

Journey to Jerusalem: Moving Toward the Cross

As the Gospel of Mark progresses, the cross of Christ starts to loom over the story. The Gospels are not mere biographies of Jesus; they are passion narratives with an extended introduction! So, how does the text establish the cross-focus for the reader? We will look at the role of predictive sections and the shadow of the cross over other events in Mark's account.

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I. Three Passion Predictions

- A. What are the features of the passion prediction?
- B. What is the response of the disciples?
- C. What is the teaching on true discipleship?

	Chapter 8 (8:31)	Chapter 9 (9:31)	Chapter 10 (10:33-34)
Passion Prediction			
Disciples' Response			
Teaching on Discipleship			

Mark 8:22–38 (ESV)

Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida

²² And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. ²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” ²⁴ And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.”

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

The teaching on discipleship continues with the Transfiguration (9:2-13) where God affirms the Son as the one to hear, with Moses and Elijah (Law and Prophets) as witnesses. Note also the continuing hard hearts of the disciples (Peter on the mountain), the others with the demon-possessed boy in 9:14-29).

Mark 9:30–37 (ESV)

Jesus Again Foretells Death, Resurrection

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Who Is the Greatest?

³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them,

³⁷ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

Notice how this instruction is picked up in the following sections (welcome little ones, vv38-50), before coming back to it in 10:13-16, contrasted with the rich in 10:17-31 (for whom it is hard to enter the kingdom of God – a shock to the disciples.)

Mark 10:32–45 (ESV)

Jesus Foretells His Death a Third Time

³² And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

The Request of James and John

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” ³⁹ And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

II. Summary

This central section is structured around Jesus’s three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). The pattern of Jesus’s first passion prediction repeats in the other two. Each is followed with teaching on the shape of discipleship—as its exemplified in the narrative of the Gospel. As Aernie points out, the disciples react negatively to Jesus’s passion predictions with “insolence (8:32-33), fearful silence (9:32), and misplaced arrogance (10:35-41).” However, in each case Jesus corrects their reaction by teaching on the nature of discipleship—“cruciformity (8:34-38), inversion of social hierarchies (9:35-37), and self-sacrificial service (10:42-45).” Each failure to grasp the significance of Jesus’s death proves that “a wrong view of the Messiah leads to a wrong view of discipleship.” (Orr, 119)

[Considering the section on children and divorce in 9:36-10:16, Orr continues] Furthermore, this passage *domesticates* (in the non-pejorative sense of this word) Jesus’ radical teaching of

8:34-38. Following Jesus, denying oneself, and carrying the cross for Jesus's sake and for the gospel does not mean abandoning one's marriage or children. (Orr, 120)

Discipleship is central to Mark's Gospel. It is not disconnected from Christology but rather "the proper outcome of a healthy Christology." The supreme example of discipleship in Mark is Jesus himself. He lives out and models the life of a disciple, and he does it to the end, serving others even to the point of death.

We have seen both discipleship's radical nature—the call to follow Jesus unto death—and its domestic nature—the command to remain married unto death. This discipleship, while focused on following and making sacrifices for Jesus, is also "for the sake of the gospel" and therefore connects to mission. In fact, it reaches beyond following and imitating Jesus to participating in Jesus' own mission. (Orr, 121)

Peter Orr. *The Beginning of the Gospel: A Theology of Mark* (Crossway, 2023)