

The Function of Mathetological Prayer in Mark

Bennie R. Crockett, Jr.

Since the redaction-critical, composition-critical, and literary-critical methodologies became vogue in Markan scholarship, numerous studies have appeared that treat Mark's mathetology (The Gospel writer's view of discipleship). In this study all three methodological approaches are applied to those passages in Mark that have a significant bearing upon an interpretation of the function of mathetological prayer. Through this interpretative procedure, the function and content of mathetological prayer is highlighted. Undoubtedly many interpreters will question such an eclectic methodology, but the nature of this study is suggestive rather than definitive.

In terms of a working definition of prayer, Mark's view of prayer seems to be submission to the will of God, which is submission to the model of self-sacrifice exemplified by the paradigmatic disciple, Jesus (14.36). Thus prayer is an attitude or demonstration of dependence upon God, not dependence upon one's self-sufficiency. The narrative of Mark primarily illustrates two themes in reference to Mathetological prayer: Jesus as the methetological paradigm in prayer and the disciples' utter failure to mimic Jesus' methetological prayer.

Jesus: Paradigmatic Disciple (Mark 1.35; 6.46)

*And very early in the morning before dawn, after he arose, he went out and departed into a lonely place, and there he prayed (1.35)*

*And after he left them, he went away to a mountain in order to pray (6.46)*

John R. Donahue points out that discipleship is not limited only to the twelve disciples in Mark's presentation, but Jesus himself is a disciple, albeit a disciple of God. /1 In parallel expression, recent scholarship on the parables of the Gospels indicates a trend toward designating the person of Jesus as the ultimate parable of God. /2 These two texts (Mk 1.35:

6.46) are important as illustrating the function of Jesus as a paradigm. When read within their context, both verses present Mark's view of correct mathetological prayer. They record that Jesus, in order to pray, withdrew himself from those who were following him. In both contexts, Jesus prayed in a lonely place (1.35) or was alone as he prayed (6.47). Thus the context Mk 1.35 provides helps the reader in formulating a judgment on the reason for Jesus' prayer. According to Mk 1.34, Jesus performed many deeds of the kingdom (1.14,15) and various demons knew his identity because of the deeds. However, Jesus did not permit the demons to reveal his identity even though his fame had spread to all the people throughout the area of Galilee (1.28). From Mk's viewpoint, the withdrawal of Jesus from the crowds for the purpose of prayer functioned as an illustration of Jesus' battle with his identity as Suffering Son of God (1.11) /3 Rather than succumbing to the pressure of allowing his identity to be known, Jesus withdrew himself in order to renew his baptismal commission to suffer as God's Son. Mk's implication of Jesus' refusal to remain where the crowds could reach him (1.36-39) is that for Mark prayer signified Jesus' reaffirmation of his commitment to a suffering role—a role that the crowds obviously were not prepared to affirm.

Further evidence that would support the view that Jesus withdrew from the crowds because of their lack of perception concerning Jesus is apparent in Mk 1.45. Jesus healed a leper (1.40-45) and told him not to say anything about the healing; rather, Jesus charged the man to present himself in the temple so that the priest could pronounce him clean to the congregation (1.44). After Jesus charged the leper, the leper went out and began to tell what had happened to him (1.45). Because of this revelation by the leper, Jesus no longer could enter any town in an open manner. Therefore Jesus withdrew into desert places (ἐν ἔρημοις τόποις), but the crowd continued to pursue him (1.45b). Actually, Jesus withdrew from the crowds because of his fear that the crowds would insist on following him as a result of his wondrous deeds. Jesus, the paradigmatic disciple of God, refused the acclaim of the crowds, for they implicitly perceived him incorrectly as a miracle worker. Mk wished to convey

to the reader through the healing pericope that in the person of Jesus the kingdom of God was appearing. Notwithstanding that editorial viewpoint, Mk also informed the reader that the kingdom would be known primarily in one who would suffer, not solely in a miracle worker.

Deserted place (ἔρημος τόπος) functions in a specific manner in Mk's Gospel. The phrase occurs in five places (1.35,45;6.31,32,35), and in each instance it seems to function as a designation for a place where a disciple reaffirmed the true model of discipleship, which for Mk was self-sacrifice. The disciples of Jesus however refused to remain in a "deserted place" because of their rejection of Jesus, who remained in "deserted places", committing himself to self-sacrifice.

