

Mark: Stupid, Unbelieving Disciples

God Calls the Weak and Foolish

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Because of the way we approach the study of the Bible, and particularly the way we approach the study of the life of Jesus Christ, we have a tendency to harmonize and synthesize what God's Word says on any particular subject. That is, we have very studiously accepted and applied the principles we find in Isaiah of 'here a little, there a little.' Mr. Armstrong taught this to us quite a bit. We are not to take doctrine from any one scripture, but that we are to gather scriptures from all over the Bible, put them together, and then see the truth that is shown in all of them. We are not to take an obscure scripture and base a doctrine on that when there are much clearer scriptures that show us the way it should be understood. For instance, people love to quote I Corinthians 13 about the love of God. It is a wonderful chapter and it tells us a great deal about the love of God, but it is not the be all and end all of the doctrine of love. There is a great deal elsewhere in Scripture that modifies what is there in I Corinthians 13.

Of course what I Corinthians 13 says is true, but there are things that we find in the gospel, in the epistles of John, and the writings of Paul that shed a great deal of light on what love is. There are even very interesting things that can be learned about love from the Old Testament. Sometimes the word is not *agape*; it is something else—*chesed*, or another word God used to describe His loving kindness.

We can learn from this way of studying. We tend to do this. We have all been taught over the years that we take Scripture from everywhere and harmonize and synthesize it. We do this most in the life of Christ. We realize that there are four gospels, but we either have a 'Harmony of the Gospels' on the shelf at home or, as all of us do, we have an 'internal' harmony of the gospel in our mind. When we read a scripture in one place, we automatically think, "I wonder what the other three have to say about this particular thing". When we see something in Matthew, we then look it up in Mark or Luke or perhaps it might be in John. They all approach things slightly different and with a few more details, but we tend to look at it that way.

There are not four lives of Christ there, but just one. We harmonize it all together. We realize that not all of the gospels have the same information in them. We realize, for instance, that Matthew and Luke have narratives of the birth of Christ. We look at them and say, "Wow, are they talking about the same thing because the things that are in the narrative of the nativity of Christ in Matthew are not shown at all in Luke." As a matter of

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fact, one person that I read about this said the only things that are the same about the two nativities is that there is Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Everything else seems to be different. It is not that one is not true and the other is. They are just looking at the same thing from different viewpoints and adding things that we needed to know that the one had left out.

We understand this. It is part of the way that we study the Bible. We know that Mark and John do not have any nativity accounts. We know that Mark suddenly says, 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ', and we are knee deep in the Jordan River with John the Baptist as he is baptizing Him. That is 30 years after the birth of Christ. John pretty much says the same thing except he starts his gospel with the beautiful 'in the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God'. But, 18 verses later, here we are again in the Jordan River with John the Baptist.

We understand how these things work. We look at the life of Jesus by amalgamating the four gospels—seeing what one records or says about a certain event and then blending in what we find in the other gospels. Then we fix this into our own internal narrative of the life of Christ. This means that normally when we study the life of Christ, we do not take one gospel and study it to the exclusion of the others. We do the old 'harmony of the gospel' thing and look at all four together. That is not wrong. I am not criticizing it; it is probably the better way of doing things. While that is good, and while the gospels give us the same story from different viewpoints, adding in where others leave things out, the themes of the particular gospels and the emphasis that they give to certain things in the gospels appear to be quite different.

It is obvious in the book of John. He is obviously the odd-man out in all of this. It is hard to find things in John that the other ones talk about because John is made up primarily of these long discourses that Jesus gave on various subjects. 'I am the bread of life', this is about judgment, about freedom, about the good shepherd, and various other things.

When you look in the other gospels, they are not there. There may be hints that Jesus might have said something like this, for instance, John 6 talks about the bread of life and you know that this is right about the time of the feeding of the 5,000. The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 is the one parable/miracle that is found in all four gospels. You can go to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and find that one instance. By this, you know that there are hints that He was talking about that, but if we did not have John, we would not have that fullness of understanding. It is good that we look at the gospels separately once in a while so that we can see these particular themes and emphases and pick up the teaching that this particular apostle is trying to teach us.

Today, I want to do that with the gospel of Mark. I want to do it with one theme in particular and I will introduce that in a little while. Before that, I want to give you a little bit of background on Mark and the book of Mark so we can understand things a little more clearly. This background is necessary because of the theme.

We realize that the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very much alike. Scholars have a term for this. They call them the *synoptic* gospels. When you take that word apart, you have the prefix, *syn-* and then you have the root word *optic*. We all know that *optic* has to do with things that deal with the eye. Your optic nerve, your glasses are optical tools, and the science of the eye is optical. *Syn-* which means 'together' and *optic* means to look, see, or view. We get the understanding that Matthew, Mark, and Luke 'see' things the same way. They see things with the same viewpoint. That is an oversimplification, because they really do not see things with the same viewpoint, but they do follow the same narrative trail. There is a story that all three clearly follow.

