



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St. Matthew - Lindisfarne Gospels \(710-721\), f.25v - BL Cotton MS Nero D IV.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St._Matthew_-_Lindisfarne_Gospels_(710-721),_f.25v_-_BL_Cotton_MS_Nero_D_IV.jpg)

## Session 1 — How Matthew Elbowed Mark Aside and Became the #1 Gospel

Robert M. Fowler — [bobinberea@gmail.com](mailto:bobinberea@gmail.com)

Most scholars believe that Mark is the oldest of our four canonical gospels, and that Matthew and Luke independently wrote their gospels primarily by revising Mark's. Matthew especially embellished Mark so powerfully that we tend to remember Matthew's version of episodes rather than Mark's. Thanks to his provocative embellishments, Matthew elbowed Mark aside and successfully laid claim to being the #1 gospel in the New Testament. In this class we will focus especially on Matthew's re-write of the baptism of Jesus, the Walking on the Water, Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, and the ending of the gospel. We will combine careful reading of gospel texts with spiritual reflection on their possible meaning for each of us today.

- Remember how Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized, John initially resisted the request, but then relented and baptized Jesus? That's Matthew, not Mark.

(Hint: Why would Matthew tell us that John had reservations about baptizing Jesus? Could it be because John was offering a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"? What sins do you suppose Jesus needed to confess and repent of? Moreover, doesn't being baptized by John imply that John had superior status to Jesus? See the problems that Matthew is attempting to soften, if not actually resolve, in Mark's story?)

- Remember how Jesus came to the disciples in the boat, walking on the water? At first they were terrified, but then Peter hopped out of the boat and joined Jesus briefly in walking on the water. That's Matthew, not Mark.

(Hint: in Mark, the disciples are persistently clueless, failing to understand what Jesus is about and failing to walk faithfully in his path. In Mark's water-walking story, the disciples are terrified and clueless, as Jesus walks towards them, through the wind, on the waves, in the dark. But Matthew has Peter hop out of the boat and take a few steps on the water, thus rescuing a bit of the disciples' reputation that is so badly tarnished in Mark.)

- Remember this? Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" Then Jesus congratulated Simon for receiving a divine revelation, calling him "Peter," the "rock" on which the church would be built, and giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The congratulations, "rock," and "keys" are all missing in Mark. They only appear in Matthew.

(Hint: in Mark, it is frequently Peter himself whose credentials as a disciple are tarnished. In the Caesarea Philippi episode in Mark, he identifies Jesus correctly ("Christ"), but he doesn't understand what he is saying, because as soon as Jesus starts talking about rejection, suffering, and death, Peter gets in his face and "rebukes" him. Matthew radically transforms Mark's account by having Jesus praise Peter to the skies, thus rescuing Peter's reputation forever.)

- How about the ending of the story? Do you recall the guard set at the tomb of Jesus, two named women go to the tomb early on Sunday morning, an angel descends from heaven to roll away the stone from the tomb, the resurrected Jesus appears to the women, and finally he appears majestically to eleven disciples on a mountain-top in Galilee, giving them the "Great Commission" to evangelize the world? None of that is in Mark; all of it is in Matthew only.

(Hint: Mark's ending is short, mysterious, unresolved, stressing fear and silence. But who wants to end a gospel like that? Matthew expands the ending immensely, tying up loose ends, solving puzzles, still pointing to some fear but now fear overcome by great joy, and we conclude with a glorious mountaintop experience. Who wouldn't go for Matthew's glory over Mark's mystery?)

In summary, Matthew embellishes Mark when he:

- puts on John's lips an acknowledgement of the awkwardness and embarrassment of Jesus submitting to John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."
- salvages a bit of the disciples' tarnished reputation in Mark by having Peter take a few steps on the water.
- insists that Peter did in fact understand what Jesus was about, which led to Jesus congratulating him glowingly for having received a divine revelation, giving him his nickname "Rock," and handing him the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- greatly expands the ending of Mark's Gospel, tying up loose ends, filling in gaps, solving mysteries, turning fear into joy, silence into proclamation, and more.