After the disciples had returned from their mission tour (6.30), they withdrew themselves to a lonely place upon Jesus' command (6.31). The means by which they withdrew themselves was a boat. Mk's mentioning of a boat signals to the reader a negative characterization of the disciples. In Mk, several boat scenes reveal the disciples' ignorance of Jesus' true identity and their rejection of Jesus' emphasis upon self-sacrifice (4.35-41; 6.45-52;8.10-21). In Mk, when the disciples enter into a boat, they invariably misunderstand and reject Jesus.

According to Mk 6.35 specifically, the disciples did not commit themselves for the benefit of others, for the reader knows from the following verses that Jesus chides the disciples for failing to feed the crowds (6.37). The compassion for others that Jesus demonstrated (6.34) carried with it a commitment to self-sacrifice; the disciples lacked compassion for the crowds (6.35); therefore they refused to remain in the "deserted place." Discipleship in a "deserted place" was reserved for those who followed Jesus' paradigm of self-sacrifice, and according to Mk the disciples never committed themselves to that paradigm.

In Mk 6.46, after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus charged his disciple to go across the lake to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd. When the crowd dispersed, Jesus went up to a mountain to pray. Evidently, Jesus prayed in solitude (6.47). Once again (1.35) Jesus reaffirmed his commitment to suffering

rather than allowing himself to be allured by a following that would not perceive him in terms of his true identity. (4.11) Mk wished to convey to the reader that a genuine disciple (i.e. Jesus) would be willing to remain in a lonely place or in solitude for the purpose of reaffirming prior commitments to God. As a result of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus realized once again that the crowds were following him because of his deeds, not because of who he was. From this interpretative point of view, the crowds function as a foil with which the reader should not identify; the crowds did not know who Jesus was.

Confirmation for this interpretation of prayer in solitude or prayer in a lonely place appears in the contrast between the disciples (6.31,35) and Jesus himself (6.46-47) The disciples apparently wanted to leave the lonely place (6.35-36). According to Mk's view, to remain in a lonely place signified model discipleship (submission to a suffering role model); the disciples consciously avoided such submission to God. Possibly, Jesus' encouragement to the disciples to go with him to a lonely place (6.31) may refer to his attempt to negate the self-inflated egos and attitudes of self-sufficiency that the disciples exhibited upon returning from their mission (6.13,30). /4 In accordance with the rest of Mk's Gospel, the disciples avoided personal identification with Jesus' true vocation and identity as one who would suffer. /5 Mk implied that the disciples refused to remain in a lonely place because they rejected Jesus' true identity of suffering and self-sacrifice.

At this point in the narrative (6.35), Mk seemed to categorize the disciples along with the crowds in terms of not knowing Jesus' true identity. Mk characterized both the disciples and the crowds negatively because of their misapprehension of Jesus, and the reader should not identify with either the disciples or the crowds. The narrative of Mk presents Jesus as the disciple par excellence the paradigmatic mathetological model at prayer. Jesus is the disciple with whom the reader should identify. On the other hand, these texts (1.35; 6.46) illustrate the disciples' failure to follow Jesus' model. Thus, Mk characterized the disciples as failing

in mathetological prayer because they refused to go to the "deserted place" with Jesus, the paradigmatic disciple who would suffer.

#### Mathetological Failure in Prayer (Mk 9.28-29)

*And when he entered into the house, his disciples questioned him privately, "why were we not able to cast it out? And he said to them, "This kind cannot come out except through prayer.*

The christological emphases in the healing narrative (9.14-29) and the specific textual problem in verse 29 cause many readers to overlook Mk's mathetological emphasis in the larger context (9.17-29). /6

