

AUTHORITY AND SERVANTHOOD IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Introduction

No matter what one might believe about the divinity of Jesus, there is no doubting the uniqueness of his life and teachings. Almost 2000 years after he walked the earth, the things he did and said are still quite at odds with the natural tendencies and expectations of society. He is confrontational yet gentle, enigmatic yet transparent, authoritative yet submissive. His teachings can seem paradoxical and contradictory and certainly challenge many of the values and structures that exist today, even within his Church. For his followers, understanding who Jesus is and what he taught is more than an interesting exercise, it is a guide to life, for following Him implies a sense of living as He did. Discipleship is intimately related to Christology and ultimately depends upon it, as a right understanding of who Jesus is leads to genuine discipleship.¹

The purpose of the gospel of Mark can be described in these two broad areas of Christology and discipleship; the writer presents Jesus as Lord and Master and calls his readers to follow Jesus appropriately.² One important aspect of this presentation involves the two seemingly contradictory motifs of authority and servanthood. In the gospel Jesus is presented both as the Authoritative One and as the Suffering Servant. At the same time, he grants his disciples a measure of authority while commanding them with dramatic and extreme imagery to serve others and forsake the pursuit of power and prominence. The

¹Narry F. Santos, *Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Stanley E. Porter, no. 237 (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 17.

²R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 22.

following sections examine these two motifs of authority and servanthood and their relationship to one another, as well as their contributions to our understanding of Christology and discipleship in the gospel of Mark.

Three main sections guide the discussion. The first gives a brief look at issues of historical background by describing the power structures and positions of the first century Palestinian world. The second traces the motifs of authority and servanthood as they are communicated throughout the narrative of Mark including a section on the Son of Man title and how it relates to these two motifs. The final section takes a closer look at four passages in the gospel in which Jesus addresses his disciples concerning the issues of power, authority, and servanthood.

Historical Background: The Power Pyramid

In the world of first century Israel, the distribution of power and authority is best pictured as a pyramid in which the majority of the power is concentrated on a relatively small class of people at the pinnacle while the majority of the people at the bottom hold very little or no power. Waetjen presents the details of this power pyramid and how it relates to the characters in the gospel of Mark; the following is a summary of his information.³ In the agricultural land of the gospel, those at the pinnacle of the pyramid were those who controlled the state and determined ownership of the land and distribution of the surplus. In Mark, this ruling class included Herod Antipas who claimed ownership of the land and required high rent and taxes from the peasant farmers and fishermen, Pontius Pilate who was notorious for his selfish abuse of power, and the high priest who was a willing collaborator with Rome.

³Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Sociopolitical Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 6-11.

Just below the ruling class was the retainer class which included those who were employed in one sense or another by the ruling class. The members of the retainer class enjoyed a standard of living above the lower classes and identified with the governing class and its interests. It is this class who receive the most grief from Jesus in the gospel of Mark: the scribes, Pharisees, Herodians, chief priests, and the high council. Instead of using their position and power to serve the lower classes, they are for the most part, concerned with retaining the benefits they enjoy and with preserving their own class. Just under the retainer class was the largest class in an agrarian society, the peasantry. This included farmers and fishermen who worked the land and paid exorbitant rent and taxes, as well as the artisans and craftsmen. Below the peasantry was a group that can be labeled the unclean and degraded, including unskilled laborers involved in offensive or ritually unclean work like tanners, shepherds, prostitutes, or porters. At the bottom of the pyramid were the expendables—those nonproductive or unemployed individuals of society including beggars, lepers, the sick and handicapped, vagrants, and thieves. This deprived and dehumanized group held little power and had little hope. Throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus is seen interacting with members of every class and responding to whoever reaches out to him in faith, but he is most willing to provide help and hope to those in the lower classes and most willing to rebuke and correct those of the higher classes who misuse their power for their own benefit.

Tracing the Themes and Terms

It is difficult to decide the best way to trace the themes of the authority and servanthood of Jesus throughout the gospel of Mark, for the two motifs are intricately intertwined and connected. Jesus' service includes acts of authority like healings and

exorcisms,⁴ and his authority is never employed for his own self-benefit, but is always in service to others.⁵ The following sections examine three motifs as they can be traced through the gospel of Mark: the authority of Jesus, the servanthood of Jesus and others, and the Son of Man sayings as they relate to these two themes of authority and servanthood. The first two sections on authority and servanthood are highly indebted to a work by Narry F. Santos entitled *Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark*.⁶ These two sections are the result of my interaction with, rearrangement and reorganization of, and additions to his material, especially his overview on pp 18-22.

Before delving into the details of these motifs, a broad outline of the gospel in relation to these themes will help guide the discussion. As I noted earlier, the two motifs of authority and servanthood are interconnected throughout the gospel, but one or the other may be highlighted in certain sections. In the first major section, 1.1—8.21, the authority of Jesus is highlighted through his actions and the opposition to and misunderstandings of him and his teachings.⁷ The second major section of the gospel, 8.22—10.52, contains teachings on discipleship that give verbal and dramatic instances of the paradox of authority and servanthood.⁸ In the final section (11.1—16.8), the servanthood of Jesus is highlighted as he humbly goes to the cross.⁹

⁴Santos, 179.

⁵James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 15.

⁶See footnote #1, pg 1, for the full bibliographic information.

⁷Santos, 60-144.

⁸*Ibid.*, 145-212.

⁹*Ibid.*, 213-266.

