

THE GOSPEL OF
MARK



INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark is one of the first accounts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The earliest historical traditions available link this book to a scribe named **Mark, or John Mark**, who was a coworker with Paul (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11) and Peter's close partner (1 Peter 5:13). In fact, an ancient church historian named Papias recalls that Mark had collected all the eyewitness accounts and memories of Peter, shaping them into this book. He writes primarily for non-Jewish people (Romans) as observed in his literature, wherein he explains Jewish customs to Gentile readers and avoids genealogies.

Mark, painstakingly curates the story of Jesus. In the very first line, he makes his claim about who Jesus is: ***"The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God"*** (Mark 1:1). What's interesting is that this is the only time Mark expresses his thoughts about Jesus. Throughout the rest of the book, he inspires the reader by presenting Jesus' actions and words and demonstrating how other people react to Him.

The entire life of Jesus is portrayed by Mark as one passage with three movements – ***from Galilee, On the Way, and to Jerusalem***. The main goal of the gospel is to show us what it means to follow Jesus – to be a disciple. Mark hints at how ordinary men and women of all ages and all places can embark on the ***"Journey of Discipleship"*** with Jesus and be a part of God's kingdom.

THE BIG IDEAS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

■ Mark portrays Jesus the Messiah as a Suffering-Servant

While the Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the King, Mark reveals Him as a Servant. Jesus announces His role in this central passage of Mark, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45) The message of the Messiah is clear: He is not here to conquer the Roman legions but to suffer and die as an **atoning sacrifice for sins**. Mark writes to show that Jesus' crucifixion does not negate His claim to be the Messiah, but rather affirms it!

■ A Journey of Discipleship

From the beginning to the end, Mark's Gospel is an invitation to discipleship. He encourages us to follow Jesus on the path of discipleship by identifying Him as the Messiah and submitting to the new life that Jesus offers.

Mark makes it very clear that we cannot embrace Jesus as the Messiah, the incarnate Son of God, without **following Him to the cross**. It's a journey from Galilee, along the way with Jesus that leads to Jerusalem. It challenges the readers to count the cost of discipleship carefully. Interestingly, the journey of discipleship is a way of suffering into glory! Following Jesus simply means denying yourself (death to self), taking up your cross, and living His new life that He offers (Mark 8:34).

The concept of following Jesus *"on the way"* is, of course, not foreign to the New Testament. Jesus Himself is the *"Way"* (John 14:6), and Christians are said to belong to the *"the Way"*. *"Walking in the Way"* is virtually a synonym for the conduct of life – a journey with Jesus!

■ **The appointed Twelve failed to understand Jesus but many outsiders believed in HIM**

The Twelve repeatedly failed to accept or understand Jesus' path to His crucifixion and death. Three times, on the road to Jerusalem, that final Passover week, Jesus privately explains to the 12 what horrors of suffering and death lie ahead (Mark 8:31-32; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Mark emphasizes that *"He said this plainly"* but the disciples *"did not understand and were afraid to ask Him"* (Mark 8:32). This sheer failure of the 12 male apostles comes to a climax in the shortest verse in the Gospel of Mark – in the Garden of Gethsemane, *"And they all forsook him and fled"* (Mark 14:50)

On the other hand, we have outsiders like blind Bartimaeus who believed without seeing, a cast of lepers who were willing to believe Jesus as the Messiah, a Roman Centurion at the crucifixion who confessed that Jesus is the Son of God, and even the demons in the text believe that Jesus is Lord. As for the twelve apostles, their progress was slow in their journey with Jesus. Interestingly, Mark makes efforts for us to see that the women disciples believed more than the male disciples. The bleeding woman who touched Jesus' garments, the Syrophenician woman who was relentless in following Jesus,

and the woman who gave her precious savings of an alabaster box of oil, show their willingness to give their all and accept the suffering mission of Jesus. All these people who were on the fringes understood the vision and mission of Jesus, except the twelve.

■ Mark: The Unique Storyteller – The Markian Sandwiches!

