



2

THE GALILEAN MINISTRY BEGINS

BACKGROUND FROM THE AUTHOR

The Gospel of Mark shows Jesus as a man of action and authority. The writing is terse, fast-paced. Those looking for long passages of teaching content will be disappointed; the Sermon on the Mount is not here—not even the Lord’s Prayer. The parables of the Lost Sheep, the Wise and Foolish Maidens, the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and so many others, do not show up in this Gospel. Be careful, however, not to judge Mark’s Gospel by what it does not have. Avoid the temptation to “beef up” Mark’s Gospel by including discussions of the longer versions of incidents in Matthew or Luke, or by addressing texts not dealt with in Mark. Listen to what Mark is saying to the church.

Mark tells his story his way in order to hold up to his church a picture of Jesus as the true authority who has the true power—the power of God to heal, to forgive, to reconcile. It would seem that Mark believed that his original audience needed to see in no uncertain terms that there was only one authority to which a follower of Jesus could or should be loyal. Remember, the early Christians were already beginning to be pressured to give their loyalty to Caesar, as both a political and a religious authority. But Caesar’s power is puny when compared to the authority of Jesus. Jesus wields the very power of God and does so by right. Mark shows, on many occasions,

Jesus being referred to as “Son of God.” It is from God that Jesus’ authority to exercise power comes.

Because Jesus has legitimate authority to call on the power of God, what does a follower of Jesus, a disciple, look like? Over and over again, the class will see that it is the disciples’ function to listen to Jesus, to follow Jesus, to proclaim the Gospel message of Jesus, and to expect to suffer as Jesus suffered.

It may be important to note that as today’s Christians, many of us do not think of ourselves as “disciples.” The Twelve and the other early disciples may seem to us to be a different class of Christians—ones who were called to drop everything and adopt a kind of martyr-in-waiting status. We may therefore put distance between what “disciples” are called to do and what we are called to do. Challenge this thinking at all costs.

Mark’s second great emphasis is the nature of discipleship; a discipleship which is as valid today as it was in the first century. This study can become a class in ancient history unless we who read Mark’s Gospel, including the participants in your class, can see that we are included in Jesus’ call to discipleship and hear Mark’s message about what makes a disciple. Like the people of the first century, we in today’s society, are distracted by calls to give our loyalties to others or to look to other powers as having authority over us.

Just as Jesus is a man of action, so is every Christian called to be a person of action— one responds to the gospel message by following Jesus as a vocation. All other authorities take a “back seat” to the authority of Jesus Christ. Keep in the forefront of the class discussions the understanding that we, as today’s disciples, need to hear and respond to our marching orders. The Gospel of Mark provides much insight for rich discussions.

SESSION PLANS

Learning Objectives

Session 2 is intended to enable participants to accomplish the following:

1. Describe the words “authority” and “power” as they pertain to Jesus and to our situations.

2. Begin to describe the purpose and work of a disciple of Jesus.
3. Describe the importance of the Sabbath in the first century.
4. Begin to explore the concept of the Messianic Secret.

Resources You May Need

- Copies of Worksheet 2A or copies of the Schweitzer quote
- Extra Bibles
- Paper for note-taking
- *The Roman Empire in the First Century* DVD

Leadership Strategy

Setting the Stage

▣ Slide #14, the title slide for session 2, can be projected as group members enter.

1. **Prayer.** Open with a prayer.

2. **Call of the Disciples.** ► View the video of Mark 3:1–19a about the call of the disciples (less than 3 minutes) on this Leader's Guide disk.

OR

2. Ask 3 people to read one text each aloud to the group: **Mark 1:16–20, 2:13–17** and **2:23–28**.

AND

Afterward, ask everyone to try to imagine how they might react if Jesus had called them.

▣ Project slide #15 and ask participants to try to be honest when answering these questions:

What does it really mean to be "called"?

What might you have to leave behind?

Would there be a deal breaker for you in the call of Jesus?

3. Authority and Power. Ask the class to work in small groups of 3 to 6 to define the words “authority” and “power” as they understand them. Write a definition for each word. Have someone in each group take notes. After 5–7 minutes let each group share its definitions, first of authority, then of power. List key words on the board as each definition is read. ■ Project slides #16–17 with Webster’s definitions of each. Ask:

Do our definitions reflect or enhance what Webster has to say?

What does it mean to have authority? What is power?

Remind the group that Mark’s concern is to show both the authority and the power of Jesus.

■ Project slide #18 with the following questions and ask:

Given the state of the infant church during the Roman Empire, why might the power and authority attributed to Jesus by Mark’s Gospel be important to Mark’s first readers?

Given the state of the church in today’s society, why might the power and authority attributed to Jesus by Mark’s Gospel be important for us?

Discuss these two questions.

Finally, ■ project slide #19 with this statement, or post it on the board or newsprint: “Power can be grabbed, authority has to be given.” Ask:

What do you think about this statement? Discuss briefly.

A dictator may take over by coup and have the power of the government’s money and military, but he cannot grab authority. Authority includes the “right” to have authority. It has been granted by one who has his own authority to give it, as people who vote give authority to the candidate to lead a part of the government. People may be forced by a power grab to live under a dictator, but the dictator has no authority; he took office illegally and without the permission of those being governed. Watch for places in Mark where the “powers that be” want to know who gave Jesus authority.

OR

3. People with Authority. Ask the group to list people who have authority over others (judges, parents, teachers, etc.). List the answers on the board. Ask the group, “What is authority?” See if the group can come to a consensus. Where does authority come from? Don’t try to form a consensus now. Say that we will be dealing in Mark with the authority of Jesus. Ask the group to define “power.” What do power and authority have to do with each other?