The Authority of Jesus

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus is presented as the authoritative one in that he exercises power and rule by virtue of his high position and relationship to God the Father.¹⁰ Several elements in the gospel point to this position of authority; six are discussed below including the use of *exousia*, Jesus' supernatural deeds, the actions and testimony of other characters in the gospel, the prologue, Jesus' teaching and rebuke of religious leaders, and other various events in the story line.

Exousia

The use of *exousia* in relation to Jesus indicates his sovereign freedom and magisterial authority.¹¹ The term denotes Christ's divinely given power and authority to act, comprising the aspects of both right and power.¹² The term reveals the element of freedom in his authority and shows that Jesus' power is universal.¹³ *Exousia* is used ten times in the gospel of Mark. It occurs twice in the context of the crowd responding to the teaching and actions of Jesus as one with authority (1.22, 27). Twice Jesus gives his disciples the authority to cast out demons (3.15; 6.7). In Mark 2.10, Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins. In an interaction between Jesus and the religious leaders in 11.27-33, the term is used four times as the leaders question Jesus' authority after the cleansing of the temple. Jesus shows his authority in the confrontation without directly answering their questions. A final occurrence of the word occurs in the parable of the man on a journey in 13.34. The man leaves for the journey giving each servant authority over some part of the household responsibilities until he

¹⁰Ibid., 19.

¹¹Edwards, 13.

¹²Werner Foerster, "exes tin, exousia, exousiazw, katexousiazw" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 568.

¹³Ibid.

returns. In each use, the term refers to that abstract notion of the right and power to act, to command, and to in some sense rule over people and circumstances. Jesus has this right to control and command, and to have power and authority because of who he is, and he gives his disciples the potential or resources needed to capably command in accord with his own mission and purposes.¹⁴ As the one who has divine *exousia*, Jesus reorders social and political priorities, redefines Torah commandments, and claims prerogatives which are otherwise God's alone.¹⁵

Supernatural Deeds

The most prominent display of the authority of Jesus in the gospel is in his supernatural actions, specifically his exorcisms, healings, and miracles.¹⁶ Four exorcisms by Jesus are recorded in the gospel: the man at the synagogue (1.21ff), the Gerasene demoniac (5.1ff), the Syrophenician woman's daughter (7.24ff), and the mute and deaf boy (9.14ff).¹⁷ The response of the demons in each episode highlights the authority of Jesus. They correctly identify him ("The Holy One of God" in 1.24 and "Son of the Most High God" in 5.7), recognize his authority (notice how they beg and plead with him), and obey his commands (even when he is nowhere near in 7.29-30). Jesus simply speaks and the demons have no choice or power to resist; they obey because they must. The contrast between the power the

¹⁴See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 352, for these two definitional categories for this term. Hereafter referred to as BDAG.

¹⁵Edwards, 14.

¹⁶Santos, 20.

¹⁷There are also summary statements of Jesus' exorcisms in 1.34 and 1.39, and of the disciples' exorcisms in 6.13. See also 3.11-12 where demons are pictured in obedience and submission to Jesus, though actual exorcisms are not mentioned.

demons have over their hosts and the powerlessness they display at the authoritative words of Jesus should not be overlooked.

Healings are prominent in the gospel including nine detailed accounts and five summary statements.¹⁸ Jesus healed many kinds of infirmities: Peter's mother-in-law of a fever in 1.29ff; a leper in 1.40ff; a paralytic in 2.1ff; a man with a withered hand in 3.1ff; Jairus' daughter in 5.35ff; the hemorrhaging woman in 5.25ff; a mute and deaf man in 7.31ff; and two blind men in 8.22ff and 10.46ff. Again, Jesus' powerful healing work takes little effort from him, often including his touch and/or his words. Especially noteworthy in relation to the authority of Jesus are the healing of the paralytic and the man with the withered hand. In healing the paralytic, Jesus not only claims authority to heal, but authority to forgive sins. In healing the man with the withered hand, he claims authority over the Sabbath and thus authority to define Torah commands. Jesus has the authority and power of physical healing, but he also claims authority to bring about spiritual healing and forgiveness.

The gospel of Mark also pictures Jesus performing other types of miracles. He calms a storm in 4.35ff; feeds a multitude in 6.32ff and 8.1ff; walks on water in 6.45ff; and curses a fig tree in 11.12ff. In addition to his authority over demons and sickness, Jesus reveals his authority over nature in these miracles. His word is more powerful than a great storm and his will breaks through the limits and boundaries of the natural order.

Two related points are noteworthy concerning these authoritative acts of Jesus. First it must be observed that the majority of these actions occur in the first section of Mark's gospel (1.1—8.21) where Jesus' authority is highlighted. Mark begins his portrait of Jesus with actions which display his inherent power and authority as the Son of God. Yet within

¹⁸Summary statements of Jesus' healings are found in 1.34; 3.10; 6.5; and 6.56 and of the disciples' healing ministry in 6.13.

these supernatural acts so focused on Jesus' authority, the element of servanthood is present and intertwined revealing the paradox of authority and servanthood in Jesus' work.¹⁹ Note the people who benefit from these exorcisms, healings, and miracles: children, lepers, women, Gentiles, the handicapped, the silent, and the isolated. These were the unclean, useless, and unproductive members of society. They had no power, influence, or status that they might use to further Jesus' ministry; they had nothing to offer him. His emotion, compassion, and words in these pericopae reveal Jesus' willingness to serve as a servant would and that he was free and willing to use his authority to serve those most in need of his help.²⁰ Thus even these powerful, authoritative deeds of Jesus were often acts of service for the most lowly members of the society in which he ministered.

