

Discipleship therefore extends beyond oneself and one's relations with other disciples into any disciple's marriage. The pharisaic focus is on grounds for dissolution. Jesus' focus is on the inviolability of the marital bond according to the Creator's will,¹⁹⁷ and the marital failure of disciples does not alter the underlying created order. The dominical command to disciples to 'deny self', 'take up one's cross', and 'follow me' becomes in this pericope a call for discipleship that covers the most intimate of human relationships – marriage. Whilst ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ,¹⁹⁸ will the disciple '...seek relief in what is permitted, or commit...to what is intended by God and commanded by Christ'?¹⁹⁸

10.13-16 – on receiving the Kingdom of God

The narrative focus switches from marriage to receiving the Kingdom. As with the previous pericope, the contemporary actors (the bringers of the children) briefly appear and then fade from view.¹⁹⁹ The desire is for Jesus to touch the children,²⁰⁰ possibly to bring healing.²⁰¹ The disciples' rebuke is severe, reflecting in severity Peter's rebuke of 8.32,²⁰² and incurring a forthright response from Jesus. Jesus is angry, His anger in the focus passage being in sharp contrast to that of the

¹⁹⁷ It is to be acknowledged that Matt. 5.32 and 19.3-12 include the allowance of adultery as a cause for divorce, and in the overall context of Scripture, one may understand accordingly that there is a divine concession for adultery. However, the plain reading of 10.1-12 does not support this view – the concession to adultery can only be implied.

¹⁹⁸ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 305.

¹⁹⁹ A literal translation of the Greek of v. 13 might read, 'and they brought to Him children that He might touch them'. Who actually brings the children is not stated, and Mark does not provide this information. Rather, he is establishing a narrative setting for further dominical teachings on discipleship.

²⁰⁰ The catchword παιδία or the singular version παιδίον appears in vv. 13, 14 and 15 of the focus pericope. This may indicate previous oral composition, implying the unit came as an existing tradition to Mark, but it may also indicate Marcan redaction to submerge vv. 14c and v. 15 (logia of Jesus) within an existing simple narrative about Jesus receiving children.

²⁰¹ 5.24-34 records the story of the palsied woman who touched the hem of Jesus' cloak and was subsequently healed of her discharge. To touch even the clothes of Jesus in faith brought about physical healing. This phenomenon continued during the apostolic era, with supplicants seeking to touch the clothes of Paul, Peter and John, and some even seeking just to be touched by the apostolic shadow (c.f. Acts 5.12-16).

²⁰² Whom the disciples rebuke is not immediately clear - do they rebuke the children themselves, or those who were bringing the children? The Greek grammar and syntax does not provide clear guidance on this point, merely recording that the disciples rebuked αὐτοῖς. What is more important though is what is presented – the severity of the disciples' rebuke. The Marcan use of the verb ἐπιτιμᾶω has already been noted above, and reflects the utter abhorrence the disciples feel for the notion of children being touched by Jesus.

disciples in 10.41ff.²⁰³ His imperative ‘permit little children come to me’ is followed without conjunction by a negative present imperative, ‘do not hinder them’. Stop forbidding the children, not just now, but ever after.²⁰⁴ The causative γὰρ provides the rationale: it is to such as these (children) that the Kingdom of God belongs. The τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων is possessive: such persons as these children own the Kingdom of God, therefore they have every right to approach Jesus.²⁰⁵

Mark then records a formal dominical saying predicated on Jesus’ eschatological role in the final judgement:²⁰⁶ those who do not receive the Kingdom of God as ὡς παιδίων will never enter it. It is the eschatological rather than earthly Son of Man who may pronounce thus. As throughout the focus passage, Jesus’ teaching is directed not just at the Twelve, but at ὁς ἄν. The parallelism between children coming to Jesus in vv. 13-14 and receiving the Kingdom of God in v. 15 reflects the authority of Jesus.²⁰⁷ To come to Jesus is to receive and enter the Kingdom of God, and disciples ἐν τῇ ὁδοῖ should take note, for these are the words of Him who will make the final judgement on who will enter the Kingdom.

Merely to come is not enough. One must come ὡς παιδίων.²⁰⁸ One simply comes ὡς παιδίων. Little children come, unlike the Twelve, with no claims to authority, ‘without presumptions of self-

²⁰³ Jesus ἠγανάκτησεν, ‘became indignant’, or ‘was aroused to anger’ because children are being prevented from reaching Him. The disciples’ anger in 10.41ff. (ῥξαντο ἀγανακτεῖν) by contrast is because James and John may have gained some kind of pre-eminence over them in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is concerned with people receiving the Kingdom of God, whilst His disciples are concerned with relative positions of authority in the Kingdom of God.

²⁰⁴ The first imperative in v. 13 is a positive aorist, whilst the second is a negative present imperative. Jesus’ command mirrors that which He gave in 8.39. Jesus is providing a dominical instruction not only for the disciples, but a more general principle: disciples of Christ must stop hindering, or never start hindering, the approach of children to Jesus.

²⁰⁵ It is important to note that Jesus does not say that the Kingdom of God belongs to these little children, but to τοιούτων (an adjective, genitive neuter plural, meaning ‘such’, or in this case, ‘of such’, with ‘as these’ implied from the relationship with the implied subject, τὰ παιδία).

²⁰⁶ The use of ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν emphasize the seriousness nature of the coming pronouncement.

²⁰⁷ The implied divine authority for such a pronouncement reflects the authority inherent in the teachings on marriage in 10.1-10, where it was noted that Jesus’ position was not to debate the interpretation of Mosaic injunctions but to declare without cause for debate the original divine intent.

²⁰⁸ One must come as a ‘little child’. The Greek used is a diminutive, suggesting to come as an infant, or as a baby (the Lucan parallel in Luke 18.15 records that they were bringing ‘even infants’ to Jesus). Mark provides no indication of the alleged qualities of children (e.g. innocence) as being the state of mind in which one is to approach Jesus.

importance and self-empowerment'.²⁰⁹ 'Whatever a child receives, he or she receives by grace on the basis of sheer neediness rather than by any merit inherent in him or herself'.²¹⁰ The rebuke to the self-aggrandizement of the disciples is clear. Such presumptions to authority amongst disciples preclude entry to the Kingdom of God.

Instead of merely touching the children, Jesus takes them in His arms,²¹¹ lays hands on them,²¹² and blesses them.²¹³ To approach Jesus ὡς παιδίου not only is entry into the Kingdom of God, into life, but brings far greater blessings than those actually sought after. The Kingdom of God though is God's sovereign and dynamic rule, and participation therein requires obedience from any disciple to the dominical call. As with the Twelve, full obedience to God's rule is not immediate, but comes as the disciple travels, like the Twelve, ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.

10. 17-31 – on entering the Kingdom of God

This section may be understood in consecutive parts: vv. 17-22 (interview with rich man); and vv. 23-31 (Jesus' subsequent teaching on wealth and discipleship).

²⁰⁹ See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 94.

²¹⁰ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 307.

²¹¹ The taking of a child in the arms may be understood in light of 8.33-37 as Jesus affirming the message of disciples showing concern for, and acceptance of, the most insignificant in society. Jesus does not merely touch – the taking up in the arms and the embrace are an acted role-play which emphasize the oral teachings. Linguistically, the point is emphasized through the use of κατευλόγω, an emphatic form of the more normal NT verb εulόγω which occurs nowhere else in the NT. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 94.

²¹² Within the OT context, the laying on of hands implied the giving of a blessing, e.g. as provided by Jacob shortly before his death to his sons and those of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). See Genesis 49.

