

On the Way to Servant-hood
Mark 8:27-36; 9:30-37; 10:32-45

The disciples didn't get it! Perhaps it was because of their skewed perception of Jesus. They probably knew the passages in the book of Isaiah concerning the "delivering" Messiah. Perhaps the texts revealing that the Messiah is called the Lord's "Servant" were bypassed (Isaiah 52:13). Who would have desired to follow a "Servant" described as "marred more than any man?" (Isaiah 53:3) Why would anyone have gotten behind a "Servant" who was "despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?" (v. 3). Yet, Jesus required that His disciples follow Him into servant-hood. His disciples, however, did not understand.

The disciples entered their education in servant-hood earnestly. Jesus commanded Simon and Andrew, "Get behind me!" and they "followed Him" (Mark 1:17). He "called" James and John, and these two "got behind Him" (v. 20). But, by the middle of the book, Jesus must inquire of the disciples, "Do you not yet see or understand?" (8:17). Their responses to Jesus' admonishment on servant-hood suggest that they did not.

Mark's gospel, in chapters 8, 9, and 10, develops this impression of the disciples' misunderstanding of servant-hood through three scenes that are joined by means of repetitious wording. Locating the repetitious wording which purposefully links a number of narratives is the third key to a dynamic Bible study. The use of this "key," in the three scenes found in Mark 8-10, uncovers this duplication. Mark's purpose is to encourage his readers to follow Jesus into servant-hood.

The first scene occurs as Jesus travels through villages north of Israel. We are told, for the first time, that Jesus is "**on the way**" toward a location not yet made known (Mark 8:27). Jesus discloses His purpose for being on earth—that He must "**suffer many things and be rejected..., and be killed, and after three days rise again**" (v. 31). But Peter doesn't get it. Through the influence of Satan, Peter gets in the face of Jesus with intense objections. Jesus must command Peter to "get behind" Him, as He had when He first met Peter (Mk. 1:7). Since Peter has missed the point that Jesus came as the Lord's "Servant" to die for mankind, Jesus instructs His disciples on the definition of servant-hood. He declares, "**If anyone wishes to get behind Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me**" (v. 34). In order to be a disciple, Peter must get behind Jesus, for Jesus was a servant first.

In Mark 9, we find the second of the linked passages on servant-hood. As Jesus walked along with His disciples, He again confided that He would be "**delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and...He will rise three days later**" (v. 31). When they arrive at Capernaum, Jesus questions His disciple about a conversation He had observed them having "**on the way**" (9:33). They were reluctant to divulge that "**on the way**" they had been debating about which of them was "the greatest" (v. 34). Jesus, therefore, sits with them to reiterate His lesson on servant-hood: "**If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all**" (v. 35). In order to be a disciple, the disciples must be servant of all, for Jesus was a servant first.

Finally, in the last of the three texts on servant-hood (Mark 10), the author exposes the location of their destination. They are "**on the way** up to Jerusalem," the place of the crucifixion (Mark 10:32). Leaving behind the crowds, Jesus restates the revelation of His death, saying that He would be handed over "**to the chief priests and the scribes;**" who

would “**condemn Him to death**” and would deliver Him “**over to the Gentiles.**” After mocking, spitting on, scourging, and killing Him, He would, “**in three days,...rise again**” (v. 33). Despite the explicit heinousness of this third prophecy, James and John covet the pre-eminent positions on either side of Jesus when He comes into His kingdom (v. 37). Seeing that they still don’t get it, Jesus, for the third time, exhorts His disciples to follow Him into servant-hood: “**whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant,**” and “**whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all**” (vv. 43-44). In order to be a disciple, the disciples must serve one another, for Jesus was servant first.

Three times we are informed that Jesus and His disciples are “on the way;” three times Jesus foretells His crucifixion; three times Jesus counsels His disciples to follow Him into servant-hood. Because of these reoccurrences, we are exposed to the disciples’ obvious inability to “get it.” We must, therefore, ask ourselves, “Do we?” Are we “on the way” to servant-hood?