Most scholars believe that Mark was the first gospel written and that Matthew and Luke took what he had written and used it for their own accounts. They added to Mark's gospel, or they took away, or they polished up his language for their own purposes. This is very important as they had different reasons for writing their gospels. Mark's reason was different from Luke's. Luke's was different from Matthew's and Matthew's was different from Mark's. All three of their gospels were different from John's.

They all had different reasons for doing this. Different events, different attitudes in the church that they were trying to help or to hinder, depending on which way they were. There were different things that they wanted to bring out about the life of Christ that another one had not brought out. As I said, John's gospel was entirely different. When he read what the others had written, he thought they had written very similar things. He wrote about things that were all together different that they had left out. It gives us new territory to explore.

Scholars do not know for sure that Mark was the first gospel written. They seem pretty confident and they have their reasons for being very confident, but to put it in a nutshell, the text of Mark is short. That is their first clue. That it is the shortest of all the gospels. What is written in Mark is almost entirely action. There are not many quotes of Christ. If there are quotes, they are short one or two verses. Very rarely do they get much longer than that. Jesus replies with a great many aphorisms, proverbs, very short picture-type parables, and things like that to get His point across quickly.

They are not the long discourses that you find in John. They are certainly not the long parables that you find in Luke and they are not the long Sermon on the Mount type of

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things that you find in Matthew. Everything is much shorter and much more compact, giving you the impression that it was written for people who needed something quickly. They needed to grasp something in a small amount rather than overwhelm them with a great deal of information.

Also, the book of Mark runs roughly in chronological order. It is probably the most chronological of the four gospels. However, Matthew and Luke both used this Markan Chronology, called the 'Markan Spine', because that is the backbone for those three gospels. The narratives or events that happened in Mark are what the other two used as well. It is interesting if you do a study on the three gospels—the synoptic—Matthew and Luke follow Mark really faithfully. Where Luke digresses to go and add something new, Matthew stays true to Mark. When Matthew digresses from Mark to add something that Mark did not have, Luke stays true to Mark. In this way you can tell that Mark was the basis for what they were writing about. It gives you the impression that when Matthew and Luke were writing their gospels, they had a copy of Mark's.

They were saying, "This is already out there; we will use what he has already said, but we will also add, subtract, emphasize this, put this in it, rearrange this, to make it into a topical approach," or whatever. It seems like, as the scholars have put it together, that Mark was the original gospel writer.

This does NOT mean that Mark's gospel was the first of anything written about Christ. There is a fairly good amount of proof, if you want to put it that way, that there was at least something going around that had the 'sayings of Christ' in it. It was not Scripture, but someone had written down the sayings of Christ and it was being spread around the church. People like to have something in their hands to read. People do not like to trust to their memory about things that have been said in a situation like this because they can get things wrong.

Somebody, early on, wrote them down, and it has been my guess—and I am assuming this just from what I know from the Scriptures and things that have been presented—that this was probably Matthew. That would be my guess because Matthew, it seems, was perhaps the most educated of the disciples. Tradition tells us Matthew wrote down the basis or the beginnings or maybe the whole gospel of Matthew in Hebrew or Aramaic first and then translated it into Greek. There is a possibility that Matthew had written something down, or at least had taken some notes and had written things down fairly soon after the death of Christ and that this is what was going on.

Mark wrote his gospel in a different situation and then Matthew may have gone back, taken his book of notes and attached them to what Mark has given here as kind of the

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'spine' of the story. Then he produced his gospel after Mark. See how that would work? He had actually written notes before hand, but as terms of a gospel that became canon; his gospel actually was after Mark. At least this is the way it could be synthesized. Someone with Matthew's background, as a tax collector, he was very good with figures. Obviously he had to keep good records. I cannot imagine someone in his position not doing something like this—not taking notes, not writing things down, not just trusting his memory on all of these things Jesus said because as John tells us, Jesus said so much and things that He did were so voluminous that no end of books could be written about these things. For someone like Matthew to have written at least some of them down during his ministry or shortly thereafter seems like a pretty good supposition.

Also, we should not forget the fact that these were not peaceful times for that. The twelve disciples who became the twelve apostles were often in fear of their lives. We should remember that Peter and John, in the first few chapters of Acts, are arrested at least twice, maybe more. They are put into prison and they are taken before the Sanhedrin and have to give an account. This is the same Sanhedrin that railroaded Jesus Christ. Who was to say that they would not railroad the apostles to a quick death somewhere?

