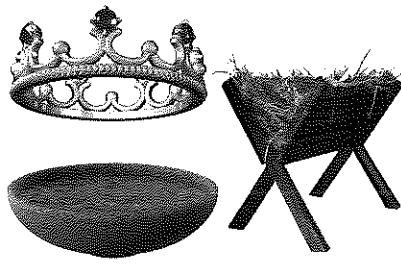


Mark: Jesus, the Suffering Servant



Topic

Gospel of Mark

Theme

The Gospel of Mark presents Christ as God's suffering servant Who came to seek and save the lost.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will consider his service for God in light of Christ's service as recorded in Mark.

Materials

- Resources 1, 2, 4, and 5
- Photos of yourself
- Handout 1

Scripture Focus

Mark

Summary

This lesson is an overview of Mark. It will introduce Mark the writer and will trace his presentation of Christ as the Servant of God. Special emphasis will be given to our response to Mark's presentation of Christ.

Outline

I. Authorship of Mark

- A. Mark, the minister
- B. Mark, the writer

II. Mark's Purposes

- A. Demonstrate Christ Suffered and Served
 - 1. Temptation in the wilderness
 - 2. Rejection by family
 - 3. Passion predictions
- B. Encourage persecuted Roman Christians
 - 1. Greatness comes by serving
 - 2. Service includes bearing one's cross

Memory Verses

"But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43–45).

GETTING STARTED

In Five Snapshots

Before class, gather five pictures that together give a snapshot of your life. Pass the pictures around the classroom or project them for the class to view. Have the learners who gathered pictures about their lives do the same. (See note at the end of lesson 2.)

ASK: What did you learn about someone else as a result of this activity?

ASK: What pictures of Christ might give us a snapshot of His life?

Mark wrote his Gospel to give a snapshot of Jesus Christ. The pictures help us understand that Jesus came to earth as a servant of God. This lesson will present some of Mark's snapshots of Christ. It will challenge us to emulate Christ's servant's heart.

Service Guess

Before class print handout 1 and cut apart the four cards. Organize your learners into two teams. Ask for two volunteers from each team. Give each of the volunteers a card. Choose one team to go first. The volunteers with the cards must try to get the rest of their team members to say the word at the top of their cards. However, the volunteers are not allowed to use any of the words listed on the card. Time how long it takes for each team to guess the words on their two cards. The team with the shortest time wins. Monitor whether the players use the words listed on the cards (see lists below). Add two minutes to their time if they use one of the restricted words.

WAITOR	MAID	TAILOR	CHAUFFEUR
Food	Clean	Alter	Limousine
Order	Hotel	Fit	Drive
Restaurant	Molly	Sew	Miss Daisy
Serve	Vacuum	Suit	Seat
Table	Make	Dress	Car

ASK: What did you notice about the four words you had to guess? *They are occupations in the service industry.*

ASK: What are some characteristics of service industry jobs? (Q1) *The worker needs to be aware of and concerned about the needs of the people he serves.*

ASK: When you were a child, did you aspire to one day have a career in the service industry? Explain. (Q2)

The service industry is sometimes looked down on and people in service careers are often mistreated by those they serve. The customers demand perfection and have little tolerance for error.

Mark wrote His Gospel to specifically show that Christ came to earth to be a servant of God on behalf of humanity. Christ, in a sense, elevated the service industry. This lesson will give us an overview of Mark's presentation of Christ as the Suffering Servant. It will challenge us to emulate Christ's servant's heart no matter what our world thinks of servants today.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Authorship of Mark

Though the second Gospel does not specifically name its writer, it is likely that *Mark* is the correct name. The name *Mark* was added to the Gospel after its writing, but the early church was unanimous in recognizing *Mark* as the writer's name. The *John Mark* of Acts is widely recognized as the writer.

A. Mark, the minister

John Mark is mentioned in connection with his mother, Mary. Peter went to her house after God miraculously freed him from prison (Acts 12:12). The church was gathered at Mary's house to pray for Mark. It seems, then, that Mark had a strong spiritual background. Mark was first mentioned in ministry when he joined Paul and Barnabas on their return trip to Antioch from Jerusalem (12:25).

Mark's next mention is not positive. He joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but then abandoned them in Perga to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). While no commentary is given as to why Mark left, Paul considered him a risk to take on their second missionary journey. Paul ended up going with Silas while Barnabas took Mark (15:36–41).

