

The Three-Legged Gospel

Mark 1 Part 1

Mark 1:1 8/26/2017

Summary: Mark presents the gospel in 3 parts. Part 1 (ch.1-8) – Jesus is the powerful, authoritative Messiah. But Jesus commands people no to go and tell yet because they are missing part 2 – that Jesus came as the suffering servant who will die (ch.9-16). Part 3 (throughout the book) is that we are to follow in his steps as suffering servants.

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Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Introduction

Throughout church history, Mark has always been the least popular gospel of the 4 gospels. For most of history it has been neglected by scholars, who would much rather study Matthew, Luke, or John, and by pastors who would rather preach from Matthew, Luke, or John. John MacArthur had a goal of preaching through the entire NT, and guess which book was dead last? Mark. He even preached some books twice before he finally broke down and did Mark.

And the reason for that is that Mark has very little unique material. 95% of the material in Mark can be found in Matthew or Luke, so why do we even need this book?

It’s written by a nobody, who wasn’t even there with Jesus during his earthly life, and who wasn’t an eye witness to any of the events. He wasn’t an Apostle or Prophet or preacher or church leader – he was just a guy who washed out of missions work when he deserted his group in the middle of an important mission trip. It’s kind of a quirky book – very poor Greek compared to the other gospels, and some very strange characteristics.

He seems to present Jesus is almost a negative light. Very often he’s doing and saying strange things that are hard to understand – like the fact that he’s constantly telling people not to spread the word about him. Nobody understands him, his family thinks he’s a lunatic, his disciples are failures. If you’re trying to get someone to worship Jesus and place all their faith and trust in him, there are a lot more glorious and inspiring presentations of Christ in the other 3 gospels. In Mark he seems kind of lowly and even embarrassing at times.

And the whole book ends on a big downer. The women come to the tomb, they find it empty, and then the angel appears and says, “Go tell the disciples.” And then here is the last verse of the book:

Mark 16:8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

The end. The whole book he tells people not to spread the news, then the one time he tells them to go ahead, they don't do it. That's such a strange ending that over the years people have written what they thought would be more appropriate endings for the book. You can find one of them in your Bible with a footnote that says it's not in the earliest and best manuscripts. The original ends at 16:8.

And the beginning of the book is just as abrupt. Matthew and Mark give extensive genealogies, to set the background, and they talk about Jesus' birth, and the background of John the Baptist and his birth. John gives an extended prologue introducing his gospel. Here's Mark's introduction:

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

That's it – then he just jumps right in to Jesus' baptism. Mark says, “You want Jesus' genealogy? He's **the Son of God.**”

You're not going to lay a foundation and then add some pieces and then build to a climax and... No. You want to know what this book is about – it's **The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** End of introduction.

Now, given all that, you might be thinking, *What I'm I even doing here? I don't think I'll ever read Mark again! Why are we studying Mark?*

Mark is a very important book and I'm excited to teach it. When they say that only 5% of Mark is unique to Mark – that's not really true. If you divide up the various verses, yes, you can find those verses in the other gospels. But the message is more than just the collection of verses.

Four Gospels

The first 4 books of the NT – we call them “gospels,” but they are 4 biographies of the earthly life of Jesus. They stand at the beginning of the NT, because Christianity is a religion that is based 100% on history. Most religions are just philosophies. If you could prove that Confucius never lived, that would have no effect whatsoever on the religion of Confucianism. It's just a philosophy, and if it sounds reasonable to you, you buy it to it. If not, you don't. Same goes for Buddhism. It's irrelevant whether Buddha ever existed. Same with Hinduism or Shintoism or Taoism or Sikhism or Bahai – none of them are dependent on any particular events in history.

Christianity is different. The Bible itself says that if you could prove our history wrong regarding Jesus, then the entire Christian faith is disproved.¹ And so God wanted the information about Jesus to be crystal clear, reliable, undeniable, and verified by multiple reliable witnesses. So he gave us 4 inspired gospels.

Having 4 of them gives verification, and it also gives us perspective, because they are all different. If you see a mountain from one angle, that gives you some information, but if you look at it from the east, then the north, then the west, then the south, you get a much fuller perspective. God gave us 4 different perspectives on the life of Jesus – each one is crucial. There are no contradictions, but there are major differences, which gives us depth of perspective and understanding.

