

*Where we start . . .*

Each of the four Gospels do present a slightly different aspect of Jesus' life and ministry. As you think of each one, what facet of Jesus' portrait comes to mind?

What do you think is the major contribution of Mark to our understanding of who Jesus is and what He has come to do?

*What we read . . .*

One of the key sections of Mark is a passage we have visited repeatedly in our studies. Look at Mark 10:43-45.

What does Jesus tell us about Himself, as recorded here by Mark?

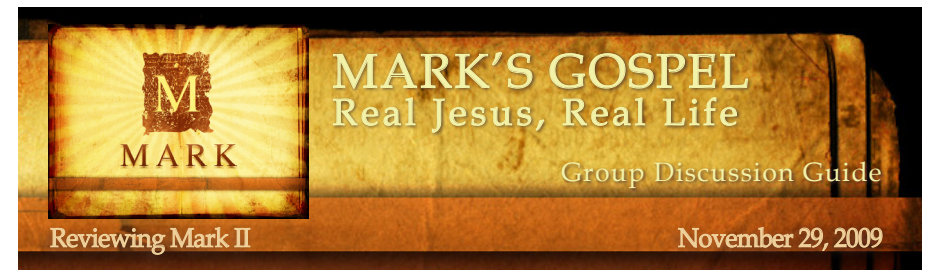
What does Jesus tell us about His friends and followers, as recorded here by Mark?

Anchoring in this passage and drawing on what you have learned from our study of Mark, what do you think Mark might say is the "real meaning of Christmas"?

How does servanthood—both Jesus' coming to serve and Jesus' invitation to us to participate in His servanthood—shape your understanding of Christmas?

*Why this matters . . .*

What would change in the way you approached the holidays if your primary objective was to live out Mark 10:43-45 in all of your interactions with others this Christmas?



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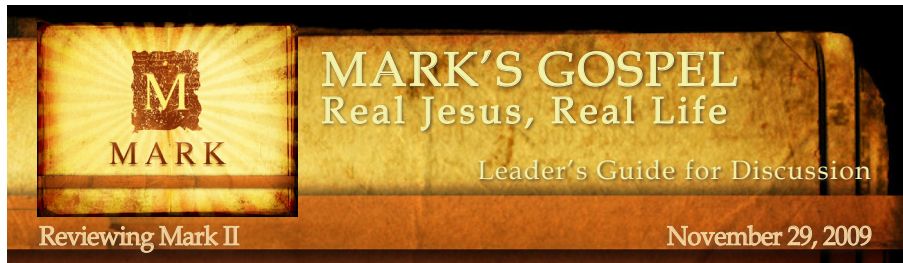
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*Diving in . . .*

We want to pick up on some of the momentum of what we have learned in and through Mark and open up the discussion around a couple of issues. First, how do we come to understand our own discipleship to Jesus in light of what Mark has written? Second, are there implications of Mark's understanding of discipleship for how we approach the holidays?

At first glance, it might not be obvious how these things might tie together. But, there is a real foundation for the connection.

Christmas is a celebration of God sending His Son into our world in order to rescue us. Jesus was a gift and came giving His own life away so as to ransom us (Mark 10:45) out of our selfishness and sin. And if we really grasp what Christmas is all about—namely God giving the Son as “gift” and the Son giving Himself as “gift”—than questions about how we enter into that “gift giving” and how we step into meaningful service is an appropriate application of Mark as well as a legitimate way of understanding what Christmas really is all about.

*Discussing . . .*

The opening question is intended to solidify our thinking that each of the four Gospels give us a slightly different picture of Jesus. The four don't contradict; but the four also don't merely show us the identical portrait. Each Gospel writer reflects on and looks at Jesus from a slightly different vantage point and, thus, calls our attention to a slightly different aspect of Jesus' life and ministry.

Given his focus on all things Jewish and his privileging of Jesus' Messianic call, Matthew clearly highlights Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah. Matthew writes for Jews hoping to find, in Jesus, the fulfillment of their long-awaited hopes.

Luke is much less concerned by things Jewish, even though he clearly wouldn't deny that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Typically understood to be writing for a Greek audience who was more concerned with humanity at large rather than Judaism in particular, Luke highlights Jesus' humanity and His dependence on the Spirit to live a life pleasing to the Father.

John writes for those who come to believe. John focuses on the whole idea of what it means to “believe,” and just who it is we are to be believing in. John

tells us of Jesus' character and nature, securing our certainty that Jesus is God come in the flesh and calling us to put our full dependence on Him.

That leaves us Mark. Although Mark does point out Jesus' Messianic claim and His humanity wedded to His deity, Mark calls more attention than any of the other Gospels to Jesus' entrance into our world as “servant.”

When we turn back to Mark (and drawing on what we have been learning all along), it is easy to see and understand Jesus' life and ministry as servant of all. And rooted in that understanding is a key insight into Christmas.

The Father sent the Son because the Father is a servant and so that the Son could come to serve. The Son came into the world to serve mankind while serving the Father and fulfilling His intended end. So, Mark would likely say something like:

Christmas is about serving: How God, the Father, served us by sending the Son and how God, the Son, served by coming into the world and giving His life as a ransom for us.

Seeing this, we are rightly driven to ask questions about what the implications of all of this for how we celebrate the holidays.

If God serves by sending and Jesus comes to serve and Christmas is about that than . . .

How is our celebrating what Christmas is all about reflected in our serving?

Obviously there is a sense that Christmas *is* a celebration of being on the receiving end of God's great gift. We are the recipients of grace; we do rightly make much of God's giving to us. But along with that, seeing as we are invited into active participation in Jesus' own life, we can reflect on how our servant-giving might be a rich and real picture of God Himself, of Jesus in His incarnation.

Through the conversation open wide to some creative thinking. *If* Christmas is about God's great gift, and *if* Christmas is when we remember Jesus who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life, and *if* Jesus invites us into that very life of self-giving, *than* what would be the most appropriate expression of that kind of love and life?

Who could we give to? What might we give? Where could we extend ourselves without expectation of reciprocation? How could we lavish grace on another? How could we live out the real meaning of Christmas by *being gifts* in our serving to those around us?