²¹³ It should be noted that this text has been used by some in the defense of infant baptism. According to Edwards, 'Calvin argued that if children were brought to Jesus to receive the Kingdom, which is the sum of the blessing sealed through baptism, why should they be denied baptism?' (see James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 308). This understanding of infant baptism being authorized by Mark 10.16 has some supporters, but it also has some detractors, including in the seminal work on baptism by Beasley-Murray (see G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1962). However, the main point of the focus pericope is not concerning baptism, or on the need to bring little children to Jesus. The main point of the focus pericope is that we are to be like little children in receiving the Kingdom of God. 'This meaning is appropriate to the main drive of the Gospel at this point, viz., the understanding of discipleship. To say that discipleship meant bringing one's children to Jesus in baptism would be incongruous as an explication of taking up the cross, denying oneself and losing one's life'. See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 107.

The journey southwards resumes in v. 17 amidst heavy Marcan redaction.²¹⁴ The identity of the approaching supplicant is unimportant,²¹⁵ his demeanour is suggestive,²¹⁶ but the question is crucial²¹⁷ – what must he do to gain eternal life? Rejecting the designation ἀγαθε,²¹⁸ Jesus asks the man why he calls Him good?²¹⁹ God alone is good. Jesus points the man to God, consistent with His proclamation of the Kingdom of God, but He does not deny that He knows the answer to the ultimate question, for it is He who will judge every man concerning eternal life in His eschatological role.²²⁰ Without waiting for an answer, and assuming the man is Torah-observant,²²¹ Jesus enumerates the horizontal commands of the Decalogue, including the command not to defraud, a possible hint at the source of the man's wealth.²²²

²¹⁴ According to Best, the following are signs of Marcan redactional activity within the verse: 1) the use of *καὶ* as a conjunctive; 2) the use of *ἐκπορευεσθαι* is a verb regularly used by Mark elsewhere, 3) 'when Jesus calls disciples, as He calls the man here, He (Jesus) is normally seen as in motion, e.g. 1.16, 19, 29 and 35'; and 4) Mark regularly begins pericopae with participles as here (*ἐκπορευομένου*). The paragraph ends similarly with a Marcan *γὰρ* to explain the rich man's actions. This evidence of Marcan redaction implies a splicing of the material contained within the pericope into the current context within Mark, suggesting that this passage also is to be understood as providing a case study for potential disciples which allows Jesus to provide further teachings on discipleship and entry into the Kingdom of God in the following verses (vv. 23-31). See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 110.

²¹⁵ As in 10.13, the identity of the supplicant is not expressed clearly. The use of *προσδραμῶν* is vague in the uttermost, and from it one may deduce that it is a adult man with wealth who runs to Jesus. The Matthean and Lucan parallels suggest that the man was young (Matt. 19.20) and a ruler (Luke 18.18), hence the synthesized designation amongst many Christians of the supplicant as the 'rich young ruler'.

²¹⁶ To run in public was not viewed as dignified. Rather, the higher one was in the social echelons, the slower one tended to move in public.

²¹⁷ In all the Gospel of Mark, this is the question that comes closest to the heart of Jesus' ministry, and yet no-one has yet asked Jesus this question through His entire Galilean ministry, including the disciples themselves.

²¹⁸ Rabbis and teachers of the time were referred to by a number of respectful titles, designations and epithets, but in general they tended to avoid the designation ἀγαθε as they understood that only God is entirely good, and therefore this designation should be reserved for Him alone. This attitude of circumspection concerning possible designations of or references to God was an important part of Jewish spirituality, and is seen elsewhere in 14.61.

²¹⁹ The word order of Jesus' question emphasizes the 'me' aspect of the question, e.g. to paraphrase, 'Me? Why do you call me good?'. A literal interpretation of Jesus' question would be 'why me are you calling good?'

²²⁰ Jesus is not denying His divinity with this statement. Rather He is leading the man through his Jewish understanding of God and the Torah to a conclusion which actually is a command to 'follow me', i.e. Jesus.

²²¹ Jesus does not wait for a response, and His phrase 'you know the commandments' is not a question but a statement. Jesus' assumption that the man is Torah-observant is, as the text later reveals, correct.

²²² Much wealth in Jesus' time was concentrated in the hands of wealthy landowners who by virtue of their land holdings had the capital to simultaneously be the main traders of the time. Wealthy landowners were often unscrupulous in their oppression of the poor, and manipulated the markets so as to squeeze out the competition from independent smallholders. The Epistle of James reflects and decries these economic practices.

Omitting ἀγαθε, the man responds that he has indeed kept all the Torah from his youth. He is Torah-observant.²²³ Looking searchingly at him,²²⁴ Jesus loved him.²²⁵ Jesus does not dispute that the man has been faithful in Torah observance, yet, ἔν σε ὑστερεῖ. Jesus' command in the Jewish context is peculiar as does not require giving wealth to the Temple or a particular community such as the Essenes, rather, the wealth is to go to the poor, in exchange for which the man will gain θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ.²²⁶ If you follow my earthly commands, I will reward you in my eschatological role.

Upon hearing the command however,²²⁷ the man departed downcast,²²⁸ ἦν γὰρ ἔχων κτήματα πολλά. As the children of vv. 13-16 come physically to Jesus and thus enter the Kingdom of God, so this man's physical turning away from Jesus excludes him from the sought-after eternal life. For this would-be disciple, the answer to his eternal questions is current action, a discipleship of obedience to

²²³ The verb the man uses is interesting (ἐφυλαξάμην is indicative, aorist, middle, 1st person singular from φυλάσσω meaning to guard, keep under guard; keep, obey, follow; keep safe, protect, defend; midd. guard against, avoid; abstain from (food offered in sacrifice to idols); keep, obey. See Bibleworks 6). If he had kept the Torah, why was he still feeling the need to ask Jesus about eternal life? Something was missing, but he did not understand how to understand the internal dissonance between his deeds and his inner convictions. This is despite the fact that, according to Strack and Billerbeck, 'that a person possessed the ability without exception to fulfill God's commandments was so firmly rooted in rabbinic teaching, that in all seriousness they spoke of people who had kept the entire Torah from A to Z'. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 311.

²²⁴ Mark records that Jesus, ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτόν, 'having looked (intently) at him, He loved him'. The use of ἐμβλέπω is noteworthy. It is more than just to see; it is to look straight at or to consider (Bibleworks 6). Jesus loved the man having already looked intently at Him. This statement about Jesus removes doubts about the man's sincerity or good intentions.

²²⁵ Nowhere else in Mark is it recorded that Jesus 'loved' anyone. This man must therefore have made a strong impression upon Jesus.

²²⁶ It should be noted that Jesus' attitude towards wealth and poverty is neither as radical nor as conservative as some would hope. Jesus nowhere advocates the radical disposition of all assets by His disciples and the adoption of vows of poverty; indeed His statements of 10.29-30 imply that those in the community of His disciples will continue to hold temporal assets. However, nowhere does Jesus simply uphold the status quo and agree with the contemporary understanding that viewed wealth as a sign of God's blessing. Those who were poor under this doctrine were that way because they were out of favour with God, and there was nothing a poor man should do to mitigate the lack of blessing from God. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 313, and Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Kent, UK: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1980), pp. 15-197.

²²⁷ The following discussion between Jesus and the disciples in vv. 29-30 suggests that disciples of Jesus may indeed be called upon to leave family, wealth, possessions and all that is valued in this age for the sake of Jesus, but in so doing they will receive so much more, including persecutions. The man of vv. 17-22 has received a choice of wealth today or eternal wealth, and he chooses wealth today. This passage is not teaching that all disciples must give up all to follow Jesus, as this would not be consistent with the implication of the teaching in 10.29-30, but this passage is teaching that at the command of Jesus, disciples must give up and turn away from whatever is holding them back from exclusive attachment to and reliance on Jesus for their eternal life, including if necessary temporal possessions.