Especially when you understand the way Bible writers wrote history, because it's different from the way modern historians do it. Each Bible writer had a message that they were teaching. They were not just summarizing events. They were teaching and trying to accomplish something in the hearts of the readers. And so they would pick and choose which events to mention, which ones to leave out, which aspects to emphasize, what order to present the information, etc. – all for the purposes of having the effects on the heart of the readers that their gospel is going after.

And so the reason Mark is so important is not because he includes a lot of verses that you can't find in another gospel. It's because the way he presents all that information gives a perspective on Jesus' life and teaching that is unique, and crucially important for understanding the gospel. The thing you need to

¹ 1 Cor.15:17-19.

know about Mark is that he writes with a paintbrush instead of a pen. And the picture he paints of Jesus is unique and invaluable for grasping the message of the gospel.

And it's a fun book to read. Mark is a master story teller. Mark is a fast paced, action packed book that focuses more on the actions of Jesus than his teaching. It still records a lot of teaching – about 40% of the book is devoted to Jesus' teaching, which is a whole lot more than what you would read in any other ancient biography. But it's quite a bit less than the other gospels. Mark focuses more on the fact that Jesus taught than on the teaching itself, and we'll see why that is as we go.

And the pace in the first half of the book is really fast – Jesus is just darting from dramatic event to dramatic event with no pauses in between. One thing you notice right away is that Mark's favorite word is "immediately." You don't notice as much in the NIV because they smooth it out by translating it various different ways. But just to give you an idea, that Greek word² is used 6 times in the entire book of Matthew, 3 times in Luke, and 3 times in John. In Mark he uses that word 12 times – just in ch.1! 32 times just in the first 8 chapters. It's always, immediately this, and immediately that. Really fast paced for the first 8 chapters – then in the 2nd half of the book he slows way down, and I'll show you why that is later on.

Another thing about Mark is he's always using the present tense to tell stories. We use that technique in English too. When you want a story to be dramatic, you switch from past tense to present. "The other day I'm on my way to work, and this guy cuts in front of me, and then he slams on his brakes, gets out of the car, and the guy's yelling and screaming at me." Those are all present tense verbs, even though it happened in the past. Instead of saying, "The guy was yelling and screaming at me..." it's "The guy is yelling and screaming at me." That's called a historical present, and we do that to make a story more vivid and exciting. Mark uses that 150 times in his short gospel. Fast paced, vivid, exciting, action-packed, and compelling.

And he really emphasizes Jesus' deeds. So we're not going to get as many of Jesus' sermons in Mark as we would in one of the other gospels, but we'll get a lot of Jesus' actions.

Jesus' Deeds

And that's so helpful because I think one thing we tend to neglect is the deeds of Jesus. We pay a lot of attention to his teaching, which is fantastic, but his works are also designed to teach us. People see an account of a miracle and think, "Oh, Jesus is powerful." And they read another one and say, "Jesus is powerful," and that's pretty much all they get from his miracles. But each of the things Jesus did had a purpose. There is a reason he spit in the dirt and put the wine in water jars and did certain kinds of healings in certain contexts.

They teach us, and they also reassure us. When John the Baptist himself began to doubt whether Jesus was the Messiah, he sent his disciples and they asked Jesus, "Are you really the Messiah?" And Jesus' response was to just perform a whole bunch of miracles right there on the spot and then said, "Go tell John what you just saw."

Jesus continually pointed to his deeds. I won't take the time tonight, but over and over again Jesus reminded people about his deeds. And the Apostles did the same thing in their preaching – pointing people to Jesus' deeds.

The Gospel

Ok, so let's dive in. The very first thing Mark wants us to know is that this book he's writing is **the gospel**.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² *euthus*

It's the gospel. And that might actually come as a surprise to some people, who have been influenced by the more extreme elements of dispensationalism, which teaches that you can't find the gospel in Mark – or Matthew or Luke or John. You can only find it in Paul.

Usually it comes out of confusion about the meaning of grace. People who think that grace means no effort will read Jesus' teachings about arduous effort and giving up everything and taking up your cross and committing your whole life in extreme ways and they conclude, "That's not grace. That's works. That's law. That must be for some other dispensation – not for us."