Markian sandwiches is a literary technique that involves starting a story that pulls the reader in, then switching to another storyline before concluding the first story. He uses two contrasting stories and places them close to each other, which derives a theological response from the readers.

One of the most obvious “sandwiches” in the Markan narrative occurs in chapter 5. It looks like this:

(A) Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, approaches Jesus and asks Him to heal his 12-year-old daughter (Mark 5:21-24).

(B) An ostracized, unknown woman suffering bleeding issues for 12 long years has faith to be healed and touches Jesus secretly. (Mark 5:25-34).

(A') Jesus continues to the house of Jairus to heal his daughter (Mark 5:35-43)

The central story is the “*meat*” of the sandwich and often is where Mark’s main emphasis lies within that portion of the narrative.

■ A sense of Urgency is derived from the Gospel of Mark

The English word *"immediately"* jumps off the page in the Gospel of Mark. It is used at least 35 times in Mark, close to half the occurrences of the word in the entire New Testament. With so many events happening *"immediately"* in Mark, the Gospel takes on an urgent tone. Through the eyes of John Mark, Bible readers get a quick-paced, action-packed view of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry.

In Mark's Gospel, Peter and Andrew *"immediately"* leave their nets to follow the Lord (Mark 1:18). In Capernaum, Jesus *"immediately"* goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach (Mark 1:21). When Jesus takes Jairus's dead daughter by the hand and says, *"Little girl, . . . get up,"* the child *"immediately"* stands up and begins to walk around (Mark 5:41).



CHAPTER SUMMARY

Act I: In Galilee

Mark 1 – Mark 8:26

The Identity
of Jesus

Mark 1:1
*"The beginning of
the good news
about Jesus the
Messiah, the Son
of God."*

Act II: On the way

Mark 8:27 – Mark 10

The Mission
of Jesus

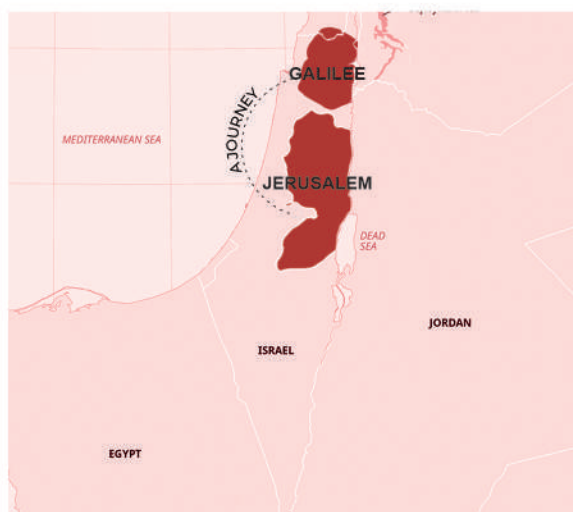
Mark 10:45,
*"For even the Son
of Man did not
come to be
served, but to
serve, and to give
his life as a
ransom for many."*

Act III: In Jerusalem

Mark 11 – Mark 16

The Suffering
Servant Messiah

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



ACT I: IN GALILEE

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

(MARK 1:1-8:26)

Discipleship

Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark geographically begins in the desert where Satan lurks (1:13) and ends in the tomb (16:1), another locus of demonic habitation (5:2). But for Mark, these dangerous places are locations that are transformed by Jesus and it is a beginning of new life with Him.

The baptism of Jesus in the desert and resurrection in the tomb. The call of disciples in the desert and the *"recall"* of the disciples at the tomb. The announcement of God's kingdom in the baptism while the establishment of God's kingdom at the resurrection.

The element of baptism as a beginning of new life to follow the way of Jesus Christ points towards a *"New Exodus"* leading people through the desert and into the Promised Land.

Discipleship is *"a new trek with God"* and it would take a life-change to embark on this journey!

The Mighty Messiah & Son of God

The first line of the Gospel introduces Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of God" and the narrative that follows is clearly meant to confirm this identity. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark tells us nothing about Jesus' birth or childhood. Unlike John, we learn nothing about his pre-existence or "incarnation" (coming to earth as a human being). Instead, Mark plunges right into the public ministry of Jesus. In a few short paragraphs, we hear about Jesus' preparation for ministry: the role of John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah, the baptism of Jesus by John, and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness by Satan.