And thus does Matthew elbow Mark aside and become the #1 gospel in the New Testament.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Objective #1: To Recognize and Appreciate the Narrative Integrity of the Gospels**

Sunday by Sunday at Trinity Cathedral, we are blessed to be exposed to a broad sweep of our biblical heritage. Often we are exposed to no less than four different scripture passages, one from the Hebrew Bible, another from the Psalms, often an epistle reading, and last, but certainly not least, a reading from one of the gospels. Our lectionary follows a three-year cycle in which the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) take turns being in the spotlight, with passages from John's Gospel periodically inserted in the midst of readings from the Synoptics. (This practice is just one of many things I find curious about the construction of the lectionary.)

On the whole, I celebrate the fact that the lectionary exposes us, in a disciplined manner, to vast portions of the Bible. This is a superior approach to the use of scripture in worship than what I experienced as a lad growing up in the Methodist Church, in the days before our contemporary lectionaries were created and used regularly, days in which a preacher often chose one particular passage to read in worship and on which to base the sermon. Often a solitary reading from the Bible was all we heard. Our far more ambitious approach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with many denominations using the Revised Common Lectionary, does a much better job of honoring the richness of the Bible in all its amazing breadth.

That said, I find myself regularly frustrated by what the lectionary throws at us, especially with regard to gospel passages. While it is true that in 'Matthew's year' in the lectionary (or Mark's, or Luke's), the spotlighted gospel is tracked week after week, thus giving us samplings of the whole thing, the fact that these gospel readings are but bite-sized pieces of the whole is a big problem, if understanding and resonating with the whole is important to us. Each of our gospels is a unified, integral whole, begging to be experienced and understood as a whole. Each gospel has its own unique narrative integrity, which is almost impossible to appreciate if we experience a gospel only as bite-sized pieces spread out over months.

Some analogies from other arenas of life may help us to understand the profound limitations in encountering the gospels in bite-sized pieces. Let's say we walk into a gallery in the Cleveland Museum of Art, and we stand entranced before a large painting, let's say 10' x 10' in size. Can you imagine a docent urging us to concentrate on a 6" x 6" area in the lower left corner of the painting, neglecting the rest of the painting? Wouldn't that feel strange? Or let us cross the street, enter Severance Hall, to listen to the orchestra play Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> symphony. Wikipedia suggests that Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> can take anywhere from 30 to 40 minutes to perform, but what if I crept up behind Franz Welser-Möst, tugged on his coattails, and begged him to do only a three-minute portion from the middle of the symphony? He would think me insane, wouldn't he? But we do something analogous with the gospels every Sunday. We read aloud Episode M from Matthew, but without reviewing Episodes ...J, K, L that preceded, and without looking ahead at Episodes N, O, P... that will follow. We treat the gospels in piecemeal fashion in a way we would never do to a painting in the Cleveland Museum of Art or to a symphony in Severance Hall.

My "Matthew Elbowed Mark Aside..." set of presentations is not a fullscale exploration of either Matthew or Mark, but it's a step in that direction. I hope your experience of "Matthew Elbowed..." intrigues and entices you to study the narrative integrity of our gospels on your own!

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Objective #2: To Practice Recognizing and Accepting "Difference," Both in the Gospels and in Our Own Lives**

First, can we study the Bible carefully enough to be able to recognize the abundant, profound differences to be found therein?

Second, can we study these differences carefully, thoughtfully, sympathetically enough to be able to understand where they come from and how they arose?

Third, can we find a way to respect and live with these differences, all the while remaining faithful to our own particular perspective on the issues raised by them?

Fourth, can this encounter with difference in the Bible help us to recognize, understand, and live with differences of all sorts in our own lives?

FYI, the four New Testament gospels (for what it's worth, many gospels have survived outside the New Testament!) are all different, sometimes radically different, from each other. Yes, there are family resemblances among them, but stark differences are also there. If you have biological siblings, you probably understand this from personal experience. Both my wife and I have three siblings; thus, both of us are one sibling in a set of four, just like the family of the four NT gospels. Among all of these sets of four siblings, there are similarities to be sure, but crucial differences as well. The challenge is to

recognize, understand, be challenged by, enjoy, and live happily with those differences as inspiration for dealing with the differences we encounter daily in our own lives.

\*\*\*\*\*



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto\\_-\\_Scrovegni\\_-\\_23\\_-\\_Baptism\\_of\\_Christ.jpg#file](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giotto_-_Scrovegni_-_23_-_Baptism_of_Christ.jpg#file)

## Session 2 — The Baptism of Jesus in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John

Mark 1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

•Note: John is offering "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Why do you suppose that Jesus, of all people, would submit to that? Does the storyteller answer that question for us? If not, how would you answer the question on your own?

