

Acts 10:36-43 and the Gospel of Mark

The record of the apostle Peter's word to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:36-43 is a summary of the entire Gospel of Mark.¹ In this short passage of eight verses Peter sets forth the crucial points of the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ as the Slave of God, who came to serve sinners with God's salvation. His speaking is a bird's-eye view of the Savior's gospel service in Mark, which unveils the divine significance of the Lord's life and ministry. It is a speaking not of eloquence or human persuasion but of spiritual utterance that conveys the truth, the reality, of the Lord's person and work. The impact of his utterance was such that "while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word" (v. 44).

While Peter spoke as an eye-witness of the events of the Lord's ministry, beginning with the initiation of the Lord Jesus into His gospel service through baptism and concluding after His ascension with the universal spreading of the gospel through the disciples, he also understood the meaning of these events in relation to the truth of God's economy. As a result, Peter's speaking was not simply a report of these events but a ministry that imparted the reality of the Lord Jesus and His accomplished work.²

Acts 10:36-43 is a distillation of Peter's view of the gospel, and therefore this passage is a key to understanding Mark according to the teaching of the apostles, that is, according to the revelation of God's New Testament economy (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 1:4).

"Announcing the Gospel of Peace through Jesus Christ"

The first crucial point of truth in Peter's message is the announcing of the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ: "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel in announcing the gospel of peace through Jesus Christ (this One is Lord of all)" (Acts 10:36). A. T. Robertson notes the correspondence of Peter's word with Ephesians 2:17: "Almost this very language occurs in Eph. 2:17 where Paul

states that Jesus on the cross 'preached (gospelized) peace to you who are afar off and peace to you who are near'" (144). It is highly significant that in Ephesians peace denotes what Christ has accomplished through His death: the abolishing of the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles and the creating of them in Himself into one new man. In Acts 10 Peter addresses the first group of Gentiles to hear the good news, and he begins with a declaration of peace. Thus, Peter touches the highest issue of the Lord's redemptive work, which is the creation of the one new man, the corporate entity comprising both Jews and Gentiles, who have been reconciled in one Body to God. Robertson comments that "Peter here sees what Paul will see later with great clearness" (144).

The new man in Christ is the new creation, differing from the old creation in that it has God as its element. It is

our being that is regenerated by the Spirit (John 3:6), having God's life and the divine nature wrought into it (John 3:36; 2 Pet. 1:4), having Christ as its constituent (Col. 3:10-11), and having become a new constitution. (Recovery Version, Gal. 6:15, note 1)

The new man and the new creation both refer to the church, not in its outward appearance but in its inward constitution. It is "the nature, the inward and intrinsic organic constituent, of the church" (note 1). At the end of Mark, the resurrected Lord charged His disciples to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all the creation (16:15). On the one hand, this indicates that all God's creation needs to hear of Christ's accomplished work, which has reconciled the entire creation to God (Col. 1:20). On the other hand, it speaks forth the goal of the gospel, which is a new creation in Christ, the new man, with the ascended Christ as the Head and the church as the Body.

Concerning Christ's preaching of the gospel after His resurrection, Alford points out that in Acts 10:36 the "announcing of the gospel of peace *through Jesus Christ*"

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(emphasis added) refers not to peace being through Jesus Christ but to the announcing of the gospel being by Jesus Christ (*New Testament* 723). Christ announced the gospel of peace that He accomplished on the cross when He came again in His resurrection as the Spirit: “And coming, He”—Christ after His death and resurrection—“announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near” (Eph. 2:17). For Christ to preach to “you who were far off,” referring to the Gentiles, as well as to “those who were near,” referring to the Jews, indicates that He did so as the Spirit. “This is the coming of Christ as the Spirit to preach peace as the gospel, which peace He made through His cross” (Recovery Version, note 1). In resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to preach the gospel in His disciples, who are the members of His Body, the corporate Christ (12:12). Mark ends with the disciples as the corporate Christ preaching the gospel. “They went out and preached everywhere” (16:20), announcing the gospel for the enlargement of the new man, the new creation.