Repentance

Mark 1:15 *"The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent** and believe the good news!"*

Repentance or "*Metanoia*" points to the call for "*a reorientation to the paradoxical values of the kingdom of God,*" a mindset that is not assimilated in the instant of the initial commitment of faith but, rather, through a lifetime of following Christ. This is a radical call – forgiveness outside the temple confines, remission of sins without any priestly rituals or even a sacrifice but a call to new life by readying themselves to travel with Jesus.

Acts 2:38-41 marks the birth of the church with Peter announcing to all about how to live this new life in Jesus?

Peter replied to them, "***Repent** and be **baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the **gift of the Holy Spirit**.*"³⁹*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

Before we can catch our breath, Jesus launches into His ministry, announcing the kingdom of God, calling disciples to follow Him, and beginning a campaign of preaching, healing, and casting out demons.

The key word throughout this first half of Mark's Gospel is "*authority*." Everything Jesus does, He does with authority. Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom (Mark 1:13) is itself a claim of extraordinary authority. God's "*Kingdom*" refers to His sovereign authority over all things as Creator and King. He is the Lord of the universe. Yet, since the "*fall*" of Adam and Eve, creation has been in a state of rebellion, fallenness, and decay. The "*Kingdom of God*" is shorthand for the renewal of all things. Jesus makes the remarkable claim that He is here to restore creation itself!

Claims to authority continue as Jesus begins His public ministry. He calls four fishermen to be His disciples and they drop everything to follow Him (Mark 1:16 -20). Jesus' authoritative command inspires them to leave behind family, homes, and occupations. Jesus then enters the synagogue in Capernaum and begins to teach. The people are amazed because He taught with authority, not like the teachers of the law (Mark 1:22). A demon-possessed man suddenly shows up in the synagogue. The demon quakes with fear at Jesus' authority, *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"* (Mark 1:24). Whenever Jesus encounters demons, they recognize His identity and are terrified (Mark 1:24, 1:34, 3:11-12, 5:7). He is the mighty Messiah and Son of God!



Acts of authority continue throughout Jesus' ministry in Galilee. By healing a lame man, Jesus confirms that *"the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"* (Mark 2:10). As *"Lord... of the Sabbath"* He exercises authority over the Old Testament law (Mark 2:27). By appointing twelve apostles, representing the restored tribes of Israel (Mark 3:13-19), Jesus acts with the authority of God Himself, who first called Israel into existence.

Divine authority is also evident as Jesus controls the forces of nature, calming a storm with a command, *"Quiet! Be still!"* The terrified disciples respond, *"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"* (Mark 4:39, 41). **This question, "Who is this?" aptly summarizes the theme of this half of the Gospel.** The question, in time, is answered with Peter's confession in Mark 8:30. More and even greater miracles follow. Jesus casts out not one, but a *"legion"* of demons (Mark 5:1-20); He heals chronic diseases with no cure (Mark 5:25-34); and raises a young girl from the dead (Mark 5:35-45). Twice He feeds thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and fish (Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-13). He walks on water (Mark 6:45-56), a divine act, since *"God alone... treads on the waves of the sea"* (Job 9:8).



ACT II: “ON THE WAY”

THE MISSION OF JESUS (MARK 8:27 - MARK 10)

The Gospel of Mark reaches its pivotal point in the confession of Peter, which serves as its initial climax. Jesus takes His disciples north of Galilee to Caesarea Philippi for a time away from the crowds. On the way, He asks them, *“Who do people say I am?”* Their answers varied: *“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”* Jesus then turns to them: *“But what about you?... Who do you say I am?”* Peter answers for the others: **“You are the Messiah!”** Jesus’ authoritative words and actions had convinced Peter that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Savior of Israel.

Two stage healing of the Blind

Mark is the only one who records the miracle of Jesus healing a blind man in two stages – Mark 8:22-26.