Actions and Testimony of Characters

The actions and testimony of the minor characters in the gospel especially witness to the authority of Jesus. We have already observed the words of the unclean spirits who identify Jesus as the Holy One and the Son of God. A Roman centurion utters a similar statement at the death of Jesus: "Truly this man was the Son of God."²¹ Other characters in the gospel are seen showing high respect and reverence for Jesus that could be considered worship by falling on their knees or bowing before Jesus (the leper in 1.40, the Gerasene demoniac in 5.6, and the hemorrhaging woman in 5.33).²² The crowds are amazed and astonished at his authoritative teaching and deeds.²³ Many reveal a recognition of his

¹⁹Santos, 144.

²⁰Ibid., 83. See 6.34: "...and he had compassion on them;" 6.50: "...Take heart, it is I; have no fear;" and 8.2: "I have compassion on the crowd..."

²¹Mk 15.39.

²²Santos, 20.

²³See 1.27; 2.12; 5.42; and 7.37.

authority to heal by seeking him out including the leper, Jairus, the Syrophenician woman, the paralytic and his friends, and Bartimaeus, to name but a few. In addition to the words and actions of these characters, the words of Jesus himself at his trial are the clearest statement concerning his authority and power in the entire gospel: "I am [the Christ, the Son of the Blessed]; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." (14.62).

The Prologue

The most prominent editorial comment by Mark which speaks to the authority of Jesus is the first statement of the gospel which begins his entire work by identifying Jesus as the Son of God.²⁴ This authoritative position is reinforced by the presentation of John's preparatory ministry as fulfillment of prophecy (1.2-3) and the announcement of John the Baptist in 1.4-8. Other signs of his divine authority include his connection with the Spirit in his baptism and his temptation, as well as the voice from heaven at his baptism. Within the first few verses of the gospel then are approximately six elements which speak clearly to the divine authority of Jesus, yet signs of submission are also present in his baptism (submitting to John's baptism) and his temptation (submitting to the Spirit's leading and accepting the ministry of the angels). John the Baptist himself is a picture of the paradox of authority and

²⁴Santos, 20. The textual problem in Mark 1.1 is a difficult one. Some important manuscripts (*, Q, and 28) omit the modifier υιου θεου from the title, while most others include it (¹, B, D, L, W, and 2427). The omission may have been an oversight due to the similar -ου ending of so many words. Because of this and the strong solidarity of the Byzantine witnesses, it is included in brackets in the NA²⁷, while the tendency to expand titles and the early shorter reading leave some doubt as to whether the phrase was original [Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek Testament*, 2nd ed (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 62]. However, when this evidence is combined with issues of context, the reading with the modifier becomes the superior reading. The inclusio formed with the similar phrase in 15.39 and the motif of divine and scriptural authority in the prologue (1.1-8 especially) give strong evidence for the originality of the modifying phrase "son of God."

servanthood in this prologue in that he preaches with authority in 1.4-6 and willingly submits to Jesus in vv 7-8.²⁵

Teaching/ Rebuke of Opposing Religious Authorities

Although Mark's gospel is characteristically one of action, the teachings of Jesus are an integral part of the story and are interspersed throughout the gospel. Important to our discussion are those instances where Jesus' teachings are received with some sense of awe and recognized as authoritative (1.21-22), where Jesus interprets the Hebrew Scriptures and laws (2.23—3.6; 10.2-12; 12.13-37), and where Jesus discusses his future glory and authority (13.1-37).

Because he claimed authority for his actions and teachings, Jesus faced opposition from the religious leaders. An examination of confrontations between Jesus and the leaders clearly shows Jesus as the authoritative one.²⁶ The leaders are seen questioning him and plotting among themselves as to how to trap Jesus, while Jesus is consistent and firm in his responses, usually silencing them with a sentence or two. Jesus "wins" every argument and openly rebukes the religious leaders, until they must resort to treachery in their opposition of him. His authority frustrates the leaders and in 12.34 Mark records, "And after that no one dared to ask him any question." The contrast between the two is stark: the religious leaders claim authority for themselves but do not wish to serve, while Jesus holds true authority and is a willing servant.²⁷

²⁵Santos, 64.

²⁶See especially the confrontations in 2.15—3.6; but also 3.20-27; 7.1-13; 8.11-21; 10.2-9; 11.27—12.44; and 14.53-65.

²⁷Santos, 143.

Other Events in the Story Line

Several other events in the story line of the gospel of Mark quite clearly denote the authority of Jesus and will only briefly be mentioned here. First is the call, delegation, and commissioning of disciples in which Jesus passes on aspects of his authority to his followers.²⁸ Jesus' predictions of his future glorious return (13.24-27; 14.62) and his transfiguration (9.1-8) are also strong indicators of his divine authority and power.²⁹ While the last major section of the gospel highlights the servanthood of Jesus, the entry into Jerusalem (11.1-11), the cleansing of the temple (11.15-19), and the cursing of the fig tree (11.12-14, 20-25) all point to his authority, especially his authoritative place over Israel. Finally, the empty tomb and the announcement of the risen Jesus' are an ultimate testimony to Jesus' authority and power over death.