“The Baptism Which John Proclaimed”

Both Peter and Mark begin their accounts of Jesus’ gospel service with the baptism of repentance proclaimed by John. Peter says, “The word which has been spoken throughout the whole of Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John proclaimed” (Acts 10:37). Mark writes that the beginning of the gospel is “even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet” concerning John (Mark 1:1-2).

The gospel begins with baptism, and it is a strong sign that the dispensation of the law is over. Baptism, which signifies burial, is a termination. By baptizing men, who were under the dispensation of the law, John the Baptist terminated them and prepared them for the Savior’s ministry in the dispensation of grace.

Furthermore, John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. *To repent* in the original Greek (*metanoēō*) is “to change one’s mind or purpose” (Liddell and Scott 503). It is not only to repent for sins and wrongdoings in the past but to have a turn in one’s thinking from all things that have usurped and occupied one’s thinking. It is a turn to God in every way and in everything for the fulfillment of His purpose. John’s ministry commanded people to have such a turn, and then he baptized them in water. The Lord’s ministry followed John’s ministry to baptize people in the Holy Spirit. Water is a sign of John’s ministry, and the Holy Spirit is a sign of the Lord’s ministry. “Water signifies death and burial for the termination of the repenting people; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life and resurrection for the germination of the terminated people” (Recovery Version, Mark 1:8, note 1).

It was also necessary for the Savior Himself to be baptized in order to be initiated into His service. His baptism demonstrated the way that He would take in His service, namely, that He would not serve in a human, natural way but through death and resurrection. “By being baptized, He was able to live and minister in resurrection even before His actual death and resurrection three and a half years later” (Recovery Version, Matt. 3:16, note 1). God accepted Him into His service by anointing Him with the Spirit, which descended upon Him as a dove (Acts 10:38; Mark 1:10).

“Jesus...from Nazareth,...Who Went About Doing Good”

In Acts 10:38 Peter introduces the Savior: “Jesus, the One from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing.” In this verse Peter touches the particular characteristics of the Lord’s ministry that are the subject of the Gospel of Mark: the humility and deeds of the Savior. The Lord Jesus was from Nazareth, a city in the despised region of Galilee, and the title *Nazarene* was a term of humiliation (John 1:45-46; Matt. 2:23). Peter speaks of the Lord’s deeds rather than His words. By speaking of the Lord Jesus’ humility and actions, Peter introduces two themes which are fully developed in Mark, a Gospel that portrays the Lord as the Slave of God and the Slave-Savior to sinners.

Mark does not have a record of the Lord’s genealogy, as do the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Such a record would not be fitting for His status as a slave. Moreover, whereas Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of the Lord’s life from His conception and birth, Mark commences his account with the Lord’s service, because what is significant in the life of a slave is not his background but his work. Mark’s account is simpler and of greater brevity than either Matthew’s or Luke’s, which is also fitting to the Lord’s status in this Gospel. Finally, although the Lord’s teachings are significant in the Gospel of Mark, in comparison with the other Gospels the emphasis is on His works, not His words, for it is the former not the latter that is important to record in the life of a slave.

The strongest expression concerning Christ as the Slave of God and the Slave-Savior of sinners is Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.” The antecedent of the phrase *for even* at the beginning of this verse is the phrase *the slave of all* in verse 44. As the Slave of God, Christ came to be a Slave to all fallen human beings. According to biblical usage, a slave refers to one who has sold himself and has lost all human rights (Exo. 21:2-6). The Lord Jesus voluntarily

became a man in the form of a slave in order to accomplish redemption for fallen humanity. His redemption became His service that He rendered to sinners, a service that accomplished the eternal plan of God.

As the Gospel that portrays the incarnated Christ as the Slave of God, Mark furnishes us with the details of Paul's teaching in Philippians 2:5-9. Christ Jesus, while existing in the form of God, emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave. Being in the form of a slave required that He become in the likeness of men and be found in fashion as a man. He also humbled Himself, became obedient unto death, received the humiliation of the cross, and was ultimately exalted by God. All these matters are seen directly or indirectly in Mark.