Barnabas and Mark were cousins.

READ: Acts 15:36–41. **ASK:** How determined was Paul to not take Mark on the second missionary journey? (Q3) *Paul refused to take John Mark even when Barnabas made his case emphatically. Paul had strong feelings about not partnering with Mark.*

Later Mark served in Rome as an assistant to the imprisoned Paul. Paul also sent Mark on a mission to Asia Minor (Philemon 24; Col. 4:10). Still later, Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark to him in Rome where Paul was again imprisoned and facing what he thought was an imminent execution (2 Tim. 4:11).

READ: 2 Timothy 4:11. **ASK:** Put yourself in Paul's place. Describe the type of person you would want to assist you and help you carry out ministry as you faced death? (Q4) *Someone who was reliable, capable, and had long-term potential.*

Mark had obviously grown as a minister of the gospel. He learned to serve well, an experience that no doubt contributed to the development of his Gospel under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

B. Mark, the writer

Mark seems to have had a close connection with Peter according to church

historian Eusebius. Evidence points to them both being in Rome at the same time. In the mid-second century Eusebius quoted writings recorded by Papias. Papias in turn quoted statements from the Elder. The Elder said that Mark wrote accurately, though not chronologically, what Peter recalled about the Lord. This evidence, along with evidence from other church fathers, is compelling and is widely accepted as reliable. So Peter was most likely instrumental in providing much of the firsthand accounts that Mark used in writing his Gospel. Mark took Peter's reports and, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, arranged them to form what is now the Gospel of Mark.

This historical evidence finds some support in the Scriptures. Peter called Mark *my son*, a term that is consistent with the historical association Mark had with Peter (2 Peter 5:13).

II. Mark's Purposes

The historical setting of the Gospel of Mark helps us understand Mark's purposes in writing the Gospel. Mark wrote sometime between AD 65 and 68 to Roman believers living in Rome. The Roman believers were suffering persecution in the aftermath of the great fire in Rome at the time of the emperor Nero (AD 64). About half of the city burned over six days, having a devastating effect on the city and empire. Naturally, the Romans wanted someone to blame. Nero pointed his finger at the Christians. As the innocent Christians bore the blame, they experienced terrifying circumstances. The historian Tacitus reported Romans putting Christians in animal skins and releasing wild dogs to attack them. The Romans hung other Christians on crosses and burned them, using them to illuminate the night.

ASK: How do you think you would have reacted to seeing your Christian family members and friends torn apart by dogs or burned? (Q5) *Natural reactions would have been to seek revenge out of hatred, to demand justice be served, or to get mad at God and denounce one's faith.*

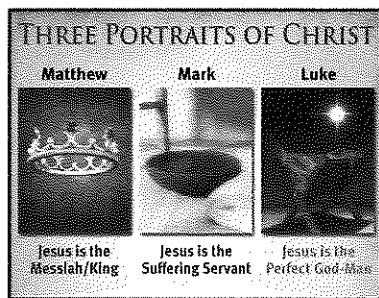
ASK: What could a first-century Roman believer have wrongly concluded about God as a result of such unfair, terrifying treatment? (Q6) *That God is not worth serving; He can't care for His own; He is powerless in comparison to the emperor; serving Him ends in sorrow and pain.*

Mark's Gospel presents the suffering of Christ and provides encouragement to those who faced persecution in Rome. The Gospel no doubt helped the Roman church to stand strong and spread the gospel.

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to review the portraits of Christ presented in each of the synoptic Gospels.

A. Demonstrate Christ Suffered and Served

Mark's Gospel focuses primarily on the suffering and death of Christ, getting to the predictions of His death by the eighth chapter (8:31–33). The passion of Christ takes up about one-third of the Gospel, but that is not the sole reference to



Christ's suffering. Mark refers or alludes to suffering throughout his Gospel.

1. Temptation in the wilderness

READ: Mark 1:12, 13. **ASK:** What evidence of Christ's suffering is apparent in this account? (Q7) *Christ is in the wilderness where wild beasts and lack of provisions threaten Him.*

Mark is the only Gospel writer to mention the wild beasts Jesus faced in the wilderness during His temptation. Perhaps he did so to encourage the Roman Christians who also faced wild beasts in the Roman arena as part of their persecution under Nero. Christ was victorious over the beasts and even over Satan (Matt. 4:1–11), the most notorious and powerful enemy the Roman believers would ever face. The mention of the ministering angels who came to Christ's aid would have been a further encouragement to the Romans. They were evidence of God's care and provision in the midst of suffering.