In order to make sure that the teaching lived on, I would think that at least one of them would have tried to write these things down so it would live beyond them just in case they were martyred. Stephen was martyred very soon, just within a year or two or three after Christ's death. The apostle James was martyred not too long into things also. I think it would be on their minds that they needed to do something for posterity. They just could not preach this information to people; things had to be written down.

Some scholars are beginning to come around to this idea that these gospels were written fairly early. Most do this for the gospel of Mark but not for Matthew, although the date for Matthew has come down considerably over the last couple of decades. It used to be that the scholars believed the gospels were not written until sometime in the late first century or the early second century. We watched over the years and these dates keep coming closer and closer to Christ's death and crucifixion. The reason is because they keep finding things. Some monastery will turn over its books/records and we will find a scrap here or they will go down into the desert in Sinai or Egypt and something will pop up and it will be a confirmation that the gospels were around far earlier than they expected.

It used to be they thought Mark was probably written in the late 60s A.D., although some still will hold to the 80s A.D. as the date. When we use the Bible, we take all of the internal truths that are there, and we take some of the early church writings, we take

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some of the new things that have been found by archeologists or people snooping in private libraries and wherever they find all of these old documents. Also, when we try to synthesize the life of Mark, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, it becomes very clear that the early 60s A.D. is probably the latest that the gospel of Mark could have been written and it seems more likely, as these men do more of their research, that the gospel of Mark may well have been written almost 20 years earlier. Some are now even saying that Mark was probably written in the early to mid 40s A. D. They believe that is far more reasonable.

I do not have time to go through all of that (synthesizing the life of Mark with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas); but if you look at where they were and what they were doing at the time, it seems clear that the most likely time for writing of the gospel would have been earlier on rather than later because of all of the things that were happening in the 60s A.D. and where these various people were and when especially Mark and Peter could have been together. (By the way, if you want to search this out, the Mark volume of the *New Testament Commentary* by William Hendriksen does this very nicely. It is very clearly explained over about ten pages. It is very good reading I think, but that is just me.) A great deal of this dating on Mark's work, Mark's gospel, hinges on Mark's relationship with Peter.

We will quickly go through several verses here in I Peter 5 to show how this may have worked. I want to start here because I want you to see Peter's emotional attachment to Mark and how close they were. In verse 12, he says that this epistle is written by Silvanus. He is the one we know elsewhere as Silas and it is very interesting, kind of as an off-hand remark, that Silas and Mark were both assistants to both Peter and Paul. They traded these men back and forth between each other. Mark also went with Barnabas for a few years in one section of their travels.

Mark was important, as was Silas. Notice what Silas was used for. He was used to write the epistle down. We will find out that Mark had a similar job with these men. Paul did not need this help quite as much because he was quite intellectual and scholarly. He knew these languages and that sort of thing, but Peter was a fisherman. He did not have the intellectual education that Paul had. It is far more likely that he would have need of a writer like Silas and someone like Mark. I do not want to give away what he was doing, but we will see that in a minute.

I Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark [he could have just left it there, but no, he says] my son.

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He had this very father/son type of relationship with Mark. They got along well together and they seemed to work very well together.

Just think as we go through this that he says here, 'She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greet you.' This could be one of two places. It could be actual Babylon, or he could have been speaking in code, meaning that he was writing from Rome. In the church, we have pooh-poohed the idea that Peter was in Rome. I do not believe that. I believe Peter could have gotten to Rome many times during his ministry, however, I do not believe that he was ever bishop of Rome or any type of Pope.

We tend to think that people back then never moved anywhere and if they traveled, it would take years to go from one place to another. We must remember that they lived at the very height of the Roman Empire. The Romans had done everything to make travel easier as far as keeping the Feasts, and making roads that would go long distances and having inns by them. They had to move their couriers and their people along these roads as well.

They had swept the Mediterranean Sea of pirates about this time. The sea lanes were open to them as well. You could get from Alexandria or from Caesarea or somewhere else on the coast to Rome in actually just a short time, as a matter of weeks rather than a matter of months or years. If you wanted to take off from Jerusalem, it was a couple of days to the coast, and then a week or so by boat, and suddenly, you were in Rome. That does not take very long.

Peter could have said in Joppa one time, "We need to go to Rome, we have members there; they haven't been visited for years or never. We can hop into a ship and go across to Rome and be there within a couple of weeks." He could have spent a short amount of time with them before going on to somewhere else.

We do not have his history except for a little short time described there at the beginning of Acts until about chapter 15. After that, he could have gone a lot of places. He probably did go to Babylon, but he could have done that and have gone to Rome as well. There is nothing to say that Peter was never in Rome. He certainly was not there when Paul was there and he was not there when he was writing to the church at Rome.

But, be that as it may, we do not know exactly which he is talking about here. He could be talking about literal Babylon, or he could be talking about Rome itself. It is an open question. Could be either.

Please turn to Acts 12. This is the time when Peter was imprisoned by Herod.