The context given in Mk 9.28-29 is an important factor in understanding Mk's mathetological emphasis on the disciples' inability to heal the epileptic boy. Jesus' healing of the epileptic boy occurs within a broader section of Mk (8.22-10.52) that generally is regarded as a teaching section. /7 In this section Jesus teaches his disciples concerning his identity and requirements for disciples to follow him (despite his teaching, the disciples do not learn from him). The teaching section (8.22-10.52) begins and closes with Jesus' healing of a blind person, through which Mk emphasized the theme of blindness. Through this theme of blindness, Mk openly emphasized the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' identity. The two Healings function as inclusive brackets around the teaching section which served Mk's mathetological polemic against the disciples. The brackets serve as frames around the intervening material, and the brackets function to provide commentary upon that intervening material. /8 The disciples' blindness (8.22-26; 10.46-52) gave Jesus opportunity to teach them the correct way to see him (8.27-10.45) as one who would suffer. ,

Peter did not see Jesus correctly according to Mk 8.29, since he perceived Jesus as a Messiah who would usher in the kingdom through power rather than self-sacrificial suffering (8.31-32). /9 Jesus rejected

Peter's selfish appeal (8.33), and he actually referred to Peter as Satan himself. According to Jesus, disciples who would not follow him the way of the cross in the way of self-sacrifice were opposed to God (8.33-38). Interestingly, in Mk's framing of the teaching section (8.22-10.52), Jesus taught his disciples three times (8.33;9.31;10.32-34) concerning his self-sacrificial death and resurrection, but they were blind to his teaching. In the Transfiguration narrative (9.2-8), Peter, James and John are privy to Jesus' true identity as Son of God (9.7.). /10 However, the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus' mission is evident in the conclusion of the Transfiguration narrative (9.10) when they question what Jesus meant concerning the resurrection. On a narrative level, the Transfiguration serves as a private (addressed to disciples only), proleptic indication of Jesus' resurrection. The questioning by the disciples indicates their blindness to an understanding of Jesus' mission, Jesus even related the suffering of Elijah (John the Baptist) to the appearance of the suffering Son of Man (9.12-13), yet the disciples remain blind to his identity.

Mark's placement of the healing of the epileptic (9.17-27) illustrates the episodic nature of Mk's story. There seems to be no evident connection between Mk 9.9-13 and 9.14 other than Mk's focus on the disciples' blindness to Jesus' true identity. Beginning in Mk 8.27, the disciples' blindness is emphasized despite Jesus' specific teaching concerning his identity (8.31) and God's identification of Jesus as God(9.7). Through the negative characterization of the disciples (9.18-19; 28-29), Mk focusses the reader's attention on the disciples in the story of the healing of the epileptic. The disciples attempted to cast out the dumb spirit from the boy, but they were not able (9.18); as a result of their failure, Jesus identified the disciples as an unfaithful generation (9.19). Clearly, the Markan emphasis in these verses is mathetological failure, not christological identity. /11 The Markan addition (9.28-29) to the healing is a mathetological comment that portrays the disciples in a negative light, since they did not rely upon God's faithfulness through prayer (submission to God). Exhibition of

attitudinal self-sufficiency in the attempt to heal the epileptic caused the disciples to be powerless (οὐκ ἔσχεον ;9.18). Therefore, in Mk 9.18-19, 28-29 the emphasis lies on the disciples' inability and unwillingness to pray (submit in faith to God) as the cause of their failure to heal the epileptic boy.

Mk 9.17-29 reveals the disciples' failure in prayer at several points. First, the disciples are contrasted with Jesus (the paradigmatic disciple), who was able to cast out the unclean spirit ((.18,26). Jesus' statement "All things are possible to the one who has faith" (9.23), is a statement about his own (Jesus') immediate ability to heal the child; the disciples did not have faith(9.19) because they did not rely on God in prayer (9.29). The reader of Mk's Gospel knows that Jesus is he who submits himself to God in prayer/faith. Second, the disciples are contrasted with the father of the child. That is the father of the child exhibits faith in and submission to Jesus (9.24), yet Jesus refers to the disciples as a "faithless generation" (9.19). Simply stated, the disciples could not heal the child because of their inability to pray, which was the direct result of their faithlessness (9.18-19, 29) . The disciples did not pray in order to allow God to heal the child; rather, they took upon themselves to heal the child from their own sufficiency, which Jesus condemned as faithlessness.