2. Rejection by family

READ: Mark 3:20–22. **ASK:** What suffering did Christ endure as He stood in the midst of the pressing crowds? (Q8) *He was criticized by some of his family members. The scribes accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Satan).*

Some in Jesus' family thought He was *beside himself*. They accused Him of being a fanatic. Most likely they were worried about their family name and reputation. So their concerns were somewhat selfish. They tried to *lay hold on him*, or in a sense *arrest* Jesus and take Him back to Nazareth. Later in the passage Jesus' mother and brothers called out to Him from outside the multitude that surrounded Jesus. Jesus responded to the multitude by saying that those who do God's will, including some that were then with Him, constituted His family (3:31–35). Doing God's will was more important to Jesus than preserving a reputation.

Family is a better translation than *friends* in Mark 3:21 given the context of 3:31–35.

ASK: Describe how encouraging this account would have been for the Roman believers who no doubt felt the sting of rejection from their unbelieving family members? (Q9) *The account would have drawn them closer as fellow believers and would have strengthened their resolve to live obediently for the Lord.*

3. Passion predictions

Three times Jesus announced to His disciples that He would soon die and then rise from the dead. Mark's inclusion of all three announcements helps build the case that Christ was the Suffering Servant. Each time the disciples were confused by Jesus' announcement. His first announcement was even met with protest.

READ: Mark 8:31–33.

Jesus' teaching regarding His suffering, death, and resurrection was new to the disciples. The verb *must suffer* (8:31) shows that Jesus' suffering was a divine necessity. There was no way around it. Peter responded in protest, expecting a nationalistic Jesus Who would ride into Jerusalem on a horse as a conquering

king. Jesus rebuked Peter, telling *Satan* to *get behind* Him (8:33), meaning He wanted Satan to get out of sight and stop trying to thwart His path to the cross.

Jesus' second announcement regarding His coming suffering and resurrection accompanies the beginning of His trek to the cross. He departed from Galilee and headed to Jerusalem where He would be crucified.

READ: Mark 9:30–32.

In His second prediction, Jesus added that He would be *delivered into the hands of men* who would *kill him* (9:31). This does not diminish Christ's voluntary offering of Himself. The word for *delivered into* can carry the idea of *betrayed*. But it is also used of God the Father's action in regard to Jesus' death (Rom. 8:32). Ultimately the verb shows that it was God's plan for Jesus to be the Suffering Servant.

READ: Mark 10:32–34. **ASK:** What specifics did Jesus add to His prediction of His passion? (Q10) *He would be condemned by the chief priests and scribes, delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, scourged, and spit on.*

Later in this same conversation with His disciples, Jesus stated His purpose for coming to earth (10:45).

READ: Mark 10:45. **ASK:** Summarize Jesus' mission. (Q11)

Despite Jesus' knowledge of the specifics of what He faced in Jerusalem, He continued to make His way there with His disciples close behind.

B. Encourage persecuted Roman Christians

Along with Mark's desire to present Christ as the Suffering Servant is his purpose to encourage suffering believers. The two purposes really go hand in hand. In fact, some of the encouragement the suffering believers received through the Gospel has already been laid out in the previous point about Christ being the Suffering Servant. The believers would be encouraged by the suffering of Christ on their behalf. If He, the Son of God, suffered so, then the Roman believers were in good company.

1. Greatness comes by serving

Jesus' second and third predictions of His coming Passion (covered above) were followed by attempts at power grabs on the part of His disciples, clues that the disciples didn't really understand what would happen to Christ in Jerusalem. The disciples disputed among themselves who would be the greatest in Christ's Kingdom (9:33–35) and then James and John boldly asked to sit on Jesus' right and left hands in His Kingdom (10:35–44).