²²⁸ The supplicant had asked a genuine question of a teacher whom he believed could provide the right answer, and he had rejected the question. His sadness was due to the fact that he recognized that in rejecting the command of Jesus, he was indeed excluding himself from the Kingdom of God.

the command of Jesus. The man's question about Torah is answered with a test of his relationship to Jesus, indeed, 'unless obedience to the law leads to discipleship with Jesus it is incomplete and futile'.²²⁹

In v. 23, Jesus looks around – will the Twelve also leave Him?²³⁰ Jesus then directly challenges their assumptions about wealth. Temporal wealth²³¹ may be humanly understood as a sign of God's favour, pointing proleptically to the expected wealth of the age to come, but in fact temporal wealth may prevent you even reaching the age to come.²³² Jesus' call to discipleship however is exclusive, requiring the (would-be disciple) to 'deny self', and this exclusive call is incompatible with any impeding attachments in the current age.

Given their Jewish heritage and covenantal belief that physical wealth was a sign of divine favour, the disciples are astonished, so Jesus repeats His saying, but now it is even more scandalous. Now it is not only the rich who will find it hard to enter the Kingdom of God – it is hard for everyone, nay it

²²⁹ See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 313.

²³⁰ περιβλεψάμενος is a participle, aorist, middle, nominative, masculine singular from περιβλέπομαι, meaning to look around (Bibleworks 6). This verb is used six times throughout Mark (3.5, 34; 5.32; 10.23; 11.11; and 9.8), and as it occurs only once elsewhere in the NT (Luke 6.10), it could be argued that this is distinctive Marcan vocabulary and therefore evidence of his redaction. However, Kuhn has argued against this, arguing that the incidence in v. 23 of και plus a participle plus a subject plus λεγει plus the object in the dative is more characteristic of the underlying Marcan traditions rather than the Marcan redaction itself. Whilst the debates about the differentiation between the Marcan sources and Marcan redactions may be interesting and in many cases helpful for exegetical purposes, the exact determination of which elements of vv. 23-24 are which do not necessarily facilitate the exegesis of these verses. See Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 111.

²³¹ The use of the word κτήματα (from 'κτῆμα, τος' meaning possession, property; piece of land) in v. 22 and Jesus' command not to defraud suggests that the rich supplicant had wealth held in estates of land. In v. 23 the Greek changes to τὰ χρήματα (from χρῆμα, τος pl. meaning possessions, wealth, means; money; sg. money, proceeds). Jesus is not referring to landed gentry specifically, but to those who hold any kind of wealth, fixed or liquid. See Bibleworks 6.

²³² Sider notes when discussing this passage that, although Jesus' teaching may have been shocking to His immediate Jewish audience, it is shocking to modern Christians also. According to him, 'most Christians in the northern hemisphere simply do not believe Jesus' teaching about the deadly danger of possessions. We all know that Jesus warned that possessions are highly dangerous – so dangerous in fact that it is extremely difficult for a rich person to be a Christian at all...but we do not believe Jesus. We Christians in the West live in the richest society in the history of the world surrounded by a billion hungry neighbours. Yet we demand that our governments foster an ever-expanding economy in order that our incomes will increase each year'. See Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, p. 108.

is humanly impossible.²³³ To emphasize just how difficult entry is, Jesus compares it to a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle – a quite impossible thing.²³⁴ The disciples are now even more perplexed,²³⁵ their question (καὶ τίς δύναται σωθῆναι;) reflecting once more their Jewish heritage.²³⁶ Jesus' words have exposed the disciples' sense of inadequacy. They are not even wealthy, how then can they be saved?

The authoritative²³⁷ dominical response is clear: people cannot save themselves, only God can.²³⁸ Coherent with contemporary rabbinic teaching,²³⁹ Jesus' words form the basis for the later Pauline doctrine of grace. As with the father of the possessed boy (9.24), the disciples' recognition of inadequacy is the necessary starting point for God's salvific actions. It is in any disciple's recognition of inadequacy, approaching Jesus as the unpretentious παιδίον of vv. 13-16, that God works to accomplish His salvific will, whilst pretensions of adequacy serve to exclude disciples from such salvific actions and entry into the Kingdom.

²³³ In the second saying, Jesus drops any reference to the rich or those with possessions, although it should be noted that some MSS add the words 'for those who trust in riches' in v. 24. Rather, Jesus is making the general point that it is hard for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God.

²³⁴ This saying has been the focus of much scholarly debate. A plain reading of the text suggests that Jesus is suggesting a human impossibility using hyperbolic language. This interpretation is viewed as the most probable because within the immediate context Jesus affirms the impossibility for humans to enter the Kingdom of God in and of themselves in v. 27.

²³⁵ The use of περισσῶς in v. 26 (an adverb meaning all the more or even more) emphasizes the increasing astonishment the disciples were experiencing, over and above their amazement / perplexity of v. 24.

²³⁶ The disciples' question is understandable given their assumptions about wealth being a blessing from God. Although the Jews were not experiencing God's favour under the terms of the covenant at the time of Jesus – they were under foreign oppression, they still believed in the principle at an individual level, hence the disciples' querulousness.

²³⁷ Mark does not record simply that 'Jesus said'. He states that ἐμβλέψας αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει, i.e. having looked intently at them, Jesus then says... (see above at v. 21 on the use of ἐμβλέπω). Jesus' look at the disciples is searching, penetrates to their inner doubts and fears, and emphasizes the authority of what He is about to say.

²³⁸ It is unclear whether the use of the verb σωθῆναι (from σωζω) in Mark had yet attained the technical sense later manifest in the Pauline corpus. However, it is important to notice the parallelism in Mark. To physically approach Jesus is equated with receiving the Kingdom of God (10.15), which is equated with entering into life (9.43ff.), which is equated with the experience of the verb σωθῆναι.

²³⁹ The LXX of Gen. 18.14 asks 'is anything too hard for the Lord?', whilst Job 42.3 (LXX) reads 'I know that you can do all things, and nothing is impossible for you', whilst a contemporary dictum stated that 'if a man commences to purify himself, he is assisted from heaven'. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 102.

In v. 28, Peter responds for the disciples.²⁴⁰ They have left all for Jesus, unlike the rich man of vv. 17-22, but if entry into the Kingdom is really humanly impossible and only by divine *fiat*, has their sacrifice been worthless? Jesus' solemn²⁴¹ response quietens the disciples' fears, and as consistently throughout the focus passage, widens the application with οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὄς. Jesus enumerates all the barriers to discipleship, including homes, families, and livelihoods, which disciples must overcome to 'deny self' and follow Him.²⁴² Furthermore, disciples, upon entering the broader community of faith, will find they not only have access to the temporal assets of all other disciples,²⁴³ but they will experience an hundredfold increase. There will also be persecutions. The persecutions are not hypothetical possibilities - they are concurrent realities for disciples seeking to enter the Kingdom of God. Persecution does not signify rejection by God, rather it signifies fellowship with Jesus, participation in His earthly role. These words would have resonated with the original hearers / readers, and have done so with disciples ever since.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ Peter emphasizes that the disciples themselves have left everything for Jesus. His words are ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν. Strictly speaking, the personal pronoun is unnecessary, but by adding the personal pronoun, Peter is emphasizing to Jesus that 'we, yes us, the disciples, have left everything for you'.

²⁴¹ The use of ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν emphasizes the serious nature of the subsequent dominical pronouncement. As this paper assumed authorship in 65-70AD in a period of actual or impending Neronian persecutions, the statement by Jesus that His disciples would not only receive access to material support within the wider Christian community but also persecutions would have been all the more impressive due to its actual or impending fulfillment.

²⁴² 8.34-9.1 includes the phrase ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ('for my sake and the sake of the Gospel'), and 10.29 includes an almost identical phrase, ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ ἕνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ('for the sake of me and for the sake of the Gospel'). Denying self and taking up one's cross in this context does not only mean abandoning earthly ambitions and hopes of advancement, but physically turning away from one's family, home, loved ones, relations, friends, sources of income and livelihood if necessary, should such things impede one's obedient response to the call of Jesus.