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Remember the angel comes down and frees him and takes him out.

Acts 12:11-12 When Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all of the expectation of the Jewish people.” [They were expecting Peter to die.] So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

Peter pops out of prison with the help of an angel, who gave him a good swift kick to get him going and he comes to his senses. He thinks for a minute and where does he end up? At the house of John Mark and his mother Mary. You would think that after a trial like that, you would go to where you would feel most comfortable. In the city of Jerusalem, it was obviously the house of Mary and John Mark.

Think about this—he goes to the house of Mary and John Mark, and there were many people there gathering and they were praying. That is not as important as the fact that they had a place that could gather a lot of people. If we go back to Mark 14—this is early in the chapter where Jesus is telling the disciples how to prepare for the Passover—he says:

Mark 14:13-15 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man will greet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us.

It is evident, when you put all of these scriptures together, that the upper room that they went to could well have been this same house that Peter went to. The same place that Mary and her husband, whoever he was (he is not mentioned ever), lived. Thus John Mark, as well, was from a rather wealthy family. They had a large house inside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, near to the Temple, because if we put together what happened in Acts 1 and 2 where they used the same place, it seems that it was very close to the Temple.

If we assume that this was the same place, we can get an idea that Mark came from money. They lived right by the Temple, inside the walls of Jerusalem. With a big house,

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it probably meant they had very influential friends. Mark, himself, having come from money, was probably well educated. Because of the international flavor of Jerusalem, it is likely that Mark not only knew Aramaic, he also knew Greek. At least his Greek was vernacular Greek. It is pretty likely that he knew Hebrew as well, or at least a good deal of it, Hebrew and Aramaic being cognate languages.

It is possible, and maybe probable in light of what we will see in a few minutes, that Mark knew Latin. He was multilingual because if he was of a wealthy family with business interests or governmental interests, it would have been smart of his parents to have him taught the Greek and Latin languages. Like I said, this is all supposition, but it makes sense when you see what he was later.

The gospel of Mark has always been associated, in tradition, with Peter. Believe it or not, it has also been associated with Rome. One of the early church writers was a man named Papias and he was born about 55 A.D., so this is pretty early in the life of the church that he was born. He later became a disciple of the apostle John. Papias writes that Mark was Peter's interpreter.

This becomes interesting then as to why he was so well received by Peter, Barnabas, and Paul as a traveling companion. He knew the languages. He could talk to people and if they spoke and the crowd did not know what he was saying because he was speaking in Aramaic, or he was speaking in Greek, but all they knew was Latin or one of the other languages, Mark was there to translate. Paul says that a gift of tongues is a wonderful thing, but you do not want people to be standing up and speaking in one language and nobody understanding. It would be better to have someone who knows that language and interpret.

That is what Mark was there for. He was Peter's interpreter. Peter, probably being a fisherman, knew Aramaic, perhaps a smattering of Hebrew, but his Greek was probably pretty atrocious. That is just a guess. He probably learned a great deal over the years, but early on, he would have probably needed someone like Mark to help him translate; to interpret what he was saying to the crowds.

Papias also says that Mark wrote down what Peter preached about Christ when he was in Rome. Clement of Alexandria, whom was much later than Papias (late second century), records that Mark wrote down his gospel because after Peter preached in Rome, the church there urged Mark to write down what he had said so that they would have a permanent record of it. Mark did so before they moved on to the next place where they were going. The tradition in the early church was that Mark and Peter were bosom buddies; they did a lot of traveling together; Mark was the interpreter. The

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Roman brethren asked him to write this gospel down for their edification and so that they had a better understanding of the life of Christ.

Remember, these people, many of them were people who had come to Jerusalem just on that day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit had been revealed. If you go back to Acts 2, you will find that there were Jews and proselytes that came from far-flung areas and one of them was Rome. Then they believed and went back to Rome, but their knowledge of Jesus and His sayings were sketchy. When Peter came and preached to them, they wanted a permanent record so they could study it and understand it better. That makes sense.

There are a few internal proofs that it was written to a Roman audience.

Mark 12:42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

In Greek it says that she threw in two *lepton* and *lepton* was a Greek term for coinage that means basically pennies or something very small, maybe half-pennies. But you see, Mark immediately translated into Latin. Because *quadrans* is a Latin word. It means basically 'penny' in Latin. Mark is helping his Latin-speaking audience, the Roman audience, by making the equivalent of this Greek term into Latin.

Mark 15:16 Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison.

Now, he does not call it just simply a palace or some Greek term, he uses the Latin term *Praetorium*, to get across that he was meaning that it was the area of the governor's residence. Finally, just a few verses down.

Mark 15:21 Then they compelled a certain man, Simon, a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.

Why does he mention here that he is the father of Alexander and Rufus? Well, go to Romans 16 and we will find out that at least one of these men was a member of the Roman church.