His humanity and humility are two outstanding characteristics of the Slave-Savior in Mark. His being found in fashion as a man, including His outward diligence and inward compassion, is most evident in this Gospel (1:32-35, 41; 8:2; 10:51). His humbling of Himself is also vividly portrayed in His direct contact with eighteen individuals in Mark. Furthermore, only Mark relates that the Lord took a young child "into His arms" when teaching the disciples concerning humility (9:36; 10:16). His obedience as the Slave of God is seen in His listening to God in prayer (1:35), His absoluteness for God (v. 38), and His full submission to God's will that He die without any resistance, a submission that caused Pilate to marvel (15:5). His humiliation in death is seen in His utterly unjust mistreatment and mockery at the hands of the Jews (14:64-65), Pilate (15:15), the cohort of Roman soldiers (vv. 16-20), passers-by (vv. 29-30), the chief priests with the scribes (v. 31), and those with whom He was crucified (v. 32). Whereas in life, those of high status shunned Him, in death He was buried with dignity by "the honorable member of the Council," Joseph from Arimathea (vv. 43-46). Finally, God vindicated His Slave by resurrecting Him from the dead and taking Him up into heaven to sit at His right hand (16:1-8, 19).

The Lord Jesus was the Slave of God and the Slave-Savior to humankind. Concerning His service, those whom He served judged that He had "done all things well" (7:37). Although He was so thoroughly in the likeness of man, He was still the Son of God, manifesting His divine attributes in His lordship (2:28), in His omniscience (v. 8), and in His miraculous power and authority to cast out demons (1:27; 3:15), forgive sins (2:5, 7, 10), and silence the wind and the sea (4:39). Yet these attributes were manifested in His human virtues. The deity of the Slave of God was concealed in His human form, the form of a slave. Only the one who witnessed the manner in which His human life came to an end perceived, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (15:39).

"Healing"

In the latter part of Acts 10:38 Peter says that the Lord went about "healing all those who were being oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." In the Gospel of Mark there are nine specific instances of healing and four instances of casting out a spirit or demon.

In this Gospel there also is a progression in the cases of healing from sicknesses which affect the entire person to those affecting particular organs of the body. There are four cases in the former category. First, there is the fever of Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31), which signifies a person's abnormal and intemperate condition that causes that person to be unable to serve God; it may also signify a person's unbridled temper. The Slave-Savior heals such a sick condition, becoming one's inward rest and quietness (cf. Isa. 30:15) and restoring him to normality for the purpose of serving Him. The second case involves a leper (Mark 1:40-45). Leprosy is the most contaminating of diseases, causing its victim to be isolated from God and people. The Lord's cleansing of the leper signifies recovering a sinner to fellowship with God and with others (1 John 1:3). The third case, that of the paralytic, signifies a sinner's paralysis through sin that causes a person to be unable to walk before God (Mark 2:1-12). The Lord healed this condition by forgiving the man's sins, indicating His judicial redemption, and by enabling him to walk again, indicating the ability to walk by the Spirit in God's organic salvation (1 John 1:7, 9; Gal. 5:25). The fourth case involves the woman with a flow of blood and the dying daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21-43). These cases are merged to signify a life that cannot be retained. The true condition of sinners is that they are born in the death-sickness of sin and are dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). When the death-sickness of sin is dealt with by the Savior's redeeming death (1 Pet. 2:24), a sinner rises out of death into life (John 5:24-25).

These four cases of healing in the first part of the Slave-Savior's service do not depict four different kinds of sinners but the four conditions of a typical sinner, who is abnormal in condition, contaminated, paralyzed in the things of God, and dead in offenses and sins, unable to retain life. Mark follows these healings with the Lord's exposure of the true inward condition of man's heart, out from which proceed thirteen defiling things (7:21-23). This shows that the inward condition of a sinner, which is wholly defiling, can be healed only by the Lord's death and resurrection, which is the subject of the second part of Mark.