None of that is true. Paul's way of talking about the gospel was already dominant in the church by the time Mark wrote, and yet Mark still didn't hesitate to call his work **the gospel about Jesus Christ**. This is the gospel.

It's so important that we know what the gospel message is. One of the mainline denominations did a survey among a group of their pastors and theologians asking them to summarize the gospel in seven words or less. Here are some of their responses: "Divinely persistent God really loves us." That's true, but it's not the gospel. Another one: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Super important command, but not a summary of the gospel. Some others: "God is love this is no joke." They had to work a little bit to stretch it out to 7 words. "We can all grow and change." "Christ Humanity occasions our divinity." "We are the Church of infinite chances." "To dwell in possibility" These are pastors and theologians.

I wonder if those pastors and theologians ever noticed the response people in Scripture had to the preaching of the gospel. People either dropped to their knees in full repentance and submission to the Lord or exploded with violent anger. They would routinely riot or beat or imprison or even kill the ones preaching the gospel. Nobody kills anybody for walking around saying, "to dwell in possibility" or even "Love your neighbor."

The true gospel is a message that you can't have a neutral response to – especially the way Mark presents it. Mark is going to just keep putting Jesus in front of our face in such a vivid way that he forces us to either bend the knee or completely reject him. He's not going to allow an indifferent response.

Three Parts

And as Mark lays it out in this book, there are three crucial parts to the gospel. I've titled the message tonight, "The Three-Legged Gospel. And Mark presents those three parts in a fascinating way in the structure of his book as he goes through the story of Jesus' life with his big paint brush. And in this painting of the gospel, the central feature is in the middle of the painting. When we tell a story, the climax is always at the end. But ancient writers would very often put the climax in the middle. You climb one side, arrive at the peak – the climax – the main point, the central feature, then you come down the other side. A great example of that is the book of Lamentations – and the Gospel of Mark.

So if you want an outline of the book, here it is (and it's simple enough you can just keep it in your head). There are 16 chapters, cut that in half – ch.8, that's where the climax of the book is. And there are three crucial elements to the gospel message in Mark. The first 8 chapters – that's part 1. Part 2 is presented in the second half of the book – the last 8 chapters. And part 3 we see throughout the book. But if you just have 1 or 2 of those parts, you don't have the gospel. In order to have the true gospel, you need all three parts, and you need to understand how they fit together. Where do you see how all 3 fit together? Right there in the climax of the book at the center, in ch.8.

So in the very first verse Mark tells us, "this is book is the gospel," and then artfully and brilliantly lays out the three parts in a really dramatic way. And so what I'd like to do tonight is give you a very quick overview of what those three parts are, and how they fit together, so you could flop your Bible open to any random passage in Mark, and be able to say right away how that passage fits into the whole message of the book.

Gospel Defined

But before I show you those three aspects of the gospel, let's start with a definition of the word. The Greek word for **gospel**³ literally means "good news." And typically it was used for good military news or political news. Good news from the battlefield ("We won!"). Or good news about a wonderful new king who has come into power, or who is arriving in your area. A calendar inscription from about 9 B.C., found in Asia Minor, says of the emperor Octavian (Augustus): "the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of the gospel which have been proclaimed on his account."⁴ Gospel! Good news for the world – there's a wonderful new emperor.⁵ So a gospel message was big news, great news of a military victory or great new leader that puts the whole world in a better condition.

The world used that word to describe the arrival of a new emperor, and the Bible writers used it to describe great news about salvation from God.

Isaiah 40:9 You who bring the gospel to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring the gospel to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up ... say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" 10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him.

The Romans often used the term "gospel" in the plural, because there were numerous occasions of good news. In the NT, the word is always used in the singular. The good news of the gospel of Christ is THE good news, *par excellence* – the ultimate and final good news for the world. That good news is the entire Christian message – the whole NT. And that message is founded on the life, death, resurrection, and teaching of Christ. And so when Mark writes an account of the life and teaching of Christ, he calls it **the beginning of the gospel.**

Matthew identifies his work as a "book"⁶ (Mt.1:1), Luke calls his work an "account" or "narrative"⁷ (Lk.1:1), and John calls his work a "testimony"⁸ (Jn.21:24), and Mark refers to his as a "gospel."⁹ All 4 of them are books, all 4 are accounts, and all 4 are testimonies, and all 4 are expressions of the gospel, but it's the term "gospel" that caught on to describe the biographies of Jesus. As soon as there was more than one of them, the early church put "The Gospel According to..." at the top of each one, so the hearers would know which one was being read.