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Romans 16:13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

So, Paul obviously has quite a good relationship with this particular Rufus and with his mother. He had either adopted her as his mother, or she had been motherly toward him and he felt quite a kinship with her. Some have even gone to say that this mother of Rufus married Paul's father and Rufus was actually his step-brother. Who knows? We do not know and it does not matter. It is not all that important.

What is important to us now is that Rufus is a member of the Roman congregation. So Mark's insertion of his name in the gospel would help people in Rome to understand that connection between Simon and Rufus and their own congregation. They could go to him and say, "Hey, tell us what your dad did." I thought that was very interesting.

As for Alexander, we do not know which Alexander he was. There are several Alexanders in the New Testament. The best guess is that he may be the Alexander that stood up in Ephesus (Acts 19:33). He was going to defend Paul there in Ephesus when the great crowd was going wild there saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," but they shouted him down. So, it is certainly possible.

It is time to assemble our facts to summarize. The gospel was written by John Mark, who came from a long-time church family. They were there during the ministry of Christ. They had some wealth and had given John Mark some education. He was an interpreter and multilingual. He knew Aramaic, perhaps a good amount of Hebrew, vernacular Greek, and possibly Latin. He was a young man.

Mark 14:51-52 is the occasion where a young man fled naked. Most people believe that was Mark himself, and that he had followed the disciples. They had just been at his house for the Passover. He followed them to the Garden of Gethsemane and he was there when Jesus was arrested. He, like the rest of the disciples, fled because they tried to catch him and he foiled them by slipping out of whatever he was wearing. Since he was the only one of the gospel writers that mention this, they think that he was the only one who knew about this particular incident, therefore, it was probably him.

So, he was a young man; a teen, maybe a late teen at the time of Jesus' crucifixion and had heard Him speak. It is clear that his affection was for Peter. He followed Peter around like a puppy dog, it seems, and Peter, in turn, treated him like a son. So they traveled together off and on. Mark traveled with Paul and Barnabas as well. They were once again together near the end of Peter's life, as we saw in I Peter 5.

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The gospel of Mark reflects Peter's recollection of Jesus' ministry. It reads like something we would expect to come from Peter. It is active, vibrant, detailed, full of emotion, and blunt. Oh, is it blunt. Just as you would expect Peter to be. Right out there. This is the way it is. Very blunt in its assessments.

Tradition and internal evidence points to a Roman audience. Certainly a Gentile one. Another thing I did not mention before; it explains Jewish customs and translates Hebrew and Aramaic terms because it was assumed that no one in Rome would realize what was going on there. The people in Rome did not know Aramaic and they did not know the Jewish customs.

Finally, it was probably written very early in the church's history; perhaps even before the counsel of Jerusalem. That is normally dated to A.D. 49. So, sometime in the 40s A.D.

I am going to add here that I believe that Mark, as we have seen, was written for a group of people who did not have a great deal of knowledge about Jesus' ministry. He wrote it, not only to fulfill their request to leave something with them on the subject, but he wrote it also as a primer for new Christians. It was supposed to be circulated more widely than Rome and be read by people who were just coming into the truth.

With this background, we will take a tour through the book of Mark. We will concentrate, not on how he portrays Jesus, but on how he portrays the disciples. Remember, this is a book written to new disciples and they want not only to know about Jesus, but they want to know how to react to Him. Mark shows by the way he terms things; by the way he lays things out, just how the disciples reacted to Jesus. He shows how they learned and how Jesus taught them and persevered with them. It will become clear as we go through it.

This is an interesting study to see them from Mark's or Peter's viewpoint. Through this one viewpoint, he presents a stark, but true and blunt picture of them before their conversion. As types of us, it reveals how we were too. It reveals how those Roman Christians were before and how they would have reacted to Christ in the same way. It also contains a bit of hope due to what these disciples became despite the very unflattering beginnings that we see in the book of Mark.

There is hope in the fact that if Jesus could do with these stupid, unbelieving, disciples what He did with them, He could do the same for us.

Let us start through the gospel of Mark. This is the calling of the first disciples, so Jesus

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begins His ministry and then calls them.

Mark 1:14-20 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fisherman. Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. When He had gone a little further from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with their hired servants, and went after Him. ["So long, Dad!"]

What is notable here is the alacrity with which they follow Him. One of Mark's favorite words is 'immediately' and here we see it—immediately. Simon and Andrew *immediately* leave their nets and follow Him. James and John simply leave their father with the hired hands in the boat. In other words, the first image of these disciples is that they respond to God's call unhesitatingly. They were eager and willing. They offered no excuses. They offered no resistance. Their enthusiasm for Christ was commendable.