Servanthood

The motif of servanthood is found throughout the gospel of Mark. Service is characteristic of the life and actions of Jesus, is a requirement of Jesus' followers, and describes the actions of others towards Jesus. The following sections examine elements in the gospel which communicate the motif of servanthood: the use of *diakonia* and *doulos*, acts of service by other characters in the gospel, Jesus' service to the needy/unimportant, Jesus' sacrificial death, and Jesus' teachings on servanthood.

²⁸Ibid., 20. See 1.16-20; 2.13-14; 3.13-19; and 6.6-13.

²⁹Ibid.

Dia konoV **and** Dou loV

Mark's use of servanthood and slavery terms indicates the servanthood motif throughout his gospel.³⁰ Dou loV appears in the gospel five times. Four of these occurrences refer to an economic slave or servant who is at the bidding of his master (three times in parables—12.2, 12.4, and 13.34; and once in the storyline—14.47). These four then inform the understanding in 10.44 where disciples are commanded to be the "slave of all." The noun dia konoV appears only twice in the gospel, both in contexts where Jesus is instructing his disciples to be a servant to others (9.35 and 10.43). The verb form dia koney is found a total of five times. Twice women are seen as the subject (Peter's mother-in-law in 1.31 and the women at the tomb in 15.41) and it seems to refer to the menial tasks of community life.³¹ In Mk 1.13 angels are seen performing this task for Jesus after his period of temptation in the desert. In each of the three of these instances, Jesus and his disciples are the recipients of the willing action of others who desire to meet their needs. The final two occurrences of the verb are both in 10.45 where Jesus declares that his purpose is to be about the action of serving others rather than merely being the recipient of the service of others. The lexical terms of servanthood and slavery are used in a positive light in the gospel, describing the activity of angels, faithful followers and disciples of Christ, and Jesus himself.

In the wider context of the Roman world, the action of serving and the position of servant or slave were for the lower members of society and women and were not seen as appropriate activities of a free man.³² In Mark, however, these terms show that the action of

³⁰Ibid., 21.

³¹Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 152.

³²Dennis M. Sweetland, *Our Journey With Jesus: Discipleship According to Mark*, Good News Studies, ed. Robert J. Karris, no. 22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 64.

meeting the needs of others displays the full sense of active Christian love and is the true mark of discipleship.³³ There is a perspective of mutuality rather than dominance where disciples are exhorted to take the position of servants rather than vie for places of honor.³⁴

Acts of Service by other Characters

Several characters in the gospel are noted as performing acts of service indicating and illustrating the servanthood motif.³⁵ Peter's mother-in-law, the angels, and the women at the tomb were mentioned above. One might add to this group the friends of the paralytic (2.1-5), the generous widow (12.41-44), the anointing woman (14.3-9), the host for the Passover (14.12-15), Simon of Cyrene (15.21), and Joseph of Arimathea (15.42-46).

Other characters serve to contrast the servanthood motif by their self-serving and self-motivated actions. The religious leaders are the obvious representatives of this group and certain pictures in the gospel highlight their gross lack of care for others. In 7.9-13, Jesus rebukes their tradition which provides an "escape clause" for caring for and honoring parents. In 12.38-40, Jesus describes the religious leaders as those who devour helpless widows—a direct contrast to the poor and selfless widow who gives all that she has to the Lord in vv 41-44. A second group is the money changers and merchants in the temple who inspire Jesus' anger and rebuke in 11.15-19. Their concern is for their own personal profit rather than for the glory of God's temple and the spiritual life of his people. Finally, Judas is an example of self-motivated behavior and a refusal of the life and practice of servanthood. In 14.10-11, the

³³Hermann W. Beyer, "dia konew, dia konia, diakonoV," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 85.

³⁴John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1983), 49.

³⁵Santos, 22.

fateful record of his betrayal stands in contrast to the servanthood of the anointing woman praised by Jesus in vv 6-9.³⁶

Jesus' Service to the Needy/Unimportant

Santos illustrates that the servanthood motif in Mark is intensified by the connection of Jesus' acts of service to the following groups: children (παῖδιον), widows (χρηά), wives or women (γυναίκα or γυνή), Gentiles (ἐθνη or ἔθνη), the sick (various words), lepers (λεπροί), and the poor (πτωχοί).³⁷ The helplessness and low social status of these groups highlight the others-centered nature of the service performed on their behalf.

Jesus' Sacrificial Death

In Mark 10.45, Jesus relates his death to service given on behalf of others. The words in this one verse indicate a theme of servanthood: serve (διακονέω), give (δίδωμι), ransom (λύτρον) and the preposition "for" (ἀντι). Jesus has come to provide for the needs of others and this service is ultimately seen in his voluntary giving of his life on behalf of all humanity. Additionally, linguistic and thematic echoes from Isaiah 53 are found in Mk 10.45 connecting Jesus to the task and concepts of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.³⁸ Jesus

³⁶Ibid., 237.

³⁷Ibid., 22, n. 87.