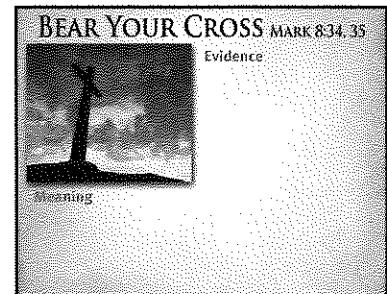
READ: Mark 9:33–35; 10:35–44. **ASK:** What clear message did Jesus send to His disciples about who would be great? (Q12) *Jesus said those who are servants and slaves of all would be great.*

The disciples were slow to understand what Christ meant, but the Roman Christians would have understood right away that the suffering Jesus endured had implications on discipleship. Their suffering in Rome was to be expected as part of living for Christ.

2. Service includes bearing one's cross

To further support his theme, Mark twice recorded Jesus' teaching concerning bearing one's cross (8:34–38; 10:21).

RESOURCE: Display resource 5. **READ:** Mark 8:34–38; 10:21. **ASK:** What does it mean to take up your cross? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q13) *To obediently follow Christ, willingly sacrificing for the cause of Christ.*



ASK: How might be some evidence that a believer is taking up his cross? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q14) *He has made serving Christ a priority; he doesn't make decisions based primarily on how much he stands to gain; he doesn't refuse opportunities to serve because the perceived cost is too high; he is more concerned about God's glory than he is about his own.*

The rich young ruler to whom Jesus was talking in the second instance (10:21, 22) decided that sacrificing and suffering for Christ was not for him (10:22). He chose to keep his riches and his life of ease instead.

Peter, Mark's close associate, wrote about Christ's suffering at about the same time Mark was writing his Gospel. Peter knew what it meant both to fail Christ and to stand for Him. He denied Christ but then endured imprisonment and beatings for the cause of Christ.

READ: 1 Peter 2:21. **ASK:** What connection did Peter make between Christ and believers? (Q15) *Christ's suffering served as an example for believers. They too might suffer at the hands of the unjust.*

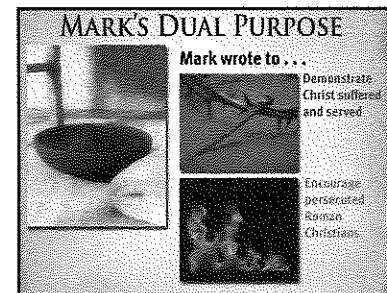
READ: 1 Peter 2:22–25. **ASK:** How does the imagery of Christ our Shepherd help put suffering for Him into perspective? (Q16) *We ultimately belong to Christ. No amount of suffering or even death can separate us from Christ, the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.*

Christ then was both the example of suffering as well as the ultimate hope in the face of death. He cares for the believer as a faithful shepherd cares for each of his sheep.

ASK: How do Mark's purposes for writing his Gospel speak to the increasingly popular teaching that God will make believers healthy and wealthy if they will but trust Him? (Q17) *Mark's purposes show that God's will for believers has never been about them being comfortable in this life.*

The message would have been clear to the Christians in Rome: to live obediently for Christ is to sometimes suffer wrongly or to perhaps even die for one's faith. But Christ already blazed that trail ahead of them. They were therefore in good company. They could find comfort and help from Christ.

RESOURCE: Display resource 4 to review Mark's dual purpose for writing his Gospel.



Not Greater Than the Master

Since Jesus served obediently and in humility, then we ought not to think we are above being a servant. Though serving for the sake of others runs contrary to our culture, it is what Christ has called us to do. In fact, His obedience in going to the cross makes it possible for us to serve Him today.

ASK: If we refuse to serve others, what are we saying about ourselves in relation to Jesus, the suffering Servant of God? (Q18) *That we think we are more important than Him and that we know better than Him.*

Challenge your students to examine both their willingness to serve and their motives for serving.

ASK: How important is being recognized for your acts of service? Do you get upset when your service goes unrecognized? (Q19)

ASK: What does putting a high importance on recognition for our service tell us about our motives for serving? (Q20) *Putting a lot of importance on our recognition for service indicates that our motives for serving God are self-centered.*

Serve Like Christ

ASK: What characterizes the lives of those who serve like Christ? (Q21) *Humility; dedication; concern that God be glorified; love.*

Challenge your learners to consider whether they have emulated Christ's heart for service. (Q22)

Summary and Memory Verses

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 3 or use the following: Serve like Christ.

Encourage learners to memorize Mark 10:43–45. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.