•Why does the storyteller have John proclaim so strongly that the one who "follows" him (that's the literal meaning of the Greek) is in fact John's superior, and not his inferior? (Hint: What is the usual status relationship between someone performing a baptism and the person being baptized?)

•Note: Mk 1:11 echoes Psalm 2:7, which is a script for the ceremonial anointing of an Israelite king. Yahweh declares the newly anointed king to be his "son." "The king is God's son, by adoption, on the day of his designation as king." (*New Interpreter's Study Bible*). Does it challenge your understanding of Jesus as "Son of God" to encounter Mark's suggestion that Jesus *becomes* "Son of God," *by adoption, by the decree of God, on the occasion of his baptism*?

•If time and opportunity allow, recall when, where, and how we learn that Jesus is "Son of God" in the other gospels.

## The Baptism of Jesus in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Mark</b> 1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 1:5 ...baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.</p> <p>1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.</p> <p>10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, <b>he saw</b> the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove <b>on</b><sup>1</sup> him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, <b>"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."</b></p> <p><b>[In Mark, why is Jesus baptized? What might we conclude?]</b></p> | <p><b>Matthew</b> 3:2 "Repent..." 3:6 ...they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins... 3:8 "Bear fruit worthy of repentance." 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance..."</p> <p>3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <b>14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.</b> 16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and <b>he saw</b> the Spirit <b>of God</b> descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, <b>"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."</b></p> <p><b>[In Matthew, why is Jesus baptized? Does the justification make sense?]</b></p> | <p><b>Luke</b> 3:3 ...proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins..." 3:8 "Bear fruits worthy of repentance."</p> <p><b>3:19 But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added to them all by shutting up John in prison.</b></p> <p><b>21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,</b> the heaven was opened, 22 and the <b>Holy</b> Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, <b>"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."</b></p> <p><b>[Who baptizes Jesus in Luke? Be careful!]</b></p> | <p><b>John</b> 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' <b>31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."</b></p> <p>32 <b>And John testified, "I saw</b> the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <b>34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."</b></p> <p><b>[In John, where is the baptism? Be careful!]</b></p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Pay special attention to the places highlighted in **red**. Questions: Who baptizes Jesus? (Be careful! Go with what the texts say, not with what you think they ought to say!) What conversation, if any, happens before the baptism? Who sees what happens? Who hears what is said? To whom are words addressed?

<sup>1</sup> "On" is not the best translation here. Literally, in Mark the spirit descends "into" Jesus (*eis* in Greek). The other gospels all use "on" (*epi* in Greek). In other words, in Mark, the spirit from the heavens enters Jesus' body. He becomes spirit possessed, but divinely so! Was that too radical, too shocking for Matthew, Luke, and John?



<https://www.ebay.com/itm/163670519757>

### Session 3 — Mark and Matthew Walking on the Water Comparison

Mark 6:45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

6:47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Mark 6:45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. *He intended to pass them by.* 49 But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Matthew 14:22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

*28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You*

51 Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased.

*And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.*

*of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*

*33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

[Words in **black** are similar or identical in both gospels. Words in *red* are significantly different! How? What are the differences in the two accounts?]

- Preceding the water walking episode in Mark, Jesus feeds 5000 "men" with only a handful of loaves and fishes (Mk 6:30-44). Neither the crowd nor the disciples offer any response to this miracle! But Mark does offer us his own take, belatedly, at the end of the water walking episode that follows the feeding story (Mk 6:52). In Mark, the disciples understand neither the feeding miracle nor the water walking episode.

- "He intended to pass them by." What could possibly be the reason for that? Hint: Might there be Old Testament echoes at work here? Moses? (Exodus 34:6) Elijah? (1 Kings 19:1-13)

- Note the disciples' unremitting terror and astonishment in Mark. Remember that when we turn to Matthew.

- Only in Matthew is Jesus joined by Peter in water walking. Jesus chides Peter (gently? Or sharply? What do you think?) for being a man of "little faith." How much understanding of Jesus do the disciples display in Mark? Again, see Mk 6:51b-52. Do the disciples behave any differently in Matthew before Peter hops out of the boat?