³⁸France, 420; and Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27—16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, no. 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 121. The linguistic and thematic echoes between Mk 10.45 and Is 53.10-12 are notable. 1) πολλοί in Mk 10.45 recalls the adjectives πολλοί and πολλοί in Is 53.11 and 12 and the idea that many will benefit from the Servant's self offering (France, 420). 2) The phrase in Mark, "to give his life" closely approximates the phrases in Is 53: "make his life a guilt offering" (v 10) and "he poured out his life to death" (v 12) (Evans, 121). Thus the idea of one who voluntarily gives his life is present in both Mk and Is (France, 420). 3) While λύτρον, does not appear in the LXX, it does approximate the Hebrew verb *asam* (Evans, 121). In Isaiah 53, the purpose for the giving of life is as a sin offering—an offering in the place of a guilty person to remove guilt (France, 420). 4) While διακονέω does not appear in the LXX of Is 53, its synonym does (δοῦλω) and the two roots have quite a bit of overlap in this Markan pericope [Ben Witherington, III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 289].

renounces all concern for his own life and power and goes to the cross in service of others, giving the ultimate example of mutual service and humility.³⁹ The Authoritative One does not employ his authority and power for the benefit of himself, but goes humbly and willingly to his death so as to redeem mankind. Mark gives several pictures of this throughout the passion narrative: Christ's willingness in spite of the burden upon him in Gethsemane (14.36), his peaceful arrest and submission to the fulfillment of Scripture (14.48-49), his submission in the face of his accusers (14.61 and 15.2), and his relative silence and refusal to defend himself or respond to his attackers throughout the ordeal.

Jesus' Teachings on Service

The three main passages in which Jesus teaches his disciples about servanthood are Mk 8.31-38; 9.31-50; and 10.33-45.⁴⁰ The discussion of these passages and their significance to the topic at hand are found in the next main section. One other important Jesus teaching, however, also points to the motif of servanthood and will be briefly examined here. In 12.28-34, Jesus teaches about the greatest and second commandment, wholehearted love for God and love for neighbor respectively. The relationship between the two is clearly one of priority: love of others is only accomplished on the basis of a prior love of God.⁴¹ But the relationship goes further, in that the second is the expected outcome and tangible expression of the first. The love for others which Jesus highly values is not an abstract notion but is a concrete action, as is seen in the original context of the command, Leviticus 19. McKnight summarizes the Old Testament context well: "Love in that book of Moses means respecting parents, protecting private property, honoring one's word, caring for the physically

³⁹Santos, 20.

⁴⁰Ibid., 21.

⁴¹France, 480.

challenged, seeking justice for the powerless, living in sexual purity, showing love for one's enemies—and lots more!"⁴² To love another as yourself implies attention to the needs and concerns of another and active care of another, the actions of servanthood.⁴³

The Son of Man Sayings

It would be irresponsible to discuss the paradox of authority and servanthood in Mark without commenting on the Son of Man sayings in the narrative, for the use of this self-title embodies the fusion of the two seemingly contradictory motifs. The phrase "Son of Man" is a byname of Jesus, is used in an exclusive sense of him as "The Human One," and is nowhere found as an address by others *to* him. The title links him intimately with humanity in the primary aspect of fragility, yet identifies him as transcendent. The two components of the phrase are thus the fragility of human existence and the high status suggested by its appearance in Dan 7.13.⁴⁴

In Mark, Jesus uses this term for himself in two contexts: either in reference to his authority and future glory (2.10, 28; 8.38; 13.26; 14.62) or in reference to his betrayal, suffering, and death (8.31; 9.9, 12, 31; 10.33, 45; 14.21, 41). This usage in Mark is consistent with the other gospels where the title is also used by Jesus to refer to himself and to suggest both his authority and suffering. As mentioned above, the phrase often recalls the figure in Dan 7.13 to whom dominion and authority were to be given.⁴⁵ According to this context, the

⁴²Scot McKnight, *Loving God, Loving Others: The Jesus Creed* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004), 58.

⁴³Other teachings that imply a motif of servanthood include Jesus' embrace of children in 10.13-16 and his concern for the oppression and misleading of the people brought about by the religious leaders and their traditions in 2.15-3.6; 7.11-13; 10.21; and 11.17.

⁴⁴BDAG, 1026

⁴⁵Evans, 123.

destiny of the Son of Man was to be served by all peoples as the Head of Humanity.⁴⁶ It is as this authoritative, yet destined to suffer figure that Jesus provides the supreme model of the status reversal presented to his disciples and apparent in his selfless, service-oriented life and death.⁴⁷ His position as the glorious Son of Man indicates his divine authority, while the identification of this position with suffering provides the ultimate embodiment of his servanthood teachings.⁴⁸

Teachings about Authority and Servanthood

Mark 8.22—10.52 occupies a unique place in the gospel of Mark for its Christological statements and clear and elaborate teaching on discipleship.⁴⁹ France labels this section "Act Two" which consists of the way to Jerusalem and learning about the cross (8.22—10.52); it is the bridge between Act One, the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (1.14—8.21), and Act Three, the time in Jerusalem dominated by the passion narrative (11.1—16.8).⁵⁰ Act Two is sandwiched by two stories of Jesus healing blind men (8.22-26 and 10.46-52) illustrating that in this section Jesus is giving insight to his "blind" disciples.⁵¹ Three passion predictions in 8.31, 9.31, and 10.33-34 govern the pericopae in Act Two. Each prediction is followed by important teachings by Jesus on what to expect as followers of him and how to

⁴⁶Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Augustus Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 202; and France, 419

⁴⁷France, 419.

⁴⁸Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 581.

⁴⁹Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis, " 'A kolouqeí moi/Follow me' (Mk 2.14): Discipleship and Priesthood," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (Fall 1985): 276.

⁵⁰France, 13-14.