And notice how similar Mark's title is to the inscription about Caesar. Mark: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The inscription: "...the beginning of the gospel proclaimed on Caesar's account." And when Mark says ...**the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God**, that title, Son of God, is another title that was used of Caesar. He was called Lord and son of God. So by using this language, the writers of the NT were putting Jesus Christ nose to nose with Caesar. Who's the true Emperor – the one in Rome, or the one in Galilee? One writer put it this way: "Caesar and Christ, the emperor on the throne and the despised rabbi on the cross, confront one another."¹⁰ But Mark isn't going to say anything directly about Caesar – he'll just paint his portrait of Christ and let you decide.

Part 1: Powerful, Authoritative Messiah

So let's look at these three parts of the gospel.

³ The Greek word translated gospel is *euaggelion*. It's a 2-part word. You know the word *angelos* (angel), which means messenger. The *aggelion* part is related to that. It means a message or news. And in Greek, if you put an *eu* in front of a word, that means *good*. So *eu-aggelion* is a good message, or good news. And if you change the u to a v coming into English, you get *evangelion*, from which we get words like evangelist (someone who shares the good news/gospel), or evangelical (someone who believes the gospel).

⁴ Inscr. Priene, 105, 40, cited in the NICNT.

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⁶ Gr. *biblios*.

⁷ Gr. *diégésis*.

⁸ Gr. *martyria*.

⁹ Gr. *euangelion*

¹⁰ Friedrich, op. cit., p. 725 cited in NICNT.

Part 1 is in ch.1-8, and it's Jesus' ministry in Galilee, revealing who he was by doing miracles and a whole lot of teaching and preaching. He's revealing and proving who he was.

And it's an awesome thing to see. Jesus has such incredible authority. That's one of the big emphases in Mark. He has authority over disease, he has authority over demons, he has authority over the wind and waves and the storm, he preaches with an authority unlike the people had ever witnessed. He has staggering power and authority. It's going to be an amazing several months going through these first 8 chapters and seeing Jesus in action.

However, the first 8 chapters of the book are dominated by confusion about who Jesus. People keep asking, "Who is this?" The disciples are confused, the people who see his miracles are confused, his family is confused, the religious leaders are confused – the only ones who aren't confused about who Jesus is are the demons. They know exactly who he is, but Jesus won't let them speak. Now, the reader knows, because Mark tells us right off the bat in v.1 exactly who Jesus is.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

So we know that right up front, but none of the characters in the story can figure it out. No human being catches on to Jesus as the Son of God until the very end of the book.

Mark 15:39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

That's the first human being who ever gets that in Mark's gospel. So the book begins and ends with a statement about Jesus as the Son of God, but in the whole middle, people are confused.

Part 2: Suffering Servant

The second half is about Jesus' journey down to Jerusalem, where he arrives, and one week later is crucified and rises from the dead. The first 8 chapters zoom through 2 and a half years of Jesus' public ministry – immediately, immediately, immediately, real fast through that. Then Mark slows way down. Chapters 9-10 cover his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, and then the last 6 chapters cover one week. The first half of the book everyone is confused about who Jesus is. The second half of the book it's not confusion; it's hostility – especially from the religious leaders. They end up rejecting him, torturing him, and murdering him, which ends up accomplishing the rest of the gospel.