- In Matthew, once everyone is in the boat and the windstorm has ceased, how then do the disciples react? If the disciples were terrified before in Matthew, does any fear or bewilderment linger now? See Mt 14:33.

- Which of the two gospel accounts do you prefer? Why? Can you identify with one more easily than the other? Why, or why not?

\*\*\*\*\*



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ\\_Handing\\_the\\_Keys\\_to\\_St.\\_Peter\\_by\\_Pietro\\_Perugino.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christ_Handing_the_Keys_to_St._Peter_by_Pietro_Perugino.jpg)

## Session 4 — Mark and Matthew Caesarea Philippi Comparison

Mark 8:27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

Mark 8:27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say *that I am?*" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

30 And he *sternly ordered [lit. "rebuked"]* them not to tell anyone about him.

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 *He said all this quite openly.* And Peter took him aside and *began to rebuke\** him.

Matthew 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say *that the Son of Man is?*" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "*But who do you say that I am?*" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, *the Son of the living God.*" 17 And Jesus answered him, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.*" 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he *sternly ordered [lit. "commanded"]* the disciples not to tell anyone *that he was the Messiah.*

21 *From that time on,* Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

22 And Peter took him aside and *began to rebuke\* him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he <b>rebuked*</b> Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan!</p> <p>For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, <b>and for the sake of the gospel</b>, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <b>38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed</b> when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."</p> <p>9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that <b>the kingdom of God</b> has come with power."</p> | <p>23 But he turned and <b>said to</b> Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!</p> <p><b>You are a stumbling block to me;</b> for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.</p> <p>26 For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?</p> <p>27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, <b>and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.</b></p> <p>28 Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see <b>the Son of Man</b> coming in his kingdom."</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

[Words in **red** indicate interesting differences between Matthew and Mark; in a few places I have used a **blue** font to highlight wording that is strikingly identical.

\*Mark uses the sharp, stern verb, "to rebuke," three times, in Mark 8:30,32,33. "To rebuke" is standard vocabulary used in exorcism stories: demons are "rebuked" by the exorcist before being "cast out." Matthew retains only the second of the three uses of "rebuke" in Mark (Matthew 16:22). Matthew softens considerably the language he found in Mark.]

- In Mark, when Peter calls Jesus "Messiah," he does not understand what he is saying, because as soon as Jesus starts talking about suffering and death, Peter gets in Jesus' face and "rebukes" him. In fact, in Mark's version of the story, Jesus and Peter "rebuke" each other a total of three times. "Rebuke" is standard vocabulary from the practice of exorcism, which means that in Mark, Jesus and Peter are engaged in spiritual battle, exchanging verbal blows, back and forth. (Imagine Harry Potter wizards dueling, hurling magical spells at each other.)

- Matthew softens considerably the "rebuke" language he inherited from Mark, but he also inserts the gloriously positive words of Jesus to "The Rock" in Matt 16:17-19. Can you see how Matthew is rescuing Peter's reputation, which was tarnished in Mark? Doesn't Matthew's revision of Mark's passage forever change for the positive how we understand this episode?

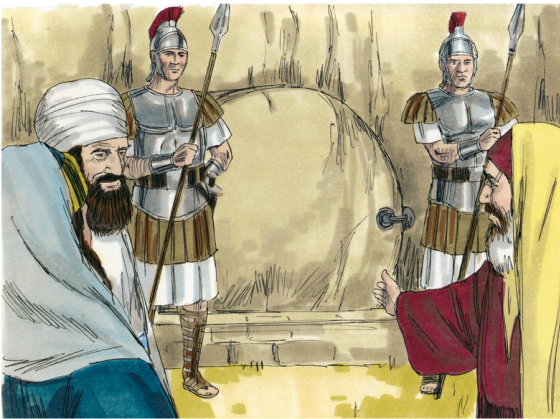
- Both gospels agree in calling Peter "Satan." (Imagine: the First Bishop of Rome was Satan!) Would you agree that most of the sting of that identification in Mark has been removed by Matthew's glorious "You are The Rock!" moment? After all, in Matthew, before being called "Satan," Peter has already been praised for receiving a divine revelation, he has given the nickname, "Rock," and he has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

•If Matthew is trying hard to rescue Peter's reputation, do you see how it might also make sense for him to erase most of Mark 8:38? (Mark does not say so explicitly, but those words could easily be referring to Peter. What do you think about that possibility? Does it make sense to you or not?)