⁵¹Donahue, 38.

live in service and suffering.⁵² A consistent pattern exists in each of these predictions. First comes Jesus' prediction of his own betrayal and death to his disciples. This is followed by the disciples' failure to grasp the teaching and values Jesus is presenting (8.32-33; 9.32-34; 10.35-40). Consequentially, Jesus gives additional remedial teaching on the subject matter (8.34-38; 9.35-37; 10.41-45).⁵³ In this middle section of the gospel as the disciples journey on the way with Jesus, he is teaching them that the demands of a disciples' life of service is in direct contrast to their squabbles over positions of prestige.⁵⁴ Jesus is showing his followers that the true mark of discipleship lies in being a servant, in taking one's cross, and in a willingness to sacrifice for the gospel.⁵⁵ In addition, this section shows the need for all followers of Jesus to be receptive to *his* definitions and descriptions of who he is and what his disciples should look like.⁵⁶

Four passages within this section have much to say about the motifs of servanthood and authority in relation to discipleship: 8.34-38, 9.35-37, 10.28-31, and 10.41-45. The following sections discuss these passages by focusing on one main thematic verse in each.

Mark 8.34

The governing statement of Mk 8.34-38 is found in 34b: "If anyone wishes to follow after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." This teaching

⁵²Evans, 115.

⁵³France, 414.

⁵⁴Donahue, 38.

⁵⁵W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, New Testament Theology, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 133.

⁵⁶Francis J. Moloney, *Mark: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 85.

comes after Jesus' first passion prediction and Peter's misunderstanding and rebuke of Jesus in vv 31-33. Jesus is teaching his followers to value him and the gospel more than their own lives. They must not be preoccupied with self and possessions, but rather they must deliberately choose the others-directed way of life to which Jesus calls them.⁵⁷

Two aspects of discipleship are dominant in v 34: self-denial and cross-bearing.⁵⁸ The concept of self-denial (απαρνησασθω) is not concerned merely with asceticism or self-discipline.⁵⁹ Self-denial is the opposite of self-affirmation and thus involves placing value on the gospel of God rather than on one's position, rights, privileges, or even one's being or life.⁶⁰ Verses 35-37 reinforce this idea by identifying a true disciple as one who is willing to lose his life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. There is more to this concept of losing life than merely the willingness to experience literal/physical death, for it also involves the loss of the comforts or privileges of life while it is being lived.⁶¹ Self-denial is the willing act of giving up personal will and ambition for God's;⁶² it is "to act in a wholly selfless manner."⁶³ This is the first demand of those who truly wish to follow Jesus.

⁵⁷Sweetland, 60.

⁵⁸Verse 34b is a first class conditional sentence. The protasis includes the indicative *qe lei* followed by the complementary infinitive *a kolouqein*. The apodosis includes the three imperatives *a parnhsasqw*, *ar atw*, and *a kolouqeitw*. The third element of the apodosis, following Jesus, is best understood in relation to self-denial and cross-bearing, (Best, 37), indicating that a true disciple should be ready to share the fate of Jesus in these two areas (Santos, 162). The meaning of the conditional sentence is one of evidence/inference: obedience to the imperatives in the apodosis is evidence that one truly desires to follow Jesus. It is interesting to note the assonance found in these verbs which all begin with alpha.

⁵⁹Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Ernst Bammel, Anthony Hanson, David Hill, and Max Wilcox, no. 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 37.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Santos, 162.

⁶³BDAG, 97.

The command to bear one's cross foreshadows the death by which Jesus will die and shows that the way of Jesus to the cross and the way of discipleship are closely interwoven.⁶⁴ The command to cross-bearing goes beyond the literal connotation of willingness to suffer martyrdom and beyond the watered-down idea of patient endurance in whatever daily trials one may encounter.⁶⁵ Jesus' cross-bearing is symbolic of his loving activity,⁶⁶ and like self-denial it is more than abstaining from certain luxuries but involves a deliberate and intentional willingness to make whatever sacrifices are necessary for the cause of Christ.⁶⁷ The concept of self-denial reflects the inner attitude while cross-bearing illustrates the outward activity, while both are a definite action and a resolve to adopt the others-centered, sacrificial way of Jesus.⁶⁸ True followers of Jesus are wholly selfless and wholly devoted to the cause of Christ and the gospel, denying the personal will, positions, privileges, and power of the way of the world for the self-denying and cross-bearing way of Jesus.

Mark 9.35

After Jesus predicts his death and resurrection a second time (9.30-32), the disciples are found arguing about which one among them is the greatest (vv 33-34). This prompts Jesus to call them together for a lesson on greatness and in 35b he states: "If anyone wishes to be first, he will be last of all and a servant of all." This statement is further clarified

⁶⁴Sweetland, 57.

⁶⁵Ibid., 60.

⁶⁶Best, 39.

⁶⁷Sweetland, 60.

⁶⁸Best, 39.

with an illustration: whoever receives a child in the name of Jesus receives Jesus and the Father.