Peter/Mark starts out presenting the disciples doing a good thing. He presents them positively. They forsook all—it says in the other gospels—all to follow Him. That means John and James left their father, Simon and Andrew left their business and all else, to follow Jesus. We immediately have a very positive view of the disciples. They did something good. They heard the call and they responded.

Consider what Jesus said to them. He specifically says to Simon and Andrew, 'Come after me and I will *make* you become fishers of men.' Did you ever notice that He said that? 'I will *make* you become.' He did not say follow me and you *will* become fishers of men. Mark says specifically here that He said He was going to *make* them become fishers of men. It was going to be *His* actions. It was going to be *His* words, *His* power that was going to transform them into fishers of men.

This verb, specifically the verb 'become' is *ginomai* in Greek. It implies preparation. He is saying here, "You are fishermen; I am going to prepare you to become fishers of men. I am going to prepare you for the job that I have for you. I have a work for you. It is out in the future. I am going to make you suitable and able to do this job." What we have here in Mark's gospel illustrates how Jesus forms and fashions them to do the job that He

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had in mind for them. It was His work that got it done. Otherwise, they never would have changed. If He had not come and made them become fishers of men, they would have remained fishermen. We have a story of transformation by the power of Jesus Christ.

Paul picks up on this and says basically the same thing.

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things which are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

We see that being played out over and over the course of the book of Mark.

Mark 2:13-17 Then He went out again to the sea; and all of the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow me.” So he arose and followed Him. [This is Matthew. Levi was his Hebrew name, Matthew was probably his Greek name. Notice he does the same thing as Simon and Andrew, James and John.] Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. [We have a big feast here, a big banquet where there are a lot of people and they are all following Jesus. But they are of this tax collector and sinner type.] And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, “How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

We have another 'calling' story. The calling story of Levi, or Matthew. He again responds immediately to Christ. But, it does not end there like it did with the other disciples. There is a further bit of explanation in here. When the scribes and Pharisees

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see all of these other sinners and tax collectors with Him, they criticize Him for it. Jesus' reply fits the theme of Mark. He calls 'sinners' to repentance. Those who really need His help.

It is just like the people in Rome. They were of the same sort. They were sinners like these other tax collectors and sinners. They were at the feast at Levi's house. We see that in these disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, and John were manual laborers. They were fishermen. They worked with their hands. They were nothing special. They did not have a great deal of education. Levi, or Matthew, was a hated tax collector. He may have had the education, he may have had a lot of money, but he was of the despised element of society. Nobody likes a tax collector. Of course, he is lumped in with sinners of various stripes. These were people that most other people would not associate with, if they had the choice.

Notice who was excluded: the scribes and Pharisees. These are the ones who were special people. They were very educated. They were higher up in the social structure. Mark's Roman audience was probably made up of laborers and slaves and what not. They would immediately feel that kinship with the disciples. They would say, "these people that Jesus called are just like we are. If they could do this, we could do this. It doesn't take someone of special intellect. It doesn't take special training; you don't have to be rich or be born into a certain family. All you need is to have faith in the Son of God and to learn His way and do His will. We can do this!"

You see the understanding that Mark is trying to promote and it is in his 'reader'. He is trying to say, "Yeah, we have something in common with these fellows that Jesus called." Just after this, if we would go down and read it, are the Parables of the New Cloth, Old Garment and the New Wine and the Old Wine Skin. This teaching buttresses what he had just said at Levi's banquet. The scribes and the Pharisees were the old garments or the old wine skins. They were not resilient enough to accept the new teaching. They were stubborn and stiff-necked, self-righteous, hide-bound, and unyielding. But the common people were more receptive because they realized their need and they were willing to give Jesus' way a try.

Remember Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor." In Luke and Matthew He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He is talking about two parts of the same thing. The poor, the disadvantaged, in life have a need for Jesus that the rich or the well-placed do not. The ones that are poor in spirit have the attitude that they have a need to be filled of Christ.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those

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who love Him?

This is along the same lines when you think of the poor in terms of money, or poor in terms of spirit. Those are the people that respond best to the call of Jesus Christ.

Mark 3:13 And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.

This is just before He appointed the twelve apostles. The preceding paragraph (in the New King James Version) says a great multitude follows Jesus. This shows that many, many, many people were following Jesus. They all needed His help. They needed healing. They needed a demon cast out. They had this and that. They wanted to hear Him speak. They clearly saw that Jesus had the power to help them. He was an answer to their problem. Maybe not the answer in their mind yet, but they could see that He had something that they needed and that they could have, if they followed Him.

Yet verse 13 shows that as much as the mob, the crowd, the multitude, wanted Him to help them, *He* was choosier. He did not just accept the whole multitude as His followers. He picks out His disciples individually. He went up on the mountain and called to them—those He, Himself wanted. He was much more individualistic in terms of who He wanted. We do not join Him, as this big multitude was trying to do, as a big mass of people. He considers us one by one; He chooses some and rejects the many. When He calls them, it says here, they come to Him. When He calls, you are called, and you come. We saw that with the disciples. He called and immediately they got up and followed Him. They were the ones that He had chosen specifically.