The two-step healing doesn’t imply that Jesus *“failed”* at His first attempt at healing, or that He is somehow inadequate. Even the superficial reader of Mark’s Gospel couldn’t miss the clarity with which Jesus is repeatedly presented as the authoritative, omnipotent Son of God.

Is there perhaps something more intended by the story, though? Does Mark see in Jesus’ two-step miracle a parable for the partial blindness of the disciples?

In the account that immediately precedes the healing of the blind man, Jesus pointedly asked His disciples, *“Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not*

But in a shocking twist, **Jesus defines the role of the Messiah as one of suffering and death** (Mark 8:31). Peter is shocked at this defeatist attitude and rebukes Jesus. Jesus rebukes him right back: *“Get behind me, Satan!... You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns”* (Mark 8:33). Though Peter is right that Jesus is the mighty Messiah and Son of God, he cannot fathom the suffering role of the Messiah. Yet, without His suffering and death, the salvation of humankind would have not been accomplished. This was Satan’s goal, to thwart God’s plan of salvation.

see, and having ears do you not hear?” (8:18). To instantly follow these words with the account of a man who literally has eyes but doesn’t see doesn’t appear to be accidental on Mark’s part.

In a sense, they see His ministry with severe near-sightedness. Rather than seeing Jesus as the suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 53), they have quite a few misconceptions. Many biblical commentators see a parallel with the blind man’s healing. If they’re correct, Mark would then be implying that the disciples need a *“second touch”* from Jesus (through His continued ministry and teaching among them) so that they might see more clearly who He is and why He came.

From this episode onward the focus is on the cross. Three times in the next three chapters Jesus predicts His suffering and death. These predictions climax in Jesus’ teaching in **Mark 10:45**, where He defines the reason for His death: *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

In Act II, Jesus speaks openly about the suffering Messianic mission that involves: the **three Passion Predictions** (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). It is significant that all three occur in Act II, while Jesus and the disciples are “on the way” from Galilee to Jerusalem. Notice the escalation in the intensity of the three predictions as they go from indirect speech to direct speech, and finally to direct speech with great detail and elaboration.

<i>Passion Prediction I Mark 8:31</i>	<i>Passion Prediction II Mark 9:31</i>	<i>Passion Prediction III Mark 10:33-34</i>
<p><i>Son of Man must suffer be rejected by elders / chief priests / scribes</i></p> <p><i>be killed after three days rise again</i></p>	<p><i>Son of man to be delivered into the hands of men</i></p> <p><i>they will kill Him after three days rise again</i></p>	<p><i>In Jerusalem Son of man will be delivered to chief priests / scribes</i></p> <p><i>who will condemn Him to death, hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock, spit upon, scourge and kill Him after three days rise again</i></p>

Transfiguration

In the center of Act II, Jesus provides an encouraging vision of the future glory that He had predicted. The Transfiguration of Jesus is the snapshot of future glory promised to disciples.

Since it is something the disciples “see”, the account of the Transfiguration is narrated from the disciples’ perspective: Jesus transfigured “before them” (9:2); Elijah’s appearance “to them” (9:4); Peter’s immature response (9:5); the terror felt (9:6); being overshadowed by the cloud (9:7); the voice addressing them about Jesus (in the third person) and commanding them to listen to Him (9:7); and their looking around and seeing no one else but Jesus “with them” (9:8). The disciples, like the historic Moses and Elijah, ascend the mountain at a time of discouragement and receive a preview of what glory will be like, to keep them persevering in the discipleship mission that, for now, only involves self-denial and cross-bearing. **The message for Jesus’ disciples is clear: While suffering has been foretold, glory is sure to come; they are to take heart.**



Moses and Elijah are the only two to have ever seen a theophany on a mountain – Elijah met with God on the same mountain as Moses (1 Kings 19:8-18); both were faithful servants who suffered because of

obedience. Neither saw death. This event united two expectations, which were alive in Judaism: the coming of the prophet of the end-time who is like Moses and the appearance of Elijah at the dawning of the “end-time”. Both expectations were met by Jesus.

The Transfigured Jesus who promises future glory but predicts present suffering, is the One disciples must listen to, and whose mission they should accept.