²⁴³ Sider provides some insightful comments on this passage, noting that '...these words seem at least a trifle naïve...but His words came alive when...read...in the context of the new community of Jesus' followers. Jesus began a new social order, a new Kingdom of faithful followers who were to be completely available to each other...in that new community there would be genuine economic security. Each would indeed have many more loving brothers and sisters than before. The economic resources available would in fact be compounded a hundredfold and more.' See Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, pp. 87-88.

²⁴⁴ A good modern example of the resonance of Jesus' words with modern Christians is found in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

The words καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζωὴν αἰώνιον balance the unpleasant notion of persecution. Using rabbinic language,²⁴⁵ Jesus promises to disciples who do deny self and who do reject impediments to discipleship precisely what the rich man of vv. 17-22 could not obtain, ‘life eternal’.²⁴⁶ Mark then concludes this section of the focus passage with a gnomic dominical saying. Those who are first in the current age, who stand on their wealth or self-sufficiency, will be last, i.e. excluded from the Kingdom of God. Those who are last in the current age, who recognize their inadequacy and reject all temporal constraints to obedient discipleship, will enter the Kingdom of God.

Discipleship is an exclusive following of Jesus, obedient to His command, rejecting of all temporal constraints, and grounded in a deep sense of inadequacy. Anything other, whilst called discipleship, will exclude the disciple from the Kingdom of God. Such are the stark choices facing disciples as they travel ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.

Summary

The troupe has moved geographically south ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ from Galilee to Judea, and following the second passion prediction, in 8.33-34 the disciples again show their complete misunderstanding of what it means to follow Jesus, necessitating further dominical instruction in discipleship and mutual responsibilities.

Temporal discipleship is scandalous. Christian discipleship is not merely one amongst many ethical codes from ancient teachers and philosophers, open to acceptance or rejection – it is the way the

²⁴⁵ The use of the phrase ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ would have sounded very familiar to Jesus’ contemporary audience, being a rabbinical term used by rabbis and in the inter-testamental and apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism to refer to that which would follow the current age.

²⁴⁶ The rich man in 10.17 asked what he must do to obtain ζωὴν αἰώνιον, and then promptly fails to do what is required, and it is precisely that eternal life which the rich man failed to obtain which is now promised in v. 30 to anyone, to any disciple, who does abandon impediments to discipleship and follow the exclusive call of Jesus.

Kingdom of God, for obedience ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ to the commands of the earthly Son of Man will bring eternal vindication from Him in His eschatological role. An eternal prize is on offer, yet the Marcan disciples, those closest to Jesus, consistently misunderstand Him, and as we move on through the narrative, we may reflect upon and seek an answer to the disciples' question, καὶ τίς δύναται σωθῆναι?

Exegesis V – Mark 10.32-52

Introduction

The original hearers / readers have now received teachings on individual discipleship and mutual responsibilities within a Christian community, but it seems that so much is required. Even the disciples in the narrative seem to despair of entry into the Kingdom of God, asking *καὶ τίς δύναται σωθῆναι?* A practical example would help, and so the narrative moves forward towards Jerusalem, culminating with the answer to the disciples' question in a moving portrait of the ideal disciple. The focus passage may be understood sequentially through the constituent pericopae (10.32-34; 35-45; and 46-52), each of which pericopae will be examined in turn.

10.32-34 – third passion prediction

Jesus now leads the Twelve and other followers²⁴⁷ up²⁴⁸ to Jerusalem. Only in v. 32a does Mark portray Jesus as leading from the front.²⁴⁹ The Marcan Jesus has never led His followers to the crowds, to the adulation and adoration from those who thronged about during His Galilean ministry. Rather, Jesus leads at this point, and He leads towards suffering.²⁵⁰

Those following Jesus are both 'amazed' and 'afraid'. Mark has previously noted separately the motifs of amazement and fear,²⁵¹ but here both motifs are combined. Fear amongst the disciples in

²⁴⁷ It is unclear in the Greek (*Ἦσαν δὲ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἀναβαίνοντες*) whether Jesus is being followed by just the Twelve, or by a larger group of followers, of which the Twelve are a sub-set. However, as in v. 32 Mark records that Jesus *καὶ παραλαβὼν πάλιν τοὺς δώδεκα*, implying that Jesus took the Twelve aside from a larger group of followers in order to make the third passion prediction. For this reason it is assumed that Jesus in v. 32 is being followed by a larger crowd of followers than just the Twelve.

²⁴⁸ The route from Jericho (v. 46) to Jerusalem rises over 3,500 feet in approx. 20 miles, which represents a steep ascent at approx. 5% average gradient the entire way.

²⁴⁹ Although in 14.28 Jesus predicts that He will go before the disciples to Galilee following His resurrection, and in 16.7 the young man in white robes states that Jesus has gone ahead of the disciples following His resurrection to Galilee, at no other point in the Marcan narrative does Jesus ever go on ahead of His disciples.

²⁵⁰ To those hearers / readers of the Gospel of Mark facing or about to face the Neronian persecutions the concept that Jesus was leading from the front to the events of the passion would have been comforting. The scandal of a crucified messiah would seem less horrendous, as Jesus was leading from the front to the passion.

²⁵¹ In 9.42, following the second passion prediction of Jesus, the disciples were 'afraid', and now in the immediate context of the third passion prediction, they again are afraid. The disciples have also been portrayed as afraid elsewhere

Mark²⁵² is incurred by their witnessing of the manifestation of the divine in Jesus, and amazement by the crowds when they see the aura of divine authority around Jesus. As Jesus leads to Jerusalem, those following catch a glimpse of the divine presence, of ἐξουσία beyond human comprehension, and their response is fear and amazement combined.²⁵³

As previously in the focus passage, Jesus takes the Twelve aside and teaches them privately. Set against Jewish messianic expectations, Jesus' teaching once more is scandalous, unsuitable for any but those on the 'inside'. The teaching is direct, τὰ μέλλοντα αὐτῷ συμβαίνειν. The divine δεῖ of 8.31 is not repeated, but the inference is clear. Drawing on His Danielic and Isaianic self-understanding, the *ebed Yahweh* and Son of Man self-designation combine to provide the most explicit and detailed passion prediction yet, providing a clear outline of the events of the passion week. Although understood by some as merely *vaticinium ex eventu*, the content supports the authenticity of the saying.²⁵⁴

in the focus passage, e.g. during the transfiguration in 9.6. The disciples have also been portrayed as being 'amazed' at the words and deeds of Jesus, including elsewhere in the focus passage, e.g. in 10.26. The crowds have also been amazed at Jesus, e.g. in 1.27 and in the focus passage in 9.15. It is only during the current pericope however that these two Marcan motifs are brought together in the context of the most explicit passion yet.

²⁵² Given the Roman penchant for brutality towards rebellions, the fear of the disciples may at the most basic level be understood as their fear of what was going to happen in Jerusalem.

²⁵³ Would it have been preferable from a rhetorical perspective to note the disciples' fear and amazement following rather than before the third passion prediction? Given the placing of the motif of the disciples' misunderstanding immediately after the previous two passion predictions, it would appear that Mark's redaction is emphasizing not the anticipated passion prediction itself, but rather the authority with which Jesus now leads to Jerusalem. What is about to happen to Jesus is no accident. It does not come by chance. Jesus leads to the passion events with an authority and divine presence that His contemporaries sense and are in awe of, even if they do not fully understand.