The obtuseness and demonstration of self-sufficiency by the disciples is highlighted in the remainder of the teaching section (9.30-10.52). After Jesus taught the disciples a second time concerning his death and resurrection, the disciples began to argue about who was the greatest among themselves (9.30-34). The disciples also forbade another person from casting out demons in Jesus' name because that exorcist "was not following us (disciples)" (9.38)! Obviously other followers of Jesus had faith in God, unlike the disciples. The Evangelist seems to indicate in Mk 9.18-19, 38-41 that if the disciples were unable to cast out demons because of faithlessness, then they were going to enforce their faithlessness on other followers of Jesus who did have faith in him. Moreover, immediately following Jesus'

third statement concerning his death and resurrection, two disciples requested from Jesus a place of prominence in his glory (10.35-37). By placing the disciples' misinformed responses after Jesus' teachings on self-sacrifice, Mk conveyed to the reader the theme of the disciples' blindness and unwillingness to see Jesus correctly.

#### Jesus' Teaching on Mathetological Prayer (Mk 11.24-25)

*Because of this I say to you, for whatever you pray and ask, believe that you have received, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone so that your father also who is in heaven may forgive your transgressions. (11.24-25)*

Many interpreters note the change of tone in the narrative of Mk between chap. 10 and chap. 11. At Mk 11.1 the scene changes from Jesus and his disciples on their way to Jerusalem (8.22-10.52) to their approach into Jerusalem, Jesus' place of suffering. While within the confines of the holy city, Jesus instructed the religious leaders about his view of the temple (11.17), yet he also instructed his disciples concerning the true nature of mathetological prayer. (11.24-25)

The encouragement to prayer in Mk 11.24-25 occurs within the immediate section of the cursing of the fig-tree and Jesus' cleansing of the temple. Stephen Hre Kio points out Mk's technique of intercalation in Mk 11, in addition to concluding that Mk viewed prayer as having primary effectiveness through faith in God (11.22). /12

For the purpose of this study, the specific mathetological importance of prayer in Mk 11.24-25 is apparent in the connection between the use of πιστιν in vs 22 and the use of πιστευειν in vs 24. Jesus commanded the disciples "Have faith in God" (11.22) If the disciples would have submitted to God, then they would have trusted that they would receive whatever they asked of God (11.24). The entire section (11.12-25) emphasizes the power of God, not the power of a disciple's faith. Kio insists that the editorial and theological emphasis in Mk 11 falls upon the

meaning of the temple. /13 Nevertheless, there also appears an editorial emphasis upon the mathetological theme of prayer. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (11.12-14) surely involves some sense of Mk's polemic against the inadequacy of Judaism since he demonstrated that inadequacy through Jesus' cleansing of the temple (11.15-19). Also, the lesson from the fig-tree (11.20-25) emphasizes Jesus' demand for the disciples' utter reliance upon God (11.22) rather than upon the religious leaders whom Mk alluded to through the symbol of the temple (11.18)

The assumptions behind Jesus' statement "Have faith in God" (11.22) affect a correct interpretation of the statement. Without doubt, Mk conveyed the view that the disciples were without πίστις (4.40;11.22), yet other characters in the narrative exhibit πίστις (2.5; 5.34;9.24,42;10.52) One assumption behind Jesus' statement in Mk 11.22 is that the disciples did not have any faith in the person of Jesus. Related to that would be a second assumption that the disciples misunderstood the true nature of faith as is evident from Mk 9.19, a text in which Jesus is reported to have referred to the disciples as a "faithless generation." In Mk 9.19 the disciples' faithlessness constitutes a failure on their part to rely on the character of God for the working of a deed of healing. The disciples did not entrust themselves to God or Jesus, God's mathetological paradigm; the disciples were faithless.