As we know, John 6:44 says the Father draws those that *He* wants, to Christ. That is how it works. It is very interesting to go through Mark and see how many times the great multitude is mentioned. There were crowds of people following Him at all times, and out of the great multitude that followed Him, He chose only twelve.

What we have here is an illustration of how specific His calling is; but how unique it is as well. We should be thrilled beyond measure that He has called us. Because there were many, many millions out there that He could have called, but He chose us. He gave us a job to do. It is interesting when comparing the gospels here that Matthew *tells* us twice that Jesus said, 'many are called, but few are chosen', but Mark *shows* us. Very interesting, at least to a guy who likes literary things.

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Mark 3:31-33 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them saying, "Who is My mother or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

We see here that this theme of discipleship in Mark is beginning to build. He shows it very frequently. This vignette illustrates that Jesus is putting together an entirely new family. It is not connected by blood ties; not connected by relationship in terms of blood, but a shared obedience of God's will. That is the one who does what His Father (meaning God the Father) wants him to do is the one who is Jesus' brother. This new family is unified by common righteous actions. Action—that is Peter—action. "Let's go; do stuff; do the work." They do the same things, the things that the Father desires them to do and they do it to please the Father; just like the Son does all things to please the Father.

Again, this is very comforting to new converts. Blood and status do not mean anything in this new family. Faith and obedience to the will of God brings inclusion, acceptance, and ultimately glory. That is something that anybody can handle with the help of God. You do not need to have been born of royalty. You do not need to have been born of money. All you need is to believe and to do God's will.

Right after that, you have the Parable of the Sower. This is where it really begins to get interesting. He began to teach them by the sea and a great multitude was gathered to Him. He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. He taught them many things by parable and said to them . . . We will skip over this and drop to verse 10

Mark 4:10-13 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them." And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all of the parables?"

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This is interesting. The disciples, the ones He had just chosen to be apostles, hear the same thing that the multitudes do. You know what? They misunderstand just like the multitudes do. They do not perceive. Jesus said they do not understand. The way He is talking here, He says—you can hear the exasperation in His voice—'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all of the parables?'

Why does He say that? Because the sower and the seed is one of the first great 'keys' to all of the parables. Because it gives you various symbols that are very easily explained by it; but also, the sower and the seed is one of the simplest of the parables. He is saying, "Guys, if you don't understand this, how are you going to understand the more complex ones that I've got down the line? Are you getting it?" Though they desired to learn, they were almost stupid in their incomprehension. It is only Mark that brings this out, by the way. This is one of those places in Mark that the other synoptic gospels do not bring out. This exasperation of Jesus at His disciples in this particular case.

Mark 4:33-34 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

This is another area that Mark gives us 'insider' information. Only he tells us this. Jesus taught His parables to them as they were able to hear them. Meaning, He brought them along bit by bit. If they did not get this one yet, He went back to it and explained it to them again. It says He expounded on these things as they were able to keep up. He would give them greater detail in private sessions that he did not give to the multitude so that they would begin to build up that understanding of what He was trying to teach them.

Here we see His excellence as a teacher and His careful concern to build their understanding at their own pace. He applies the same kind of care to us as we grow. That is where the Roman Christians would have been encouraged by this. If they did not quite get something, they knew that Jesus, in time, would give them understanding.

Right afterward, Mark gives us a scene to illustrate how little growth the disciples had made.

Mark 4:35-41 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so

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that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that the wind and the sea obey Him!"

What we have here—even though they had seen much and Jesus had taught them much already—is that the disciples do not understand Him. They accuse Him in verse 38 of not caring about them. Then they show great fear and as Jesus said, they revealed that they had no faith. When He does calm the storm, they do not calm down. Their fear only increases. They begin to question who it is they are following. "Who can this be that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" That is not the right reaction. That is a human, carnal, unconverted reaction. Not humble, faithful, or godly. Even though He shows His power over nature, that He can calm the sea with a word, they fail to recognize who Jesus really is. He had given them many proofs already, but they fail to see it.

There is a similar example in Mark 6. This is the one where He walks on water. In verse 44 we see that it is just after the feeding of the 5,000.

Mark 6:45-50 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. And when He sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. [He was going to the other side.] And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and they cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked to them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

This tells you how unconverted they were. They did not even know that ghosts were not real. You would think, "Oh, there is our Master." What were they troubled about? He was going to fall in? No, He was walking pretty calmly there across the sea. They were troubled about who this was. What was He going to do? He forestalls them from doing

anything rash.