The structure of 9.35b is similar to that of 8.34b: it is a first class conditional sentence with *qe lei* followed by the complementary infinitive *eina i* in the protasis, but it has a future indicative *es ta i* in the apodosis. That this future indicative is functioning almost identically as an imperative brings the structure even closer to that found in 8.34. On the surface, the first class condition is functioning to communicate a cause/effect idea: "if you want to be first, then you will be last." But the self-contradictory and paradoxical nature of this statement causes the reader to pause. This is a common rhetorical feature in the gospel where Jesus uses unexpected, contradictory statements that depart from accepted opinion in order to challenge, confound, and break stereotypes.⁶⁹ He is not simply providing his disciples a new and better way to achieve greatness but is *renouncing* their striving for prestige and power altogether and completely redefining and reversing the concept and importance of "greatness."⁷⁰

In their culture, to be first was to be in the upper governing or retainer class with others of power and influence, so for the disciples to be last, as Jesus instructs, is for them to be someone with no rank, authority, or privilege.⁷¹ This implies a willingness and a decision to be last, to give others priority, and to refrain from insisting on self prerogatives.⁷² The use of *dia konoV* indicates that the imagery of household service is to characterize the way of

⁶⁹Edwards, 12; and Santos, 3.

⁷⁰Donahue, 56.

⁷¹Evans, 61.

⁷²Trakatellis, 277; and Sweetland, 63.

discipleship.⁷³ The action emphasized is care for others and an awareness of the needs of others; it is ministering to others in time of need.⁷⁴ Jesus is teaching a new orientation to life and a drastically new mentality in which others, rather than self, become the center of attention, love, and care.⁷⁵

The picture Jesus gives in vv 36-37 illustrates this point as well as reinforcing the imagery of household service. The service that should characterize the way of the disciple is compared to the kindness, care, and attention one would show a child.⁷⁶ When caring for a child, the needs of the child consistently come before the needs of the caretaker though the child is one who is quite helpless and powerless. The actions of the caretaker are uniquely focused on the benefit for the child rather than self. The true follower of Jesus displays this type of servanthood to all.

The disciples, who are eager to be first and to have power and status for themselves, persist in their desire for a new power pyramid where they hold the prominent places at the apex.⁷⁷ Jesus' words on servanthood, however, give a completely different picture where power and position over others is devalued and others-oriented service is elevated. The prevailing attitude of the disciples shows how much they still misunderstand about true discipleship and provides a warning to all who fail to comprehend Jesus and his

⁷³Donahue, 39.

⁷⁴Trakatellis, 278; and Santos, 179.

⁷⁵Trakatellis, 278.

⁷⁶Sweetland, 63.

⁷⁷Waetjen, 159; and Telford, 133.

mission.⁷⁸ The disciples are called to transform their thirst for power and prominence and accept Jesus' way of service and sacrifice on behalf of others.⁷⁹

Mark 10.31

The statement found in Mk 10.31 shares certain similarities with 9.35 and 10.43b-44, but is found in a different context, has a different structure, and thus the force and meaning are a bit different. In Mark 10.31, Jesus says, "But many who are first will be last and the last will be first." Rather than following a passion prediction by Jesus and misunderstandings by the disciples, this statement is found in a context in which Jesus is encouraging and praising his disciples for the sacrifices they have made in following him. In vv 23-27, Jesus speaks of the near impossibility of a rich man entering the kingdom of God. In v 28, Peter makes the statement, "We have left everything and followed you," as a reminder of the sacrifices of the disciples,⁸⁰ and as if to ask the outcome of such sacrifice.⁸¹ Jesus responds by assuring Peter that those who have sacrificed in following Jesus will be rewarded and will receive eternal life in the age to come (vv 29-30). Verse 31 then is a declarative statement utilizing future indicative verbs; it is not a conditional sentence and does not carry an imperatival tone. It is a statement of how things will be rather than an exhortation of how disciples should be characterized. It is further encouragement to the disciples about the nature of the coming age in which the values and rule of Jesus will visibly be in place. It also reinforces the idea that the power structure and value structure of the

⁷⁸Sweetland, 61; and Santos, 275.

⁷⁹Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi, *"But it is Not So Among You": Echoes of Power in Mark 10.32-45*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. Stanley E. Porter, no. 249 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 206.

⁸⁰Moloney, 85.

⁸¹Waetjen, 172.

present age is in contradiction to the structures which should govern followers of Jesus now and will govern the next age.

Mark 10.43-44

The third passion prediction is the most detailed of the three and the subsequent actions of the disciples (specifically James and John) has been called the "most blatant example of human self-centeredness in contrast to Jesus' humility and self-sacrifice."⁸² The ambition of James and John revealed in 10.35-40 shows their desire to establish their own personal position and status.⁸³ Jesus addresses their desire and gives it a more realistic view by again reiterating that his way is the way of suffering. In v 40, Jesus reveals that status in the kingdom of God cannot be bestowed as a favor or even earned by loyalty and sacrifice.⁸⁴ In response to James and John's question about power and glory, Jesus reveals his own limitation in the face of God's plan.⁸⁵ The two brothers picture Jesus' glory in the image of the powerful of their society rather than in the suffering servant image Jesus has just explained to them (for the third time!).⁸⁶ James and John show a remarkable lack of awareness and propensity for personal ambition that is out of keeping with everything Jesus has taught since 9.33.⁸⁷

It is in response to this interchange and the unrest it causes among the other disciples that Jesus speaks in vv 41-45. This passage shows the radical selfless service that is to characterize those who follow Jesus in direct contradiction to the accepted worldly values

⁸²Edwards, 321.

⁸³France, 414.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Donahue, 47.

⁸⁶Kaminouchi, 206.

⁸⁷France, 414.

of power, authority, and prominence while in direct parallel to the servant life and suffering death of the authoritative Son of Man. The disciples are to live lives of service *to* others, not prominence *over* others.