²⁵⁴ If the third passion prediction were the result of the early Church's contemplations rather than being purely an historical event, one would assume that the Marcan redaction would have made the passion prediction harmonize precisely with the events of the passion week as recorded by Mark – but the third passion prediction and the passion events within Mark cannot be fully harmonized. As there is not complete harmony between the events and the prediction, despite the signs of Marcan redaction within the pericope, it is difficult to argue for a post-Easter origin for the third passion prediction. The evidence seems to suggest that Mark has recorded a passion prediction from the actual life of Jesus, and has recorded the prediction despite the inconsistencies with the actual Passion Week. On a broader level, the differences between the three passion sayings may also be used to argue for their authenticity and their faithful preservation by the early Church, as given the redactional evidence throughout the focus passage it would have been relatively easy for the three sayings to have been harmonized amongst themselves and with the passion week events themselves. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, pp. 319-21, Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 108, and E.J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Marcan Gospel*, p. 145.

For those readers / hearers enduring or about to endure the Neronic persecution, the message is comforting. As Jesus went to His passion, His contemporaries sensed the presence of the divine around Him – what happened in the passion was not a failure, but the climax of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into the affairs of men.

To follow Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ is to follow Him to suffering (ἀναβαίνομεν). Suffering for the name of Jesus is therefore not an aberration from but participation in the Kingdom of God. Disciples' desires for worldly authority are again exposed, and following Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ is to be shown in the following discourse as an (internal) attitude of humility and in (external actions of) self-sacrifice.²⁵⁵

10.35-45 – the disciples' misunderstanding

As following the first and second passion predictions, Mark presents the recurring motif of the disciples' misunderstanding. Possibly using their family connections,²⁵⁶ James and John present a remarkable request that belies an inner uncertainty²⁵⁷ – will Jesus do for them whatever they ask? Jesus' response is penetrating, and serves to reveal James and John's real motives – personal glory. The request is to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in the coming Kingdom. Having just witnessed Elijah and Moses flanking Jesus in the transfiguration, James and John now claim those positions for themselves. It is a request to be second in authority only to Jesus in the age to come.²⁵⁸ No higher

²⁵⁵ In 8.34, following the first passion prediction, Jesus commands disciples to 'deny yourselves'. Following the third passion prediction, Jesus models what it is to be a disciple more fully: to be a disciple is not just about denying self, but it requires positive self-sacrifice and service for others.

²⁵⁶ It has been suggested by some scholars that in fact James and John were the cousins of Jesus. Such an understanding is based primarily on the understanding of the relationship between the women who watched Jesus on the cross in John 19.25. Although Wenham in particular makes a strong case for the close family relationship, the connections are primarily inferred from the text rather than directly stated by the text.

²⁵⁷ The recording in the narrative of this highly embarrassing incident for James and John strongly suggests the authenticity of the tradition.

²⁵⁸ The use of the phrase ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου could possibly refer to the glory of the resurrection, or of the parousia. In pre-Easter terms, James and John had witnessed the glory of the transfiguration, and they could be thinking of the glory prefigured by the transfiguration when Jesus would fully inaugurate the Kingdom of God. Alternately, the post-Easter Church, when thinking of the resurrection, could be thinking of the phrase ἐν τῇ δόξῃ as referring primarily to the parousia.

request could be made by a mortal, yet the request, whilst ostensibly by disciples, masks unrepentant and exclusive self-interest.²⁵⁹ As with the supplicant of v. 17-22, Jesus does not deny the disciples' presupposition – the Son of Man does have an anticipated eschatological role.

In contradistinction to the disciples in v. 41, Jesus responds with grace and patience, asking them if they can drink the cup He will drink, and be baptized with the baptism with which He will be baptized? Jesus is referring to the suffering and death that are divinely ordained for Him in Jerusalem, the subject of His three passion predictions, and the coming 'ransom saying',²⁶⁰ because in going to Jerusalem, Jesus is simply fulfilling the divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$.

The inferred answer is in the negative, for the Son of Man's suffering and death is vicarious and expiatory,²⁶¹ but James and John nevertheless reply in the affirmative.²⁶² Jesus agrees that they will

²⁵⁹ It was customary in Jewish thought for the rabbi to walk on the road flanked to the left and to the right by his disciples. Such a position pointed out the rabbi for all to see, honouring him by his central position in the group, but it also brought glory to those closest to him. James and John's request therefore, whilst putting Jesus at the centre, and ostensibly making Jesus the focus of attention, is actually a request for themselves to be second only to Jesus in honour and authority. 'The brothers hope to honour Jesus while honouring themselves. How easily worship and discipleship are blended with self-interest; or worse, self-interest is masked as worship and discipleship'. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 322.

²⁶⁰ The concept of drinking from a cup was understood within the OT context to refer to participating in an event ordained by God. Such an event could be a cause for joy, but more generally the 'cup' of God referred to God's condemnation, judgement and wrath (see Pss. 11.6; 16.5; 75.8, 116.13; Isa. 51.17, 22; and Jer. 25.15-28). To 'drink the cup' was to become subject to God's wrath and judgement. Mark records Jesus referring to this 'cup' during his agonies in Gethsemane, strongly suggesting in the parallelism of Jesus' words that the 'cup' He is to 'drink' the will of God. The reference to baptism is not so clear. The only reference to date in Mark has been to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, and there are no clear indications of suffering or of the divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$ associated with 1.9-11. In the immediate context, the structural parallelism in v. 38 with the notion of the 'cup' which Jesus is to drink suggests a parallel concept of suffering and death within a divinely ordained process. The Pauline concept of baptism included the notion of baptism being a participation in the sufferings and death of Jesus, without which there could be no participation in the resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6.3-14 in particular present this Pauline understanding of baptism), so there seems to have been a development in thought within the apostolic Church which understood baptism in the sense of dying before physical or spiritual resurrection could occur. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 117.

²⁶¹ This deduction is based on the understanding about what Jesus is referring to in the saying about the 'cup' and baptism. If Jesus is, as argued above, referring to His impending passion, and His vicarious sacrifice (10.45), then James and John cannot participate, for such is the earthly role of the Son of Man.

²⁶² Evans notes the irony of James and John's affirmation of the ability to participate in Jesus' suffering. When Jesus does die, to His left and His right are two criminals, who had no wish to be there, whilst James and John had fled with the rest of the disciples. The truth was that neither James nor John could face the 'cup' that Jesus was about to drink. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 118.

face indeed drink from τὸ ποτήριον and be baptized with τὸ βάπτισμα which He will be baptized with, but the meanings have changed.

Referring to Jesus, such terms refer to His vicarious and expiatory death (v. 45). Referring to James and John²⁶³ (and all would-be disciples), such terms refer to the διωγμοί of v. 30 that are an intrinsic part of discipleship. Jesus makes no reference to future glory for the disciples. His disciples do not accept suffering because of promises of future glory, but because suffering *ipso facto* is integral to following Jesus. The syntax suggests that Jesus' denial is emphatic that it is not for Him to grant such a request,²⁶⁴ but in using the divine passive He refers the matter to God's will.²⁶⁵ As Jesus' coming passion is part of the divine δεῖ, so is the ordering of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, His anticipated eschatological glory is not denied. Disciples follow Jesus not because they know in advance their glorious reward, but because it is He who leads, because such leadership is according to divine will, and because a disciple's participation ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ will be ultimately judged by the Son of Man in His eschatological role.

When the remaining disciples hear of the brothers' request, they ἤρξαντο ἀγανακτεῖν²⁶⁶ as their own ambitions are threatened. Averting the embryonic factionalism, Jesus exerts His authority by summoning the Twelve to Himself and speaking.²⁶⁷ Jesus starts by describing the practice of power

²⁶³ If the words recorded by Mark were in fact *vaticinium ex eventu*, we would expect a more accurate representation by Jesus of the respective fates of James and John, arguing for this verse being based on an authentic dominical saying.