The Messianic "Secret"

One thing that has generated a lot of curiosity in studies of Mark is what scholars call "the Messianic secret." That's a reference to all the times Jesus keeps telling people not to let anyone know who he was, or not to tell about a miracle that he did. Over and over Jesus will heal someone and then strongly warn them, "*Do not* tell anyone about this!" It seems so strange – why the big secret? And if it's a secret, why does Jesus do so much open, public ministry? I think there were multiple reasons why Jesus commanded them not to tell, and we'll talk about that when we get to those passages, but I'll give you what I think is the biggest reason right now. If people went out spreading the news about Jesus as the Messiah, they wouldn't get the message right. Jesus was like a chef cooking up some wonderful dish, and when people came into the kitchen and tried to take some he'd say, "Not yet – it's not done." When people saw Jesus' astonishing power and miracles and heard his amazing preaching and teaching – they wanted to take that messianic meal and run with it. But it wasn't ready. It was still missing a key ingredient. What was the key ingredient? The second half of the book – Jesus suffering, rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection. If you preach the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, but you leave out the suffering and dying, that's not the gospel. And nowhere is that clearer than in the climax in ch.8.

I told you that the first half of the book is dominated by confusion about who Jesus is. All that confusion comes to a head at the climax in ch.8.

Mark 8:27 Jesus ... asked [the disciples], “Who do people say I am?” **28** They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” **29** “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.”

Christ means Messiah – “You are the Messiah.” That’s right on. Excellent answer! We know from the other gospels that Jesus makes a big deal about that answer that Peter gave.

Matthew 16:17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

So that was a fantastic answer Peter gave, and it was right on the money, but still, it wasn’t enough. As great as that answer is, look at the very next thing Jesus says:

Mark 8:30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

“Wait a minute – I thought I got it right?” You did, up to a point, but that’s not the full story – not even close. Jesus knows that Peter and the others still don’t really get it.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man (another title for the Messiah) must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

That’s the missing ingredient. That’s the part they didn’t get, and without that part, it’s not the gospel. Is Jesus keeping that part a secret? No.

32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33** But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Very dramatic moment. He’s talking to Peter, but he’s looking at the disciples. That is a very poignant, striking way to make a point.

Disappointing Messiah

So why has Mark been such a neglected gospel? One reason may be because he presents such a disappointing Messiah. A Messiah who is a suffering servant who is put to death by Rome. (Another key verse in Mark is 10:45 where Jesus said **the Son of Man didn’t come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life.**) When you’re looking for a dominating rescuer and military leader, and you get a suffering, dying slave, that’s pretty disappointing. All the gospels present Jesus that way to some degree, but Mark really makes a point of it.

The people at that time were under the boot of Rome, and for hundreds of years they had been eagerly waiting for God to send the Messiah who would be like David – defeat all their enemies and lead Israel into once again being a glorious kingdom – dominating the nations. And from time to time someone would show up and say, “I’m the Messiah,” and he would lead a rebellion against Rome (or Greece), and while he was winning the people would get all excited, but then when he ultimately lost, they would say, “Well, obviously he wasn’t the Messiah.”

That was what the people were looking for – a military leader. And that was pretty much the extent of their concept of a messiah. So you can understand, when people figured out, “Wait – Jesus is the Messiah” that Jesus would say, “Why don’t you hold off for now on spreading that around?” Because what they would spread around would be the completely wrong idea.

They had missed the whole emphasis in the book of Isaiah on how the Messiah would be a suffering servant. And that he would die for the sins of the people. That’s why Mark emphasizes Isaiah so much in his book (more on that later on). A suffering, servant Messiah who is put to death was just impossible for them to accept.

This is Some Rescue

To get a feel for what this was like for those people, imagine you were wrongly accused of some horrible crime. Suppose someone's running a scam and they got their little kid to claim that you molested him. And they got someone else to claim to be an eyewitness and it goes to court and then looks like you're going to prison for the next 20 years. It looks absolutely hopeless. Think of how you would feel if that were actually happening to you right now.

But then you hear about this amazing lawyer who specializes in cases like yours and he's never lost a case. And then you find out that he's going to take your case pro bono. You're so excited.

But then as soon as he shows up, they put handcuffs on him, bring him before the judge, and the gavel slams down, and he's sentenced to life in prison. They take him away. Then you find out that they sentenced him to death and he got the lethal injection now he's dead.

That gives you a little bit of an idea of what it would be like for a Jewish person to conceive of a messiah would come and be crucified by the Romans. Or imagine that you are traveling overseas and you got captured by ISIS. They tell the U.S. government that if they don't meet all their demands in 24 hours they're going to cut off your head. And you know they're serious because some of your fellow prisoners heads are laying there on the floor.