In the light of the preceding linguistic parallels, the mathetological intention in Mk 11.24-25 seems to be as follows. To believe that one receives through prayer according to a faith commitment (11.25) assumes that a disciple has faith in God (11.22); by definition in Mk, faith in God necessarily carries with it a spirit of submission to the will of God. Submission to the will of God (faith) consequently is the primary characteristic of true prayer in Mk's mathetology. God grants the prayers of true disciples (11.24) because their prayers are prayed in a spirit of submission to the will of God; the prayers are not offered from a spirit of self-sufficiency (9.18-19, 28-29), Mk therefore presented Jesus' view of ideal

mathetological prayer as that which is offered in a spirit of utter dependence on God;

### Mathetological Foreshadowings of Gethsemane

For the purpose of this study, the Gethsemane narrative is the most important text for an understanding of mathetological prayer in Mk. The entire narrative of Mk moves toward the climax of Jesus<sup>h</sup> suffering and death, and the Gethsemane narrative illustrates the two primary themes elucidated above; Jesus as the paradigmatic mathetological model and the disciples as mathetological failures. Related to those themes of course is the issue that Jesus demonstrated his previous teaching concerning ideal mathetological prayer (11.24-25) while the disciples rejected his example of faith in God.

The Passion Narrative technically begins at Mk 14.1, but many interpreters point out that Mk's entire story is under the dark shadow of Jesus<sup>h</sup> Passion. Nevertheless, there is ample material within the Passion narrative itself that reveals mathetological interests. /14 The teaching section (8.22-10.52) conveys to the reader that the disciples did not understand Jesus on his terms of self-sacrifice. That misunderstanding or rejection comes to fruition in the Gethsemane setting. Actually in Mk the disciples never understand Jesus<sup>h</sup> true identity and mission. /15 In the Passion Narrative the disciples reveal what they really believe and who they really are through their disloyalty to Jesus (14.32-42, 52).

In order to give due attention to the text of Mk in reference to the disciples<sup>h</sup> ultimate misunderstanding and rejection of Jesus in Gethsemane, it is helpful to review the negative portrayal of the disciples that Mk presents. Mk's negative portrayal of the disciples prepares the reader for their ultimate misapprehension and denial of Jesus. There are many passages in Mk, other than those discussed above (1.35;6.46;9.28-29), that illustrate the disciples misunderstanding of Jesus

Although Jesus taught his disciples in private (a benefit not afforded the crowds), the disciples lacked faith and understanding of Jesus<sup>h</sup> person when they encountered a storm on the lake (4.34,38,40-41). /16

In two other boat scenes (6.45-52; 8.13-21) the disciples do not trust Jesus or understand who he is; that lack of faith and understanding yields Peter's inadequate confession of Jesus' identity (8.29). Mk characterized the disciples in like manner to the crowds who received Jesus' teaching but who also hardened their hearts against the truth (4.12; 6.52; 8.17-18). /17 A similar comparison of the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus and the crowds misunderstanding of Jesus also appears in Mk 7.17-18; the crowds obviously did not understand Jesus' parables and possibly were not supposed to understand them (4.12). In contrast to the crowds, the disciples (without the benefit of parables) ideally should have had complete insight into the person of Jesus, but even they who received the secret of the kingdom could not understand Jesus' parables (7.17-18) Peter's inadequate view of Jesus (8.29; 32-33)

seemingly was shared by the other disciples because after Jesus' second Passion prediction the disciples are reported to have misunderstood Jesus' saying (9.32,34). That misunderstanding grew to the point that the disciples forbade a man from casting out demons in Jesus' name (9.38); the disciples are portrayed as opposing the deeds of the kingdom. That particular characterization is enlarged when the disciples are reported to have rebuked persons who brought their sick children to Jesus (10.13). Obviously the disciples had not learnt the meaning of servanthood when Jesus taught them about servanthood through the object lesson of receiving a child; on the contrary, the disciples had been discussing who was the greatest ((.33-37)! Two disciples continued in such self-inflated egotism after Jesus' third prediction of his suffering (10.35-40). The disciples' misunderstanding and rejection of Jesus' emphasis on his death in the three Passion predictions (8,31;9,31; 10.33-34) precede Mk's accounts of the disciples' self-centred inclinations (8,32-33; 9,33-34; 10,35-37). In like manner Jesus' inference concerning his death (14.27) precedes the egotism of Peter and the other disciples (14.29,31) as well as the disciples' selfish inclinations in the garden of Gethsemane

(14,32-42). Jesus' statements concerning suffering and self-sacrifice caused the disciples to react with a demonstration of self-preservation and self-sufficiency (cf. 8.34-38). Furthermore it is possible to understand the occurrence of πολλοί in Mk 10.48 as a reference including some of the disciples who possibly joined in the rebuke of blind Bartimaeus from having contact with Jesus. Based on Mk's pre-Passion narration about the disciples, the reader expects the worst from the disciples at the time of Jesus' Passion.