The teaching that Jesus offers his disciples can be examined in three sections. In the first section (v 42b-c), Jesus provides a description of status and authority in the Gentile political world. The picture is a clear one of those who are deemed more important and influential than others exercising rule and authority *over* those in subordinate positions, and doing so for their own personal benefit while ignoring the needs of others. In the eyes of the world, greatness and importance was defined as and exercised in coercive and self-beneficial power and authority.⁸⁸ Section two (vv 43-44) contains a description of the radical service that should characterize the life of the disciples in direct contrast to that described in the previous section. In section three (v 45), Jesus presents his own life and death of ultimate service as the model and authority for his command to servanthood.

The central command in 10.43b-44 reads "Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you will be a slave of all." The structure shares similarities and differences with the parallel message in 8.34 and 9.35. Instead of a conditional sentence, these parallel statements in 10.43b-44 utilize indefinite relative clauses in the subject position and future indicative verbs as the main verb. Like 9.35, these statements are self-contradictory and highly ironic. The call to be slaves of all is not a recommendation of kindness for would-be leaders but a radical call to practice servanthood that denies the power network as it is understood by the world.⁸⁹

⁸⁸Evans, 118.

⁸⁹Kaminouchi, 208.

A *doulos* is one who is solely committed to another,⁹⁰ totally owned by another, and possesses no rights except those given by the master.⁹¹ This imagery is a further extension of the idea of subjection presented in v 43 and in 9.35; it involves even less self-determination.⁹² Whereas a servant received some personal benefit in that he received wages and had some ability to care for his own needs, a slave is completely and utterly at the service of his master. The idea of equating the lowest and most dependent class of society with the most prominent is "absurdly paradoxical."⁹³ Christ is saying here that the greatest virtue for his followers is not power or even freedom, but service.⁹⁴ The possessive genitive *panτων* makes the statement all the more radical in that it requires this slave-like devotion be shown to everyone, not just those considered to be of a higher status.⁹⁵ The phrase itself is deliberately paradoxical, for a slave usually had only one master, and thus serves to emphasize this ideal of universal service towards others.⁹⁶

There is no precedence in either the Old Testament or the Jewish tradition for the radical ideas and values found in Mk 10.43-44.⁹⁷ Presented here is a decisive reversal of values that turns the natural expectations of society on their head.⁹⁸ These statements are not meant to provide a protocol or map to follow for those who wish to become important and prominent, but to rearrange their thinking on the subject. These verses do not describe the

⁹⁰BDAG, 260.

⁹¹James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 170.

⁹²France, 419.

⁹³Edwards, 326.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵France, 419.

⁹⁶Donahue, 313.

⁹⁷Edwards, 325.

⁹⁸France, 419.

way to achieve greatness, for greatness is only described as something wanted (qe|h).⁹⁹ The idea of becoming a servant and slave to others is not a new avenue to status, but it denies the idea of power, prestige, and prominence as valuable or helpful ambitions. The desire for power, authority, and dominance focuses on self and kills love, which is by nature focused on others.¹⁰⁰ The purpose of the disciples in the 1st century and of followers of Christ through all centuries is not to own and preside over the Christian community, but to be a part of it and be "owned" by it for the benefit of others.

Conclusions

Power and authority in the first century, much like today, were commodities to be used and abused for the purpose of self-benefit, self-preservation, and/or self-promotion. Servanthood was for those without power or authority and was the lot in life for those who had no other choice. The life and teachings of Jesus present an alternative paradigm to these structures. The gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the one with supreme, divine authority and power who lives a life of supreme, divine servanthood and sacrifice for others. His disciples are invested with his authority and called to his mission, but in order to do so they must properly understand who Jesus is so that they might follow him appropriately. Throughout the gospel, the motifs of authority and servanthood are prominent and intertwined. Jesus is pictured using his authority to minister to and benefit those who are most needy and his disciples are instructed to use the authority given to them for the same purpose. Servanthood is consistently presented in a positive light as something expected and demanded of true followers of Christ. Still, the original disciples misunderstand and continue to pursue

⁹⁹Gundry, 581.

¹⁰⁰Edwards, 326.

positions of prominence and authority while Christ continually provides clear teaching on the sacrificial nature of his own life and work and the radical servanthood that is to characterize his disciples. As is often the case with Jesus and his teaching, the reality is quite startling and unexpected and disciples of all generations need the repetition and reiteration of these ideas as they are presented in the gospel of Mark.

These lessons of authority and servanthood in the gospel of Mark do not insist that disciples rid themselves of any hint of power and authority in an attempt to place themselves in the lowest class of whatever power pyramid may exist. The point is to follow Jesus in recognizing that whatever power and authority may be invested in us is from the only true source of power that exists, God the Father. Thus any power we have been given is to be used exclusively in service to him, not to self (or any other allegiance or group). Jesus has clearly shown that service to the Father is practiced in the type of service to others which denies self-prerogatives and ambitions. To accomplish this, the true follower of Christ must first be aware—aware of his or her own gifts of power or authority whether they be economical, political, or social and aware of the ultimate source and purpose of such gifts. He or she must also be aware of the needs of other people and classes of society: who or what needs to be challenged with the message of Jesus? Who needs an advocate more powerful than they to protect them and plead their case? The paradox of authority and servanthood in the narrative of Mark represents Jesus' introduction of an entirely new way of thinking about the relationship between these two motifs. Power is not the goal and servanthood the means; *servanthood* is the goal and power and authority are merely the means that accomplish that lofty goal.