²⁶⁴ The Greek word order places the emphasis on the word 'me', οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι.

²⁶⁵ The use of the divine passive in Greek is based on the underlying respect the Jews had for the name of God (viz. the use of *Adonai* instead of the Tetragrammaton in Hebrew), and their use of circumlocutions to avoid wherever possible the name of God or ascribing attributes to humans that were thought only attributable to God. The fact that Jesus denies that He knows who will perform which function in the Kingdom of God argues strongly for the authenticity of such a saying.

²⁶⁶ This is the same verb used of Jesus in 10.14. As Jesus shows anger when innocents are brought to Him and people are hindered from receiving the Kingdom of God, so His disciples become angry at the thought that some of their midst may have surreptitiously gained positions of pre-eminence and authority over them within the coming Kingdom.

²⁶⁷ Throughout the Gospel of Mark, when Mark wishes to emphasize the importance of a dominical saying, he portrays Jesus as (on occasion) sitting down (as in 9.35), or summoning the disciples (as in the focus passage in 8.34 and 9.35).

in His day. The rulers²⁶⁸ of the gentiles ‘lord it over them’,²⁶⁹ and their high officials ‘exercise authority’,²⁷⁰ over them. Greatness is defined in earthly kingdoms by physical power and the ability to coerce others. The greater one’s ability to impose one’s will, the greater one was.

Jesus emphatically denies this concept of greatness amongst His followers, οὐχ οὕτως δέ ἐστιν ἐν ὑμῖν. Through using ἐστιν rather than ἐσται, Jesus does not refer to relations within the future manifestation of the Kingdom of God, but to relations amongst disciples now, thereby defining disciples who understand and practice greatness in human terms as actually being outside of the Kingdom of God.²⁷¹ What then is greatness in the divine economy? Opening the teaching to any who would hear, Jesus presents two parallel statements that progressively intensify. He who wishes to be great must serve, and he who wishes to be first must be a slave of all. To equate with οἱ μεγάλοι of earthly kingdoms, a disciple must (ironically) become ὑμῶν διάκονος. For those disciples aspiring even higher, seeking to equate with οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν τῶν ἐθνῶν, it is necessary to become πάντων δοῦλος.²⁷² In the divine economy values and subsequent roles are reversed. Community ethos amongst disciples is expressed not in desire for self-aggrandizement but in selfless service for others.

²⁶⁸ Mark records a strange phrase of Jesus, οἱ δοκοῦντες from δοκέω trans. to think, suppose, consider, imagine; intrans. seem; be recognized, have a reputation (Bibleworks 6). Such a phrase seems to imply that those who ruled over the Graeco-Romano world only seem to rule, whereas in reality their rule was very real and very brutal.

²⁶⁹ The verb used is κατακυριεύω, to have power over, gain mastery over overpower, subdue, try to show one's authority over (Bibleworks 6). This verb has overtones of domination, oppression and tyranny rather than of consensual government exercised on behalf of a willing populace.

²⁷⁰ The verb used is κατεξουσιάζω, to rule over, a softer concept than that of those who had ultimate authority, i.e. the Roman emperor and the imperial court. This verb is used of οἱ μεγάλοι, ‘the great ones’ who were the local officials and designates of the ultimate rulers of the Graeco-Romano world. Such persons were subject to the decisions of the ultimate rulers, and Rome often intervened to adjudicate in disputes amongst the princelings and petty monarchs who ruled on Rome’s behalf in the ethnarchies, tetrarchies, kingdoms and provinces of the Roman empire.

²⁷¹ Edwards argues convincingly on this point that ‘v. 43a is thus not an admonition to behave in a certain way as much as a description of the way things actually are in the Kingdom of God, and even among the disciples of the Kingdom. Thus, to fail in being a servant is not simply to fall short of an ideal condition but to stand outside of an existing condition that corresponds to the Kingdom of God...at no place do the ethics of the Kingdom of God clash more vigorously with the ethics of the world than in the matters of power and service’. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 325.

²⁷² Jesus’ parallelism compares those who ‘seem to lord it over the gentiles’, i.e. the highest rulers in the Graeco-Romano world, at whose word a slave could be executed, with the highest aspirations a disciple of Jesus may have – to be a slave of all.

V. 45 is linked with the current pericope by the causative γάρ,²⁷³ in the immediate context recording the rationale for why disciples are to seek servanthood rather than mastery, and in the broader context of the focus passage, through this final dominical teaching addressing the fundamental eschatological reason why disciples are to obey the earthly Son of Man's teachings.

Mark presents in v. 45²⁷⁴ a key dominical saying, which together with 14.24²⁷⁵ give the clearest Marcan insights into Jesus' messianic self-consciousness – the Greek NT syntax and vocabulary are clear. The earthly Son of Man's death is unique,²⁷⁶ is a ransom,²⁷⁷ is vicarious and expiatory,²⁷⁸ is

²⁷³ As has been noted previously, in the focus passage Mark repeatedly uses γάρ as a causative conjunction to provide the underlying rationale for previous dominical statements, e.g. the use of γάρ in 8.35, 36, 37, and 38 to provide the theological rationale for why any (would-be) would choose to obey the call of Jesus, deny self and take up his cross.

²⁷⁴ This verse has generated enormous amounts of scholarly debate and study, with the debates focusing around three central questions; 1) the internal unity of the saying and the relationship of the saying with vv. 35-44; 2) the relationship of the saying to Isa. 52.13–53.12; and 3) the authenticity of the logion itself. The answers one brings to any of these questions must be internally consistent with those for all the answers together. See Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 119-25.

²⁷⁵ 'He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many', (NRSV). A. Yarbro Collins argues quite convincingly from her study of stelae within western Asia Minor that 'the evidence suggests that the notion of the Son of Man giving His life as a ransom for many (10.45) belongs to the same complex of ideas as the saying over the cup (14.24), according to which the blood of Jesus was poured out for many. At least from the point of view of their reception among Gentiles familiar with Hellenistic cults, both sayings interpret the death of Jesus by describing it in a metaphorical way as a ritual expiation of the offenses of many'. See Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Signification of Mark 10.45 among Gentile Christians', *Harvard Theological Review* 90/4 (1997), p. 382.

²⁷⁶ The use of the preferred self-designation by Jesus in this verse indicates that Jesus is to die as the Son of Man. This is the earthly role for the Son of Man that must precede His eschatological role as the Son of Man.

²⁷⁷ The use of the word λύτρον from λύτρον, οὐ a means of release or a means of redeeming, has excited much academic debate. There is no reference to λύτρον in Isaiah 53, but v. 45 is not a paraphrase or translation of Isaiah 53. Rather, v. 45 is a summary of the role of the *ebed Yahweh* described in Isaiah 53. In the first century AD, 'when anyone heard the Greek word λύτρον, 'ransom'...it was natural for him to think of the purchase-money for manumitting slaves' (see Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, pp. 121-22). Hostages could also be redeemed through the payment of a λύτρον. Whereas οἱ δοκοῦντες ἄρχειν τῶν ἔθνων and οἱ μεγάλοι enslave others, the Son of Man's role is to free slaves. A. Yarbro Collins has provided epigraphical evidence from first century AD gravestones and steles which use the word λύτρον and its cognates as part of 'a larger group known as the "confessional inscriptions of western Asia Minor". The sequence of offence, misfortune interpreted as punishment for the offense, and "ransoming" or propitiation, sometimes involves persons other than the offending individual...the confessional inscriptions describe and presuppose interactions between human beings and the gods. In this complex of ideas, the λύτρον word group has several layers of meaning, including: ransom from slavery, ransom from captivity, and release from hidden bonds that cause misfortune...the death of Jesus could then be interpreted as an act that won God's favour for the many by compensating for those offenses', (see Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Signification of Mark 10.45 among Gentile Christians', pp. 371-82). Questions such as those raised by Origen about whom Jesus paid any ransom to are not invited by the text (it should be noted that when the Marcan temptation narrative in 1.12-13 is compared with the synoptic parallels, it becomes clear that Satan was attempting to divert Jesus from His death, not encourage Jesus to die so that he (Satan) might receive an hypothetical λύτρον.