•Sometimes Matthew's embellishments change drastically what he has inherited from Mark. But sometimes his small insertions deftly clarify or make explicit what was only implied in Mark. For example, in Matt 16:22, Matthew tells us precisely what Peter said in response to Jesus' prediction of suffering and death: "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." That might have been what Mark wanted us imagine Peter saying. Or again, in Matt 16:23 Matthew keeps Mark's infamous "get behind me, Satan," but adds the helpful clarification, "you are a stumbling block to me." A stumbling block is an object that lies ahead in one's path, over which one is likely to stumble as one walks. By ordering Peter to "get behind me," Jesus is ordering him not to be 'in his face,' so to speak, but rather to go back and take a position behind him, where a disciple is supposed to be as he/she follows the teacher down the path. Teachers walk ahead, while pupils follow along behind. Peter has 'gotten out of line,' and is being sent back to the rear, where he belongs.

•Which portrayal of Simon Peter, Mark's or Matthew's, is closer to your own perception of Peter? Which version of Peter can you identify with more easily? Any chance you would prefer Matthew's portrayal over Mark's? Why?

\*\*\*\*\*



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gospel\\_of\\_Mark\\_Chapter\\_15-22\\_\(Bible\\_Illustrations\\_by\\_Sweet\\_Media\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gospel_of_Mark_Chapter_15-22_(Bible_Illustrations_by_Sweet_Media).jpg)

## Session 5 — Burial of Jesus, Discovery of Empty Tomb, and Resurrection Appearance Stories in Mark and Matthew, Compared

Mark 15:40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

15:42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45 When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth,

and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where the body was laid.

16:1 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. 6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." 8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 15:40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of James, and Salome. 41 These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

15:42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a **respected member of the council**, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 **Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45 When he learned from the centurion that he was dead**, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James saw where the body was laid.

Matt 27:55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

27:57 When it was evening, there came a **rich man** from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also **a disciple of Jesus**.

58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus;

then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in **his own new** tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a **great stone** to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and **the other Mary** were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

**Matt. 27:62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure**

Mark 16:1 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome **bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.** 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

3 They had been saying to one another, **"Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"** 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, **which was very large,** had **already been rolled back.** 5 **As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side;** and they were alarmed. 6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples **and Peter** that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." 8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; **and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.**

**as you can." 66 So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.**

Matt. 28:1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and **the other Mary** went **to see the tomb.**

**2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.**

5 But **the angel** said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear

**and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."**

**Matt. 28:11 While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story is still told among the Jews to this day.**

**Matt. 28:16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had**

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."</p> |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

- In the final verses of Mark, there are four male characters mentioned (Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate, a centurion, and the young man inside the tomb). Would you have expected other male characters to be included in the story? Who?
- There are also three female characters mentioned here, a total of three times: Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joses, and Salome. Although Mark tells us that they followed Jesus when he was in Galilee, and that they and "many other women" had come with him to Jerusalem, Mark has not bothered to say anything about these women disciples until the very end of his gospel. How do you feel when you are told at the very end of the story that in all the places earlier in the gospel when women disciples were not included in episodes, they were actually also there, but invisible and silent?!
- Correction: Mark may have already told us about one of the three women who are present at the end, "Mary, the mother of James and Joses," who did already appear in Mark 6:3. Unless there are two different Marys in Mark, both with sons named James and Joses? An unlikely coincidence, wouldn't you think? So, the same Mary is probably being referred to in 6:3, 15:40,47, 16:1. But who is this Mary? News flash: this is the mother of Jesus. But why does Mark not bother to remind us that this is the mother of Jesus? For the sad, painful answer, see Mark 3:21,31-33; 6:3-4. In this gospel, sorry to say, Jesus is estranged from his mother and his siblings.
- Do you find it odd that three women would have the foresight and persuasiveness to find a shopkeeper from whom to buy spices (at dawn?! ) to anoint a dead body but fail to arrange for muscle to remove the "very large" stone from the front of the cave tomb? Couldn't the women have recruited some male muscle to assist them in gaining entrance to the tomb? To whom might they have turned for assistance but did not? In other words, what men should have been alongside them there at the tomb, but were absent?
- There are two locations in Mark where a "young man" appears: Mark 14:51 and 16:5. In both instances the young man is described primarily by his clothing, or lack thereof. Could this be the same young man? How can we make sense of this strange echo within the story? (Confession: this is not clear—he is one of Mark's many mysteries!)
- In Mark, the young man inside the tomb tells the three women to "go and tell" the disciples, AND PETER, that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, and THERE they will see him. The women run from the tomb in "terror, amazement, and fear," and said "nothing to anyone," and so the story of the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection was never told to anyone, no one went to Galilee to see Jesus there, and the Jesus Movement died along with Jesus on Golgotha, never getting off the ground. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus never happened. At least not in Mark's gospel! But we know the story *did* get out somehow, and we know that Christian discipleship *did* take root and flourish, so if the women in Mark never told anyone, and the AWOL men in Mark never got the message, how did the story get out? Who did receive the story, embrace it, and live by it? → Hint: go look in a mirror!