But then you hear a noise and you see SEAL Team 6 coming to rescue you. And you're all excited until the whole SEAL team shows up without any guns or weapons, and puts their hands up and surrenders to Isis, who lines them all up and shoots them. And at that point you're quoting the great theologian Princess Leah: "This is some rescue!" That's exactly how the Jews back then would feel about a crucified Messiah: "This is some rescue."

Part 3: Discipleship

So part 1 of the gospel – Jesus is the Messiah who does miracles, preaches like no one has ever preached, and is the very Son of God. Part 2 of the gospel – he came to be rejected, suffer, die for our sin, and then rise from the dead. So what's part 3? Part 3 is where our response comes in. This suffering, serving Messiah calls us to follow him. We are called to humble ourselves, become servants, suffer, and, if necessary, die as we follow in Jesus' steps. That's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

The emphasis on discipleship runs throughout the book, and many scholars have pointed that out as a main theme in Mark. One scholar said Mark has two main topics: the life & teaching of Jesus, and discipleship. It's emphasized throughout the book, and it's also right here in this climactic passage. Right after Jesus explains that he must be rejected and suffer and die, look what he says in the next verse.

8:34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

The call to follow Christ is part of the gospel message. The gospel comes to us not only as news, but also as a command.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 He will punish those who ... do not obey the gospel

The gospel is a command to follow Christ.

So those are the three elements of the gospel So Jesus says, "Who do you think I am?" "The Messiah!" That's right on. That's lesson 1. Lesson 2 – the Messiah will suffer and die. "No way!" Ok, you failed lesson 2. Lesson 3 – Not only will I suffer and die as a servant, but you must follow down that same path of servanthood, rejection, suffering, and death. That's the message of Mark. Put those three parts together, and you have **the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

And remember, the gospel is great news. At first glance, Mark kind of reads like a tragedy. Jesus' disciples are failures, no one understands him, his family thinks he's insane the religious leaders think he's demon possessed, he is rejected and tortured and crucified, and then the book ends with his followers going off in fear and not telling anyone about his resurrection. A tragic story, right? A sad story of a

misunderstood, rejected man who ends up being tragically killed and then forgotten - right? Wrong. Mark says it's a book filled with fantastic news. It's gospel – good news, not tragedy.

So if it's such good news, why is everyone so confused in the first half of the book, and so hostile in the second half? The answer to that question is very important. We're going to be learning a lot of things about how the condition of your heart determines your ability to see the truth – even obvious truth. No matter how much evidence and proof there is, you won't be able to accept it unless your heart is in the right condition. And we'll learn, as we go through this book, how to spot problems in the heart that prevent you from grasping various different truths about Christ.

One thing I didn't have time to get to tonight – what about the fact that this gospel was written by a disgraced nobody who failed at missions? Actually, he failed at just being a helper on the mission field, and that's all he ever was, was a helper. Now that we understand the book, that's actually perfect for this book, right? It's perfect that the gospel that emphasizes the lowliness, rejection, and servanthood of Christ would be written by a disgraced nobody whose only claim to fame is servanthood. Lord willing, I'd like to spend a lot more time on that next time, because there are some things you need to know about John Mark that will be a great encouragement.

Application

So what are the implications for all this for your life? First, don't be like those who missed the Messiah because he wasn't what they expected. Be very careful about trying to force-fit God into your preconceived expectations. God is surprising. When he doesn't do what you thought he would do, when a passage in the Bible doesn't say what you expected, always be ready to adjust your expectations to the way God really is.

And let's make sure we never file off any of the sharp edges of the gospel to make it more acceptable. I get a daily email list of churches looking for pastors, and several times I've read job descriptions that say, "We want to be a place where unbelievers like to go to church." If the world in general likes going to your church, it must not be the same message that Jesus preached, because the world didn't like that at all.

And don't be ashamed of Christ, or he will be ashamed of you on Judgment Day. If people ridiculed and rejected him then, they will do it now (if we present him accurately). And that ridicule and persecution and hatred will end up directed at us. We must be willing to stand by him and endure that.

Hebrews 13:13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

Don't be ashamed of Christ, and don't be ashamed of the gospel. The path of following Christ as a disciple is a path that leads through suffering and disgrace. So let's never forget Jesus' simple command: "Follow me."