²⁷⁸ In addition to the word λύτρον, with its inherent expiatory and vicarious senses, Mark records the word ἀντὶ, meaning for, in place of, instead of; in behalf of; because of, therefore; for (see Bibleworks 6). The use of ἀντὶ makes explicit the inherent vicarious sense within the noun λύτρον, and emphasizes to the readers / hearers that Jesus' death is to be both

voluntary, not passive,²⁷⁹ and is for all, both Jew and gentile.²⁸⁰ The objective rather than the subjective understanding of the atonement is therefore to be preferred.²⁸¹ Earthly rulers enslave, the Son of Man emancipates. Serving rather than domination are the way of the Son of Man, and therefore such is the way for His disciples following Him ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, whilst dissension amongst disciples amongst who is to hold positions of authority and rulership effectively place those disciples outside the Kingdom of God. The Son of Man's eschatological (ultimately salvific) role is predicated on the completion of His earthly role. The eschatological Son of Man can save only if He has fulfilled His earthly role. Disciples likewise can only participate in the Son of Man's ultimate eschatological role if they participate in His earthly role through obedience to His call and teachings.

So once again, who then can be saved? The focus passage now culminates in a moving portrait of the ideal disciple.

vicarious and expiatory. Buchsel argues with reference to λύτρον that 'the word...is also found, however, in the sense of "expiation" or "compensation". The usage of the LXX is much the same as a secular usage except that there is a more common and specific cultic use...the ransom saying undoubtedly implies substitution. For, even if the ἀντὶ be translated "to the advantage of", the death of Jesus means that there happens to Him what would have had to happen to the many. Hence He takes their place. The saying plainly looks back to 8.27 - what no man can do, He, the unique Son of Man, achieves. Attempts have often been made to expound this concept of substitution in terms of the OT idea of ransom, or sacrifice...but methodologically these attempts are open to the objection that it is not possible to refer 10.45 with the necessary certainty to anything specific in the OT. By intention, the saying of Jesus is allusive. It gives an insight into the mystery of God, which is to be humbly venerated and yet also protected against over-subtle curiosity; hence its figurative form...inconceivable though it may appear, He experiences death as one of the many who have fallen victim of corruption. He has taken their place. He, the beloved Son of God, is the divinely smitten shepherd of the flock...God has laid on Him the necessity of dying. Because He thinks what is of God, He must die'. See F. Buchsel, λύτρον in Kittel, Gerhard (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 340-56.

²⁷⁹ As stated above, in the LXX of Isaiah 53 reads quite differently to the MT rendition, giving '...the Lord has handed Him over for our sins' for v. 6 and '...His soul was handed over to death...and on account of their sins He was handed over' for v. 12. However, in v. 45 Jesus says that He is διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι, i.e. to serve and to give (both verbs are infinitive, active, aorist). The *ebed Yahweh* of Isaiah 53 is 'handed over' by God according to the divine will, the divine passive, but Jesus' death in v. 45 is conscious, active and His choice, even though that choice in the agonies of Gethsemane is ultimately the will of God.

²⁸⁰ This is indicated by the use of the word πολλῶν. This word literally means 'of many', but it refers to 'all'. In the LXX of Isaiah 53, the word πολλῶν is used five times to refer to the beneficiaries of the *ebed Yahweh's* death, e.g. Isa. 53.12 'it is used to describe the beneficiaries of the Servant's sacrifice' (see Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, p. 122), and in Isa. 52. 15 the LXX reads that the *ebed Yahweh* will startle ἕθνη πολλὰ, providing another link between the self-consciousness of Jesus and the *ebed Yahweh* figure of Isaiah 53. Within the NT, the extensive parallelism between 'the many' and 'all' indicates that 'the many' were considered in NT times to refer to 'all'.

²⁸¹ Concerning the so-called 'objective' (Anselmic) and 'subjective' (Abelhardian) understandings of the atonement, the linguistic evidence and content of the logion suggest a primary understanding of the atonement that is objective, as Mark presents Jesus' expiatory and atoning death as the basis for salvation vicariously for all who will accept.

10.46-52 – Bartimaeus, the ideal disciple

Forming a linguistic and thematic inclusio with the focus passage's immediate context,²⁸² the narrative approaches Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, is sitting *παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν*, excluded thereby from participation in the cultic celebrations at Jerusalem. The only beneficiary of a miracle to be directly named in the synoptics (thereby adding to the warmth of the story), he is socially marginalized, hearing others journey towards the Passover celebrations.

The Marcan designation of the passing Jesus as Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαρηνός is significant, referring not just to Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth, but within the Marcan context the designation emphasizes Jesus' anointing by God,²⁸³ pointing proleptically to the messianic designation of Jesus by Bartimaeus, the one who sees more clearly than those with physical sight. In desperation,²⁸⁴ Bartimaeus twice exclaims *υἱὲ Δαυίδ*, a messianic designation of faith based on the prophecies of 2 Samuel 7. From his human inadequacy he cries for divine mercy. For such a cry the Marcan Son of God stands still,²⁸⁵ and summons Bartimaeus. Upon arriving, Jesus asks Bartimaeus the same question as to James and John in v. 36, *τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω;*²⁸⁶

²⁸² In the passage outlined as providing the immediate context for the focus passage (8.22-26), Jesus heals a blind man, and in the current pericope Jesus is about to heal a blind man. In 8.22ff. there is an implied command to silence by Jesus to prevent inadequate confessions of His messiahship, and in 10.48 there is a command to silence by the crowd, intent on preventing a blind man from reaching the Messiah (as Bartimaeus so believes from his designation of Jesus as 'Son of David'). The Greek of 8.22 reads *καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Βηθσαϊδάν*, and the Greek of 10.46 reads *καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Ἱεριχώ*, exact parallels except for the place names used. 8.22ff. is used to highlight the disciples' metaphorical lack of sight both before and after the story of the healing of the blind man, and Bartimaeus is also used to highlight the lack of spiritual sight of the Twelve.

²⁸³ In 1.24 Jesus is designated as Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνε. 10.47 includes the only other reference to Jesus as a 'Nazarene' in the Gospel of Mark, and in this passage the designation 'Son of David' is messianic, relating to the OT prophecy of the House of David in 2 Samuel 7. See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 329.

²⁸⁴ Evans argues that the cry by Bartimaeus, *ἐλέησόν με* is used by Mark to bring to the minds of the hearers / readers the LXX of Ps. 6. 3, which also includes these exact words, reading 'have pity on me Lord, for I am weak'. Whilst this OT parallel is helpful in understanding the cry of Bartimaeus, it is not clear whether gentile hearers / readers in Rome would have been familiar with the LXX, so the OT linkage, whilst interesting, should remain a mere possibility rather than a probability.

²⁸⁵ The imperial 'Son of God' who rode his chariot had to be reminded by a slave that he was merely mortal as he received the acclamation of the crowds in the imperial triumph, but Jesus the Son of God hears the call of faith from one of the lowest of society, and at such a call He stops and pays attention.

²⁸⁶ The Greek of the parallel question in v. 36 reads *τί θέλετέ [με] ποιήσω ὑμῖν;*. Whilst not being identical, the basic sense of the two questions is the same. Jesus is inviting Bartimaeus to reveal his understanding and faith in Him.