Remind the group that Mark is concerned to show both the authority and the power of Jesus.

If you have *The Roman Empire in the First Century* DVD, play the chapter entitled “Blessed Are the Meek” from Part II of the DVD, starting at 1:18:00 and stopping at 1:23:16 after Professor Callahan speaks of God doing something (5 minutes).

After viewing the DVD segment, talk about how important it is to know the context of any writing, but especially, an ancient one. Point out the fact that the threat of destruction of Jerusalem at the whim of the emperor could end life as they knew it at any time. The emperor had complete freedom to do exactly as he wished.

■ Project slide #18 with the following questions and ask:

Given the state of the infant church during the Roman Empire, why might the power and authority attributed to Jesus by Mark's Gospel be important to Mark's first readers?

Given the state of the church in today's society, why might the power and authority attributed to Jesus by Mark's Gospel be important for us?

Discuss these two questions.

Finally, ■ project slide #19 with this statement, “Power can be grabbed, authority has to be given” or post it on the board or newsprint. Ask:

What do you think about this statement? Discuss briefly.

Exploring the Scripture

1. Jesus' Authority. Have the class work in small groups. Half of each small group is to skim Mark 1:16–45. The other half is to skim Mark 2. Explain that in skimming, one reads enough to get the gist of the story and then moves on. It is not necessary to read every word. If the passages are long, the members of the small group may break the text into sections and each person skim the section they have chosen. Remind them that they are looking for the word “authority” but they are also looking for actions and words that show Jesus' authority.

(Some of the answers would be that Jesus has power to heal and forgive because he has authority from God. He has authority over the disciples—note that “follow me” is a way of saying, “Put yourself under my authority.” His authority is greater than the law that told them to fast. He also has the authority to define proper Sabbath observance.)

Ask one member of each subgroup to write down key phrases or words and the verse numbers the group considered to be significant. Call time and gather the groups together. First ask those in each small group that skimmed 1:16–45 to take turns reading a few of the verses they found that showed Jesus' authority; then move on to the next group. Do not have one group read all of its verses at once. Do not write the answers on the board (you will end up writing down most of the chapter). Follow the same process with the groups that skimmed Mark 2.

AND

2. People and Things. As one group, list on the board the persons and things over which Jesus has authority that are mentioned in Mark, chapters 1 and 2. Ask participants what Mark is saying about Jesus in these two chapters. Ask them to imagine that they are new Christians living near Rome at the time of Nero. How would they feel reading Mark? How would Jesus' authority compare with Caesar's?

3. Roman Empire. ■ Project slide #20. Point out that in Mark's day, the Roman Empire demanded to be regarded as the authority in people's lives politically, culturally, and religiously. The only army was the Roman army. Everyone in the empire paid taxes to Rome. Roman coins were used throughout the empire. Latin was gradually overtaking Greek as the language that all people should know. ■ Project slide #21. The Roman emperors were to be worshipped as gods. This was considered to be a way to unify the empire.

Ask participants to brainstorm in their small groups who and what, today, attempts to claim the right to have authority over our lives. They may come up with several answers. Discuss briefly as one group:

How is today's situation different? How is it similar?

OR

3. *The Roman Empire in the First Century* DVD. ► If not used earlier in this session, play the chapter entitled "Blessed Are the Meek" from Part II of the DVD, starting at 1:18:00 and stopping at 1:23:16 after Professor Callahan speaks of God doing something (5 minutes). What was new information to the group?

AND

4. Discipleship. Hand out Worksheet 2A to be completed in small groups. Come together to discuss the findings.

OR

4. ■ Project slides #22–23 with the verses and questions from the worksheet and work through the activity as one group.

■ Project slides #24–25 with the quote from Albert Schweitzer. Discuss it with the group. In what ways does it relate to the passages just reviewed? What does the group think are the most important attributes of a disciple?

5. Messianic Secret. Remind participants of the discussion of the Messianic Secret on page 15 of the Resource Book. Ask participants to share their theories for why Jesus keeps telling people not to tell others about him. Do not try to resolve the matter in this session, but invite participants to keep watching for those times Jesus instructs people not to tell, and whether that instruction ever changes in the Gospel.

Closing

1. Hymnal. Hand out copies of your church's hymnal. Let people silently look through the discipleship section of the hymnal to find phrases and statements about what it means to be a disciple, to follow Jesus. Call time. Ask people to call out the phrases they have found.

AND/OR

2. Vows. Hand out copies of your church's membership vows or baptismal vows. Let them read through the vows silently. What is required for membership? How does it relate to Mark's idea of discipleship? Have them call out some of the ideas they have found. Or ask someone to read the vows aloud, then proceed as above with the whole group.

3. Prayer. Close with a prayer or by reading together Dr. Schweitzer's statement from Worksheet 2A or **■** project slides #24–25.

Looking Ahead

Find a bottle of mustard seeds.

DISCIPLESHIP

Read Mark 1:16–20 and 1:30–31.

1. What actions do the people around Jesus take in these passages?

2. In what ways are these actions instructive for contemporary followers of Jesus reading Mark's Gospel?

Read Mark 2:13–17.

1. What qualifications does one need to have in order to be a disciple?

Read *Mark 3:31–35*.

1. What does this passage about Jesus' true family have to say about discipleship?

Read the following paragraph and discuss it with those in your small group. In what ways does it relate to the above passages from Mark? What do you think are the most important attributes for a disciple?

Who Is He?

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

—*Albert Schweitzer*