Prior to the Gethsemane narrative within the Passion narrative itself, there are foreshadowings of the disciples' ultimate rejection of Jesus (14.50). Some of the disciples became angry as Jesus was anointed with costly ointment (14.4-5) because that anointing signalled his death, an event the disciples abhorred. Judas, one of the twelve, planned to betray Jesus to the Jewish leaders (14.10-11). Jesus predicted that all of the disciples would fall away when he would be struck (14.27) Also Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times (14.31). Actually Peter denied Jesus three times on two separate occasions (in Gethsemane, 14,32-42; and in the courtyard, 14,66-72), though Mark highlighted the second occasion with a comment about the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction (14,72). On both occasions nonetheless Peter revealed a lack of commitment to Jesus' acceptance of suffering and death as determining one's true identity. The irony of the characterization of Peter is that Mk portrayed him as saying he would not fall away from Jesus, nor would he deny Jesus (14.29,31). Mk also portrayed the other disciples ironically when he included the editorial comment about their confidence in not denying Jesus (14.31). Consequently, both Peter and the other disciples fell away from Jesus and denied him (14.32-42, 50, 66-72)

So, by the time of the narration of Jesus' arrest, the disciples' early misunderstanding of Jesus (4.10-12,33-34, 41;6.52; 7.17-18; 8.17,21,29-31;9,10; 10.13-15) had turned into open rejection of Jesus (14.50). The Passion of Jesus forced the disciples into an ultimate decision concerning their loyalty to him. Their fateful problem was that they misunderstood Jesus' identity because of

their selfish inclinations and egotistical ambitions; that misunderstanding caused them to reject Jesus.

Gethsemane: Mathetological Climax (Mk 14.32-42)

And they came into the place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter James and John, and he began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very saddened unto death; remain here and watch!" And after he went on a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed so that, if it were possible, for the hour to pass from him. And he said, "Abba, father, all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me, but not what I desire, rather what you desire." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Are you not able to watch one hour? Watch and pray so that you may not enter into temptation; "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." And after he went away again, he prayed, saying the same prayer. And when he came again to them he found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy with sleep, and they did not know what to answer him. And he came a third time, and he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and relaxing? It is enough! The hour has come, and behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go. Look, my betrayer has arrived". (14.32-42)

The Gethsemane prayer (14.32-42) is the key pericope for an understanding of Mk's view of mathetological prayer. Because of a priori christological questions surrounding the presentation of Jesus' Gethsemane experience, many interpreters disregard Mk's mathetological emphasis in 14.32-42. /17 Consequently, christological questions that interpreters apply to the text of Mk 14.32-42 yield interpretative fruit that Mk probably did not intend. The Gethsemane narrative is paradigmatic for an understanding of mathetological prayer in Mk for several reasons. First, the narrative reveals Jesus as the disciple par excellence in terms of genuine prayer (submission to God's will) Second, the narrative conveys the disciples' real disloyalty to Jesus by revealing their failure in mathetological prayer. And third, from the larger story line of Mk, Gethsemane functions as the place of all of the disciples' rejection of Jesus (14.50), and thus the Gethsemane narrative brings the relationship of the disciples of Jesus to a negative climax.

The setting for Jesus' prayer, the disciples' failure

at prayer, the disciples' rejection of Jesus (14.32-42,50), Jesus' arrest; (14.43-49) are in the garden of Gethsemane. Not only did Judas betray Jesus in Gethsemane (14.44-45), but all of Jesus' disciples forsook him there, and they ran away from Jesus (14.50). So in essence, all of Jesus' disciples rejected and betrayed him because none of them remained with him in his "hour". In the overall story of Mk's Gospel, the negative characterization of the disciples is most acute in the Gethsemane setting (14.32-51)