•Mark's story was too mysterious, too radical, too demanding, too challenging to live with, at least for Matthew, so he softened and clarified it. Puzzles were solved, mysteries clarified, and a gloriously happy ending added!

And thus did Matthew elbow Mark aside and become the #1 gospel in the New Testament.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Reflection Questions and Provocations for "How Matthew Elbowed Mark Aside and Became the #1 Gospel"

### Session 1

- Are you surprised by how little we actually know about the composition of Matthew's Gospel? Does that affect your willingness to embrace Matthew's story as a reliable guide for Christian life? Are you comfortable with such uncertainty within the Bible? Within your own life?
- Are you willing to embrace the insistence of Matthew's Jesus that his followers must continue to obey every "jot and tittle" of the Law of Moses? (Mt 5:18–KJV) Do you obey every pen stroke of the Law of Moses? Why, or why not?
- What do you think of Matthew's portrayal of the Pharisees, praising them to the skies in one moment, but blasting them as "hypocrites" the next? Can you reconcile these radically different perceptions of the Pharisees within the same gospel? Would it help you to imagine that 'Matthew' himself might be a Christian Pharisee, someone refusing to abandon Pharisaism but at the same time deeply frustrated over fellow Pharisees who reject Jesus?
- Matthew begins with a genealogy for Jesus, his miraculous conception and birth in Bethlehem, the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt, Herod's slaughter of the innocents, and the return from Egypt. These are all no doubt familiar to you, but are you aware that Mark's Gospel has none of this? How do we negotiate between two gospels that begin so differently? What is your strategy for dealing with radical differences within the Bible? Or within your own life?

### Session 2

- In Mark, what is the intended purpose of John's Baptism? What then is the reason for Jesus being baptized by John? Does the storyteller say? If the storyteller doesn't say, what would you conclude on your own about the purpose of Jesus' baptism?
- In Matthew, what does Jesus say to persuade John to baptize him? Do you understand the justification he offers? Does it make sense?
- In Luke, note how much Jesus' baptism itself has been minimized. But more telling than that, who baptizes Jesus in Luke? Be careful—don't just assume—what does it say?
- Trickiest of all, where is the baptism to be found in John? Again, be careful—don't just assume—what does it say?
- In Mark, who sees what happens? To whom are the words spoken, and thus, who hears them? Tackle the same questions for Matthew, Luke, and John.

- Of the four different accounts, do you prefer one over the others? Why or why not?

### Session 3

- If Walking on the Water is supposedly our focus, why even bother to look at the preceding episode in Mark, the Feeding of the 5000? (Look for a possible answer in Mk 6:52).
- Mk 6:48: "He intended to pass them by." What do you make of that? What could possibly be the reason for that? Hint: Might there be Old Testament echoes at work here? Moses? (Exodus 34:6) Elijah? (1 Kings 19:1-13)
- Only in Matthew is Jesus joined by Peter in water walking. Jesus chides Peter (gently? Or sharply? What do you think?) for being a man of "little faith." How much faith in Jesus do the disciples display in Mark? Again, see Mk 6:51b-52.
- In Matthew, once everyone is in the boat and the windstorm has ceased, how do the disciples react? See Mt 14:33. If the disciples were terrified before, does any fear or bewilderment remain now?
- Which of the two gospel accounts do you prefer? Why? Can you identify with one more easily than the other? Why or why not?