The Lord heals in order to feed, which signifies His desire to be our life supply. The Lord's healing ministry in Mark is accompanied by two cases of feeding: the feeding of the five thousand in 6:30-44 and the four

thousand in 8:1-10. Furthermore, even the casting out of a demon from the daughter of a Canaanite woman in 7:24-30 is presented in the context of feeding. In this case, the Lord describes His service to sinners as bread on the children's table, which cannot be thrown to the little dogs. To this the woman responds, "Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs under the table eat of the little children's crumbs" (v. 28). This indicates that the Jews' (the children's) rejection of the Lord Jesus as their life supply opened the way for Him to be the life supply to the Gentiles (the little dogs).

The Slave-Savior's healing service progresses from healing sick persons to particular organs of the body—the withered hand (3:1-6), the ears and mouth of a deaf and dumb man (7:31-37), and the eyes of a blind man in Bethsaida (8:22-26). These healings point to the recovery of the spiritual functions in the life of a believer. For example, in Ephesians 1:18 Paul prays that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened. In Galatians 3:5 he speaks of receiving the bountiful supply of the Spirit through the hearing of faith, which indicates how to receive the word of God. Two other passages indicate our need to impart spiritual things through our speaking: Ephesians 5:19 exhorts us to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and Colossians 3:16 mentions teaching and admonishing one another, both of which require speaking.

“We Are Witnesses of All the Things”

In Acts 10:39-41 Peter proceeds to speak next of Christ's death and resurrection, emphasizing the fact that he and the other apostles were witnesses of these things:

We are witnesses of all the things which He did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom also they did away with by hanging Him on a tree. This One, God raised on the third day; and He has made Him manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses appointed beforehand by God, to us, ones who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.

Acts stresses the fact that those who spread the gospel by His power after the Lord's ascension are His witnesses. The word *witnesses* literally means “martyrs; those who bear a living testimony of the resurrected and ascended Christ in life, differing from preachers who merely preach doctrines in letters” (Recovery Version, Acts 1:8, note 3). The Gospels are a record of the Lord in the stage of His incarnation carrying out His ministry on the earth “to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom of God only in the Jewish land” (note 3). Acts is a record of the Lord after His resurrection and ascension in the stage of His inclusion. In this stage, He as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit carries out His ministry in the heavens

through these martyrs, in His resurrection life and with His ascension power and authority...to spread Himself as the development of the kingdom of God from Jerusalem, as a beginning, unto the uttermost part of the earth, as the consummation of His ministry in the New Testament. All the apostles and disciples in the Acts were His martyrs, His witnesses, of this kind. (note 3)

The witnesses of the Lord's resurrection were, on the one hand, those who had received a heavenly revelation of the person of Christ and, on the other hand, those who had become one with Christ organically by being united with Him through His death and resurrection. In such a union they shared in Christ's crucifixion, having been crucified with Him, and in His resurrection, having been raised together with Him (Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 2:6). Thus, Christ became their life and person (Col. 3:4, 11), and His history became their history (Rom. 6:3-4). Peter and the first group of apostles in Acts and later Paul were such witnesses (Acts 26:16).

Mark presents a vivid illustration of how the Lord obtained witnesses to His resurrection. In this Gospel Peter and the other disciples are representative of all the believers. Peter, James, and John accompanied the Lord from the beginning of His ministry (1:16-20). They were with Him as He proclaimed the gospel, cast out the demons, healed the sick, and fed the thousands. Eventually, they were brought by the Lord to the mountain, where He was transfigured before them (9:2-13). It was there that they were fully unveiled concerning Him. He was revealed as the Christ who is everything in God's New Testament dispensation. Once Christ came, there was no longer any place for Moses, representing the law, or Elijah, representing the prophets. Everything of the Old Testament dispensation was terminated and replaced by this universal, all-inclusive One.