Interestingly, Peter wants to completely disregard the suffering project of Jesus and wants to stay at the mountaintop heavenly residence with heavenly beings. Peter thinks the kingdom has finally come in power and he wants to build three tabernacles. Moreover, he ranks Jesus as merely being one of the prophets, *“for the proposal is to build three shelters, not one throne.”* He and the other disciples did not understand the nature of the task that lay ahead for their Master and themselves.

The glorious mountaintop ends with a command from God
“Listen to Him!” The disciples are to listen to Jesus! What Jesus has said about His mission and that of His followers (8:31) is what must be heard and accepted now. Glory will come later. For the present, the call is to *“listen to Him,” i.e., to accept the mission Jesus undertakes, denying oneself and taking up one’s cross to follow Him who goes ahead.”*

Of the Twelve, these three who accompanied Jesus on the mountaintop, Peter, James, and John, had the best chance of understanding the scenario: they were the very ones who had witnessed an earlier miracle of Jarius daughter rising (5:37). And if Jesus was associated with the two *“death-less”* ones, Moses and Elijah, could not Jesus Himself die and rise again? So this Transfiguration was supposed to assure the disciples of the promised glory and with that hope, they are to press on, *“On the Way”*.

ACT III: IN JERUSALEM

THE SUFFERING SERVANT MESSIAH (MARK 11 – 16)

The Naked Young Man

*"And a **young man** followed him, with nothing but a **linen cloth** about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked." (Mark 14:51-52)*

*"As they entered the tomb, they saw a **young man** dressed in a **white robe** sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed." (Mark 16:5)*

Mark is not an incompetent writer but he uses sophisticated literary devices to bring out the greatest theological truths with the help of the Holy Spirit.

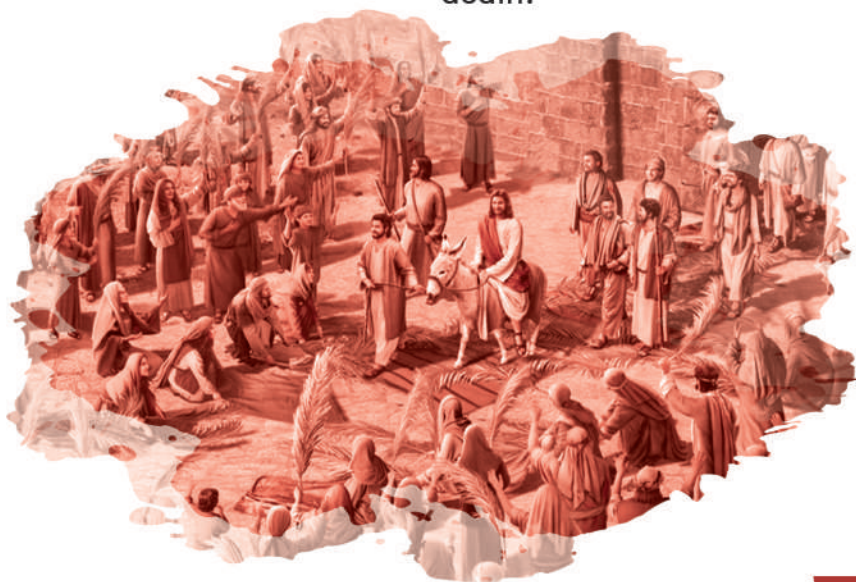
Mark 14 mentions twice that the young man wore a "linen cloth", the only other time this word is used by Mark is at the burial of Jesus who was wrapped in "linen cloth" (15:46 also twice). So, this would indicate a "clothing exchange" in the theology of Mark; that the cloth abandoned in shame was taken up by Jesus at His death.

In chapter 11, Jesus enters Jerusalem riding into the city on a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. This "**triumphant entry**" is Jesus' first public disclosure of his messiahship. Prior to this, Jesus had intentionally kept a lid on His identity as the Messiah. Scholars refer to this unusual feature of Mark's Gospel as the messianic secret. Jesus silences demons when they try to identify Him (Mark 1:25, 1:34, 3:11-12, 5:7); He commands those who are healed not to tell anyone about it (Mark 1:44, 5:43, 7:36, 8:26); and He warns His disciples not to disclose that He is the Messiah (Mark 8:30, 9:9). Why the secret? With Jesus' announcement in Mark 8:31, the reason becomes clear.