As with James and John, the response indicates the respondent's understanding of Jesus. James and John wished for eschatological glory without considering the necessity for suffering. Bartimaeus wishes for physical sight, and once received, he neither seeks glory nor position, but εὐθὺς...ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ. Whence Jesus leads, so Bartimaeus follows, for Bartimaeus is the ideal disciple. At the approach of Jesus, Bartimaeus expresses faith born of inherent inadequacy. At the command of Jesus, Bartimaeus obeys. At the touch of Jesus, Bartimaeus can see both physically and spiritually. Bartimaeus' faith in the person and direct obedience to the command of the earthly Son of Man results in a dominical sentence predicated on the Son of Man's eschatological role, "παγε, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε, the use of σωζω intimating that Bartimaeus is both temporally healed and ultimately saved.

Summary

The Twelve continue to misunderstand Jesus' teachings of the earthly Son of Man's role, so who then amongst the original hearers in distant Rome or modern hearers can be saved? Bartimaeus is the ideal disciple, for his response to the approach of the earthly Son of Man is faith born of inherent inadequacy, his response to the earthly Son of Man's command is simple obedience, his reward is a declaration of salvation from the eschatological Son of Man, and Bartimaeus now follows ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, regardless of temporal consequences.

Exegesis VI – The Marcan Concept of Discipleship in 8.27-10.52

The first hearers

The first hearers of Mark were probably Christians in Rome, about to endure or enduring the Neronian persecutions, fearful of the political chaos in Palestine, and dismayed by the internecine strife within their (ex)-synagogues.²⁸⁷ What messages concerning discipleship would those first hearers have heard from within the focus passage?

First and foremost, discipleship requires self-abnegation and the radical rejection and denial of self, of all earthly ambitions and desires, and the acceptance of suffering, not because suffering per se is inherently salvific, but for the sake of Jesus. Only thus is participation possible tomorrow in the Son of Man's eschatological glory. Suffering for the sake of Jesus is fellowship with the earthly Son of Man, and the rejection of such suffering by any disciple excludes one from ultimate glorification. The torments of the arena are therefore to be endured, for therein lies ultimate glorification.

Disciples must also move ἐν τῇ ὀδῷ beyond fear or amazement to a public confession before the Roman magistrates of Jesus as Lord, for to publicly deny the earthly Son of Man leads to denial by the eschatological Son of Man. Discipleship requires obedience to the logia of the earthly Son of Man, who does not abandon His followers in their torment in the arena but remains in fellowship to lead ἐν τῇ ὀδῷ. In confessing the earthly Son of Man and facing the temporal consequences, disciples are not alone.

Whilst confessing the earthly Son of Man, disciples may misunderstand Him and His identity, and any such false understandings will lead inexorably but unwittingly to a false discipleship in the service of Satan. Misunderstandings per se do not exclude from the Kingdom of God, but disciples

²⁸⁷ The use of the term 'Palestine' does not signify either acceptance or rejection of the modern State of Israel, of any putative State of Palestine, or the national rights and borders thereof. It is used primarily for convenience.

must be open to divine correction, as obdurate and unrepentant misunderstanding excludes from the Kingdom of God. Discipleship also necessitates an ongoing sense of inherent inadequacy that arises from participation in the Son of Man's mission, and physical separation from Jesus whilst ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ is to be overcome through prayer, or discipleship becomes ineffective.

Furthermore, there can therefore be no hatred of their former acquaintances within Judaism or of their Roman persecutors. The second passion prediction broadened culpability for the Son of Man's passion: fallen mankind is directly responsible, but the passion ultimately remains within God's sovereign will. Rome may seek to dominate, but the Son of Man submitted to the divine δεῖ. Such is the model for all disciples.

The potential for schisms was considerable, but the hearers are to remember that there can be no disputes about position amongst disciples, for such disputes place one outside the Kingdom of God today. Rather, they are to seek to serve others and put others' needs over personal desires, with mutual submission to the needs of fellow disciples. They are to consider themselves the servant and slave of all, involving selfless actions directed towards others regardless of social norms, living in peace with one another, for inhibiting the walk of another disciple directs the offending disciple's walk ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ towards eternal doom - yet the peace Jesus commands amongst His disciples is only possible to the extent that His disciples serve each other, endure purifying troubles, remove any causes for stumbling within and between themselves, and embrace humility rather than rulership.

Modern hearers

Whilst recognizing that all of the above Marcan concepts of discipleship may apply at different times to modern hearers, there are some particularly apt messages from the focus passage for modern (western) disciples.

In an era of scientific, economic and technological advances, discipleship today, as for the first hearers, requires following Jesus as a child, with no claims or presumptions of self-importance, to receive abundantly what He gives by divine grace alone. There can be no pride in human attainment or socio-economic self-sufficiency amongst modern disciples, for only in a sense of inadequacy and a rejection of any self-sufficiency can God bring about His salvific will.

In an era of fragmented Christianity with rancorous theological disputes over issues such as female ordination, disciples are not to exclude or deny others working in the name of Jesus, as discipleship is ultimately defined in terms of one's relation to Jesus, not to any temporal grouping. All disciples belong to Jesus, and genuine discipleship is recognized and affirmed by God, not by self-appointed arbiters.

In an era of rapidly changing public mores and attitudes towards marriage, discipleship is to be expressed in marriage. Denying self means submitting one's marriage to the Lordship of Jesus and fulfilling the divine intent rather than seeking to exploit divine concessions to fallen demands, and in an era of increasing personal wealth, discipleship is to be expressed in stewardship of one's possessions, through consciously utilizing them for Kingdom purposes and rejecting them should they become a stumbling block to obedience to the dominical command.

Summary

For both original and modern hearers, discipleship is an exclusive following of Jesus, obedient to His command, rejecting of all temporal constraints, and grounded in a deep sense of inadequacy. Anything else, whilst called discipleship, will exclude the disciple from the Kingdom of God. Such is the stark choice facing disciples as they travel ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.

Conclusion

As stated above, the purpose of the paper is to explore the Marcan concept of discipleship through an exegesis of Mark 8.27-10.52. The paper's hypothesis is that '...the ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ motif contained within the focus passage, understood in the light of both the earthly and eschatological roles of the Son of Man, incorporates key Marcan theology that directly addresses the concept and practice of discipleship within the modern context'. Put more simply, is modern discipleship to be lived in the ever-lengthening shadows of Jesus' earthly ministry and His cross, in the breaking dawn of His anticipated return, or in the light of both events?

Our study has shown that Marcan discipleship is indeed a journey ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ a following of the earthly Son of Man, and that without a full appreciation of the Son of Man's earthly role, there can be no discipleship, for a false appreciation of the cross leads to false and futile discipleship. Indeed, daily discipleship ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ must be understood in the context of the Son of Man's earthly role and His commands, for discipleship that rejects the Son of Man's earthly role is ultimately of Satan.

However, our study has also shown that there is a linkage between the earthly and eschatological roles of the Son of Man - the eschatological role follows and is dependent upon the earthly. We have seen that much of the dominical instruction throughout the focus passage, whilst juxtaposed with the passion predictions, is predicated on the eschatological role of the Son of Man. Temporal like will be repaid with eschatological like by the eschatological Son of Man. Disciples' actions today have eternal consequences.

Therefore, understood exclusively in the light of the Son of Man's earthly role, the call to discipleship ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ provides merely an ethical model for living, which may be rejected or accepted without ultimate consequences, but when also understood in the light of the (parallel)

eschatological role of the Son of Man, the call to discipleship has an ultimate significance, for obedience ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ to the commands of the earthly Son of Man will bring eternal vindication from Him in His eschatological role.

Our study has also shown that throughout Mark, Jesus is the focus of attention, for He alone is the Son of God. Discipleship in Mark occurs when human inadequacies and hopes are exclusively directed in faith towards Jesus of Nazareth in both His earthly and eschatological roles, for in that moment of human inadequacy the divine redemptive will can occur, and the disciple has moved further ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ towards the Kingdom of God.

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