However, Peter's and the other disciples' journey with the Lord Jesus did not end there; it continued to Jerusalem, where the Lord presented Himself to the chief priests and scribes to be killed. They accompanied the Lord to the garden to watch with Him and to be with Him at His arrest. Peter followed the Lord to the place where He was judged. There in the courtyard Peter was also judged. He denied the Lord three times, and in this failure his natural zeal and confidence in his strength were fully exposed and brought to an end (14:66-72). When the Lord passed through death, He was not alone (15:40-41). Moreover, following His resurrection from the dead, an angel instructed the women to tell this news to Peter: “But go, tell His disciples and Peter” (16:7). Even when the Lord ascended, He did so in the presence of His disciples (v. 19). In every step of His redemptive work, the Lord was not alone. This signifies the fact that all the believers, who are joined to Christ by faith in Him, participate in the

marvelous accomplishments of His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In this respect, Mark is not only a biography of the Slave-Savior but also a biography of all believers, as represented by Peter and the disciples. Through His death and resurrection we have become one with Him. His history has become our history. We are His witnesses.

“He Has Charged Us to Proclaim”

In Acts 10:42 Peter says that God “has charged us to proclaim to the people and solemnly testify.” This refers to the Lord Jesus’ charge to His disciples before His ascension: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all the creation” (Mark 16:15). Peter’s message to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius was part of the fulfillment of this word; it was the spreading of the gospel beyond the realm of the Jewish people to all creation. In the remainder of the book of Acts, as the disciples spread ever more widely, there was also a universal spreading of the gospel. According to verses 17 and 18, certain signs would accompany their preaching of the gospel: the casting out of demons, speaking with new tongues, picking up serpents, not being harmed by deadly drink, and the laying of hands on the sick for healing. This list is significant in two ways. First, only four of the five signs were manifested in the record of Acts (10:46; 19:6; 28:3-5; 5:15-16), which indicates that the Lord’s word was not completely fulfilled in the book of Acts. Thus, the spreading in Acts continues even to today. Second, since the accomplishment of only the first and last signs are recorded in the Gospels, the other three signs must be accomplished by the disciples, as the corporate increase of the Savior, thereby fulfilling the Lord’s word that the believers would do greater works (John 14:12).

“The Judge of the Living and the Dead”

Peter testified to Cornelius that Christ “was designated by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). This word implies that Christ is coming again to set up His kingdom on earth as revealed in Mark 10:30, 35-45; and 14:25. The kingdom in its initiation, growth, development, and fulfillment is a major item in the other Gospels, and no less so in Mark (4:1-34; 9:1-13). When Christ returns, He will set up His kingdom on earth, and He will judge the living and the dead (John 5:22, 27; 1 Pet. 4:5; Matt. 25:31-46).

“Everyone Who Believes into Him Will Receive Forgiveness of Sins”

Peter concludes his word to the house of Cornelius with the forgiveness of sins: “To this One all the prophets testify that through His name everyone who believes into Him will receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43). Mark

begins with John the Baptist’s preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). The forgiveness of sins removes the obstacle of the fall so that we may be reconciled to God. The opposing Jews, who questioned the Lord’s authority to forgive sins, only recognized the Lord Jesus as a man, not as God. The Lord proved that He had such authority by healing the paralytic man. Thus, He demonstrated that He is both the true God and a real man, the God-man, possessing both divinity and humanity.

Peter’s message in the house of Cornelius shows that Peter was constituted with the truth of the gospel, that is, with the reality of Christ as the good news. He was not speaking mere doctrines or relaying historical facts. He was constituted with these truths so that in a short speaking he could present a bird’s-eye view of the gospel, a view which requires the entire Gospel of Mark for its explanation and development. His speaking was full of impact and ministered not only the knowledge but also the very content of the gospel as a reality into those who heard him. Peter is a pattern to all those who seek to participate in the continuation of the New Testament ministry today.

by Jim Batten

Notes

¹See Recovery Version, Mark 1:1 note 1, and Robertson, pages 144-145.

²In *Elders’ Training, Book 3: The Way to Carry Out the Vision*, Witness Lee points out that the ministers of the word need to acquire the crucial points of the truth for each book of the Bible and then put these together to have a bird’s-eye view of the book. He illustrates this from the books of Mark and Romans on pages 19 through 28.

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