Mark 16 mentions the young man (it is an angel as reported by other gospels but Mark is doing something with calling him a young man) at the open tomb. His clothing is pure white. The only other time in Mark where "white" garment is mentioned is at the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:3). So, it appears that another "clothing exchange" has occurred. At Jesus' resurrection, the white robes of glory now clothe the young man.

There is hope for all who follow Jesus. Because of what Christ did, the shame and failures are exchanged for His glory –
True Divine Exchange!

Popular expectations among the Jews were centered on a warrior Messiah who would defeat the Romans and establish God's Kingdom on earth. The people would be inclined to make Jesus king on their terms. In response, Jesus tamps down messianic expectations to define the true (suffering) role of the Messiah. He was here to conquer much greater foes than the Roman legions. He was to destroy humanity's greatest enemies: Satan, sin, and death.



Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem as Messiah is followed by several provocative acts. Jesus clears the temple of moneychangers (Mark 11:1-11), engages in several controversies with the religious leaders (Mark 11:27-33, 12:13-37), and tells a parable that presents the religious leaders as evil tenant farmers who are mismanaging God's vineyard (Israel) (Mark 12:1-12). All of these acts challenge the authority of Israel's leaders and provoke them to respond. Their response is to plot Jesus' murder (Mark 11:18, 12:12, 14:1).



All of this leads to the final night (Mark 14) when Jesus has the Passover meal with His disciples, a symbolic meal that tells the story of Israel's liberation from slavery through the death of the Passover lamb. Jesus takes these symbols and gives them new meaning. They point to Him and the liberation from sin and death that will take place through the death of the suffering servant Messiah. Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion are dark and disturbing scenes in Mark's Gospel. At Jesus' arrest, Judas, one of His own, betrays Him. All of His disciples abandon Him.

While Jesus stands trial, outside in the courtyard, Peter—the leader among the disciples who claimed absolute loyalty (Mark 14:29, 14:31) – denies Him three times (Mark 14:68, 70, 71).

In a travesty of justice, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate concedes to Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus died on the cross in darkness, rejected by His own nation, mocked by bystanders, and abandoned by His closest followers. Even God seems to have abandoned Him as Jesus cries out the words of Psalm 22:1: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Mark 15:34).

Yet, for those with eyes of faith, this was no tragedy. As Jesus had been teaching all along, His death was part of God's sovereign purpose and plan to provide an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (Mark 10:45). Victory comes through sacrifice, suffering, death, and resurrection.

On the third day, after Jesus' death and burial, Mark describes how a group of women come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They are shocked to discover that the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. An angel announces that Jesus has risen from the dead! Yet the women are bewildered and leave the tomb in fear and silence (Mark 16:1-8).

The whole Gospel is a call to faith in the face of trials and suffering. Mark's readers, who are likely suffering for their faith (see below), have heard the announcement of the resurrection,

but they do not see Jesus physically with them. In this way, they are in the same position as the women. Will they respond with faith or with fear? Mark's whole Gospel, including the empty tomb story, is a call for faith instead of fear in the face of an uncertain future.

CONCLUSION

Mark's Gospel is designed to influence its readers to change their lives in thought, in feeling, and in action to comply with the precepts, priorities, and practices of God's world, which is displayed in, with and through the inspired story written by Mark.

Mark is emphasizing that a disciple is the one who follows Jesus, discerning his person, accepting his mission, and being faithful to Him on the way to glory but through suffering of giving up oneself to accept the Kingdom of God.

Mark, through the Holy Spirit, beckons the listeners, the Gospel concludes with an open invitation: Jesus will meet his disciples in Galilee again! Jesus is ready for the next round of a trip of discipleship for his failed disciples. This Gospel, therefore, appears to be cyclic with a fresh start pointing to the beginning.

Will we sign up for this trip of discipleship? Let's get ready to follow!



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