### Session 4

- Fundamental, central question for this Mark/Matthew comparison: When Peter calls Jesus "Messiah," does he understand correctly what he is saying, or not? What is your evidence to back up your conclusion? And don't just assume that what holds true in one gospel is the same in the other. You may need two different answers for two different gospels.
- In Mark's version of the story, Jesus and Peter "rebuke" each other a total of three times. "Rebuke" is vocabulary from the practice of exorcism, which means that in Mark Jesus and Peter are hurling spiritual battle grenades at each other. Does that provide a clue for why Matthew makes the major and gloriously positive insertion of Matt 16:17-19 into his version of the story?
- If Matthew is trying hard to rescue Peter's reputation, besides inserting the "You are the Rock" material in Matt 16:17-19, do you see how it might also make sense for him to erase most of Mark 8:38? (Mark does not say so explicitly, but those words could be talking about Peter.)
- Both gospels agree in calling Peter "Satan." (Imagine: the First Bishop of Rome was Satan!) Would you agree that most of the sting of that identification has been removed by Matthew's glorious "You are the Rock" moment? After all, in Matthew Peter has already been given the nickname, "Rock," and given the keys of the kingdom of heaven before being called Satan.
- Which portrayal of Simon Peter, Mark's or Matthew's, is closer to your own perception of Peter? Any chance you would prefer Matthew's portrayal over Mark's? Why? How?

### Session 5

- Extensive notes and provocative questions regarding the ending of Mark's Gospel have been offered elsewhere in my notes, and if you would like to chew on any of those, feel free!

•Let's turn our attention here to the differences between Matthew's Gospel and Mark's. What surprises, intrigues, or perplexes you about the following?

•Mark refers to "Mary, the mother of James and Joses" three different times, but Matthew only uses that description once, while obscuring Mary's identity the two other times by simply calling her the "other Mary." Why would Matthew want to obscure this Mary's identity? (See the notes provided elsewhere on Mark 6:3, 15:40,47, 16:1.)

•In all of the New Testament, only Matthew has the story of Jewish Temple Soldiers guarding the tomb in order to prevent Jesus' disciples from stealing his body and falsely claiming that he had been resurrected. See Matt 27:62-66, 28:4,11-15. Whether or not such a thing is literally, factually, historically true or not (if it were historical, is it likely that only Matthew would know about it?), for sure Matthew's *story of the guard at the tomb provides a story to guard the story of the empty tomb and the trustworthiness of the Christian testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.*

•In Mark, three women bring spices to the tomb in order to anoint Jesus' body. In Matthew there is no mention of spices, and only two women go only "to see the tomb."

•In Mark, the three women unexpectedly find the tomb already open. They enter it and are surprised to find a "young man" dressed in white. In Matthew the young man has become an "angel," whom the two women apparently see descend from heaven to roll away the stone before their eyes. The stone was not already rolled away, and they do not enter the tomb, as they did in Mark.

•The instruction from the young man/angel to the women is almost identical in both gospels: go tell the disciples (Mark: AND Peter) that he is going before you to Galilee—THERE you will see him.

•In Mark, the women run away from the tomb in terror, amazement, fear, and they say nothing to anyone. The End. In Matthew, they still run away from the tomb with fear, but also with "great joy," and they go to tell the men the news. But before they get there, the Resurrected Jesus meets them, they fall to his feet to worship him, and he reiterates the angel's instruction to the men to go to Galilee, where they will see him. (Apparently the women in Matthew get to experience Easter right away in Jerusalem, but the men in Matthew have to go to Galilee for their Easter experience.)

•And after the last portion of the Guard at the Tomb story, sure enough, the eleven remaining disciples (Judas has gotten his just desserts by now in Matthew, but never in Mark) encounter Jesus on a mountaintop in Galilee, where he gives them the "Great Commission" to go into all the world, making disciples of all the nations. (Matt 28:16-20).

•Mark's ending is short, mysterious, with many narrative threads left loose and unresolved (Mark 15:40-16:8, 16 verses). Matthew's ending is much longer, clearer, more positive, upbeat, straightforward (Matt 27:55-28:20, 37 verses). Mark's story ends in fear and silence. Matthew's ends with mountaintop resurrection glory. Why wouldn't anyone prefer Matthew's ending of the story over Mark's? This is one more example of how Matthew succeeded in elbowing Mark aside, becoming the #1 Gospel in the New Testament.