I want to interject here that in Greek, this 'it is I,' is not necessarily 'it is I.' It can be, but more likely He said, 'Be of good cheer, I am, do not be afraid'. They were saying, "Who's this out there walking on the water? We're troubled; we're afraid; we don't know what He'll do." And He says, "Be of good cheer, I Am! I am the God that you are supposed to be worshipping. Don't be afraid. You know My character. I'm not here to do anything bad to you. Why is there a need to fear?" Now notice their reaction.

Mark 6:51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.

What is being said here is that they were astonished. This literally is the Greek for "They were out of their minds." They were not comprehending. Their fear had gotten to the point where they were unable to reason. Really, if you want to put it into religious terms, they could not believe what had just happened.

Mark 6:52 For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

He was talking about "I am the bread of life. I'm the one able to make this bread multiply; I will provide." All of that sort of thing; only God can do those things.

Do you know what that word 'hardened' means? You probably do not. You probably have not looked at it in the Greek. That word hardened would be better translated, 'their hearts were *stupidified*' or 'their hearts were blinded.' They could not open up to the idea of who Christ was. They were rigid; they could not accept it.

In Mark 8, Jesus again shows His exasperation with them. As we can see in Peter's case, these things always happen when they are in a boat.

Mark 8:13-14 And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.

Okay, you have twelve disciples, you have Jesus; that is 13 men. You have one loaf of bread and you think, they could just apportion this loaf, one slice per man, that will feed

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13 men. YOU HAD JESUS CHRIST IN THERE! HE HAD JUST TAKEN FIVE LOAVES AND MADE ENOUGH TO FEED 5,000. WHAT DID IT MATTER THAT THEY ONLY HAD ONE LOAF OF BREAD IN THE BOAT WITH THEM? They still were not comprehending.

Mark 8:15-16 Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread."

All they heard was yeast or leaven and they were off to the races on the fact that they only had one loaf of bread. This is how deep their level of spirituality was. Notice Jesus' reaction:

Mark 8:17-21 But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? [He knew.] Having eyes, do you not see? [Remember what He said in the parable of the sower.] And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? ["I fed four thousand; I fed five thousand; I walked on the sea; I stilled the storm. What more do you need me to do?"] When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven." So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"

We do see a bright, little spot of light here in verse 27.

Mark 8:27-29 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

In Matthew, Jesus says, "Hey, wonderful. But God told you to say that. You didn't come up with this on your own." It does not say that here; it just drops it. Then He charged them that they should not tell anyone about it. Obviously, Peter did not want to have the praise here because he understood that it was not him. He had given the correct

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answer, but it was not out of his own heart. It was just because God had told him the answer. Thus, he still was not getting it, and he knew it.

Even though this was a breakthrough, we find that just a few verses later, Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed.

Mark 8:32-33 He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Just as soon as he got the balloon blown up, we are back to unbelief again. Now he is saying the things that Satan wanted him to say, not the things that God wanted him to say.

There is much more in the book of Mark on this theme and obviously we do not have time to go into all of them. I did not mean to go any further than this. Suffice it to say, that this stupidity, hardness of heart, unbelief, faithless, and clueless attitude continue through the crucifixion and the resurrection. Mark shows only three glimpses of growth and belief. We see when they go into the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks Peter, James, and John to stay up with Him and pray. Three times He finds them falling asleep. They were still the way they were before.

In Mark 16, this is after He has risen from the dead. Jesus comes and appears to them in verse 14.

Mark 16:14-16 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all of the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

In spite of just having rebuked them, He gives them their marching orders.

Mark 16:19-20 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up to heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word

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through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Notice that Jesus goes up, sits down at the right hand of God. The very next thing that we see is that they went out and preached everywhere. "The Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen"

What are we supposed to take from this? It is interesting that we do not see Mark showing us the disciples having an "Aha!" moment, and they finally get it; they believe and their belief is life-long. You do not see that. It is not there. They do not come off, even after it is done, as being full of faith. They do not pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to Christ and His Kingdom.

No, Mark leaves it like this. The disciples were unbelieving and hard of heart. But the resurrected Jesus at the right hand of God, with all power in the universe, was able to take this poor clay and make vessels of honor to carry His Word into the world and call others to salvation.

We come to the end and God and Christ get all of the glory and all of the credit for this work that was done. This provides us hope, because we are no better than the disciples were. Maybe some of us were far worse. But that does not matter. God, by His grace and mercy, has put all of that behind us.

Those people that we were before our calling are now dead and buried in the waters of baptism. We have been raised as new creations. We all have newness of life; the life in the Spirit. Despite all of these problems of unbelief, hard heartedness, and stupidity, we can be useful to Him to bring others to salvation. Beyond that, what is more incredible, is that we will be glorified ourselves at Jesus' return.

I leave you with this from James.

James 1:9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation.