



# THE BEREIA PAGE

*“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11*

## Discipleship 101: Learning from Mark’s Gospel

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With 4,541 fewer words in the ESV than the next shortest Gospel (John), Mark is known for getting to the point (cf. [issue 6/20](#)). Hans Bayer notes that he also shows an interest in defining discipleship:

The ultimate purpose and theme of Mark is *to present and defend Jesus’ universal call to discipleship*. Mark returns often to this theme, and as the narrative unfolds he categorizes his main audience as either followers or opponents of Jesus. . . . Mark’s central effort in presenting and supporting this call is *to narrate the identity and teaching of Jesus*. This fact implies that discipleship for Mark is essentially a relationship with Jesus, not merely following a certain code of conduct. Fellowship with Jesus marks the heart of the disciple’s life, and this fellowship includes trusting him, confessing him, taking note of his conduct, following his teaching, and being shaped by a relationship to him. Discipleship also means being prepared to face the kind of rejection that Jesus faced (Bayer 2008, 1889).

Mark’s first chapter illustrates themes that are developed and deepened throughout the writing, beginning with Jesus’ declaration of his mission in Mark 1.14–15. As Larry Hurtado writes,

The urgent conviction reflected in Jesus’ words [in 1.15] sets the tone for the rest of the story of his ministry and, together with his acclamation as God’s Son, marks his work with momentous significance. . . . God has begun to establish his rule in a world viewed by many religious Jews as under the tyranny of Satan and evil. The kingdom of God thus represents the triumph of God’s plan of salvation over human sin and demonic oppression (Hurtado 1989, 22).

The day-in-the-life incidents recorded in 1.16–34 show essential components of discipleship and how Jesus nurtured his learning followers. Verses 16–20 show the surrender that lies at discipleship’s core. Having previously evaluated Jesus (John 1.35–42), Peter and Andrew, along with James and John, made their decisive commitment to follow him.

Against the backdrop of that commitment, we begin to see Jesus’ intentions for his disciples (cf. Hurtado 1989, 22–23). First, he meant for those who followed to participate in his mission, not merely hear his teaching, observe his deeds, or receive his blessings. Second, as he will elaborate when he appoints the twelve apostles (3.13–19), his disciples were to emulate his service in their ministries. At its most basic, to follow Jesus was to be “with him” (Mark 3.14; cf. 1.36; 5.18, 37, 40; 14.33). It was a relationship in which they increasingly identified with him and allowed him to mentor them into a more complete imitation of his image (cf. 2 Cor 3.17–18).

In their association with Jesus, we see three discipleship priorities. First, he was *devoted to teaching* (Mark 1.21–22; cf. 2.13; 4.1–2; 6.2, 6, 30, 34; 7.7; 8.31; 9.31; 10.1; 11.7; 12.14, 35; 14.49). Hurtado calls attention to the fact that, in Mark, διδάσκω (*didaskō*), to teach, is empha-

sized over κηρύσσω (*kēryssō*), to proclaim. The number of occurrences of the words is comparable—*didaskō* seventeen times compared to fourteen for *kēryssō*—but *didaskō* is used fifteen times to refer to Jesus' actions (1.21–22; 2.13; 4.1–2; 6.2, 6, 34; 8.31; 9.31; 10.1; 11.17; 12.14, 35; 14.49) whereas *kēryssō* refers to his actions just three times (1.14, 38–39) (Hurtado 1989, 26).

Second, Jesus possessed a *unique authority* (ἐξουσία, *exousia*; ten times, in 1.22, 27; 2.10; 3.15; 6.7; 11.28–29, 33; 13.34). This underscores the nature of his being, status, and power, especially over demonic forces. It also shows something vital about his credibility: Jesus' teaching gives direction, presenting his disciples with unique insights into reality and how to live.

Third, priority is given to Jesus' *care for people*. Because the demons could neither rebuke nor control him (1.23–25), people were relieved from unimaginable distress and loss of control. Diseases, understood to be connected to sin, or at least to be one of the effects of living in a fallen world, were cured in an instant. These and similar actions demonstrate Jesus' conviction that the welfare of people should be prioritized and their needs addressed holistically (cf. Mark 2.23–28).

These emphasis points show that “discipleship” was not a plank in Jesus' platform, but was rather the life he modeled and expected his followers to emulate. Mark reinforces this in his reports of the disciples' commissioning. They were to preach, call for repentance, engage in healing, and advance his conquest of the demonic (3.14–15; 6.7, 12–13); in short, his disciples were “called to enter into his mission and not to be observers” (Hurtado 1989, 22).

### Works Cited

- Bayer, Hans F. 2008. “Introduction to the Gospel According to Mark.” *The ESV Study Bible*. ed. Lane T. Dennis. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.
- Hurtado, Larry W. 1989 (1983). *Mark*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

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