After Jesus and his disciples had observed the Passover meal (14.12-24), they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus then instructed them that he, the shepherd, would be struck, and that they, the sheep, would scatter (14.26). Despite the negative tone, however, Jesus also promised the disciples that he would see them in Galilee after his resurrection, (14.27). Peter confidently boasted that he would never fall away from Jesus (14.28), which gave Jesus the opportunity to predict Peter's fateful denial (14.10). Once again, despite Jesus' negative tone, Peter boasted that he would never deny Jesus (14.31); the other disciples likewise boasted (14.31b). Jesus' prediction about the sheep (disciples) being scattered came to fulfillment when the guards seized him, the shepherd (14.46-50). Furthermore, Peter's boast that he would never deny Jesus but die with him (14.31) was nullified through his failure to stay awake and pray when Jesus prayed (14.32-42). The reader does not have to await Peter's threefold denial (14.66-72) in order to observe Peter's denial of Jesus through self-pleasing and self-preserving sleep (14.32-42)

Mk 14,36 is assumed throughout this study to be the normative definition and demonstration of genuine mathetological prayer. According to Mk 14,36 Jesus as the disciple of God committed himself to accepting the cup of suffering and death that God required of him. Jesus, who is the paradigmatic disciple in Mark, demonstrated the genuine content of mathetological prayer. As Mk characterized Jesus, the reader understands the content of such prayer is submission to the will of God regardless of one's personal prejudices; in the case of Jesus' discipleship, his personal preference was for God to remove the obstacle of suffering and death (14.35-36a)

Nevertheless, Jesus prayed the ideal mathetological prayer when he said, "but not what I desire, rather what you (God) desire" (14.36b). Submission to God's will should be a disciple's ultimate objective according to Mk since Jesus, the paradigmatic disciple, characterizes that objective.

The incorrect mathetological approach to prayer is evident from the Gethsemane narrative through a contrast of Jesus' threefold prayer (14.32,35,39) with Jesus' three statements to the disciples (14.34b,40a,41a) /19 Editorial work in Mk 14.32-42 is apparent to many interpreters, and a simple tabulation of the words in Mk 14.32-42 reveals that the editor's purpose was as important as the inclusion of the words of Jesus even if one were to presume that all the words attributed to Jesus in Mk 14.32-42 were his exact words. /20 Peter's threefold commitment to sleep conveys that he and the other disciples were actually denying Jesus (14.30), their sleep being a symbol of their having succumbed to temptation, rejection and the betrayal of Jesus (14.38,41)

In Mk's mathetology "sleep" represents a lax commitment to correct discipleship. In Mk 13.36 "sleep" is a negative characteristic of a disciple who was not prepared for the return of the master of the house from a journey. Rather than sleeping that disciple should "watch" or "stay awake" (13.33,35,37) for the return of the master of the house (13.35); the same idea about "watch" is conveyed in Mk 14.38. The occurrences of γρηγορέω here relates to the view that a disciple is in a state of submission to God when he "watches" or "stays awake" (Mk used γρηγορεῖτε(καὶ)προσεύχεσθε as a hendiadys). If a disciple "prays", then such a disciple also "watches" or "stays awake". Thus it would seem to follow that the reason for the disciples sleeping in Gethsemane was due to their non-commitment to prayer (submission to God). Such sleeping signals to the reader that they had rejected Jesus and his mission of suffering and death. In Gethsemane, it could be said, that the disciples slept to preserve their lives rather than submitting them as sacrifices to God through prayer. The disciples' sleep indicates rejection of Jesus and their unwillingness to align themselves with his commitment to self-sacrifice.

Within the confines of the holy city, Jerusalem, the disciples had the opportunity to demonstrate that they had learnt Jesus' teaching about ideal prayer (11.24-25). Yet they rejected Jesus' demands to submit themselves to a role of suffering and death by their choice of sleep (faithlessness) over prayer (faith).

### Conclusion

Through this study of selected passages in prayer in Mk's Gospel, several themes become evident. First, mathetological prayer always contains an element of submission to the will of God or trust in the character and action of God rather than reliance upon self-sufficiency. Second, Jesus is the paradigm for such prayer in Mk; thus all the other disciples contrast with Jesus' commitment (14.36) to God. Third, the disciples rejected Jesus' paradigmatic demonstration of prayer; they chose to follow their own inclinations and thus they reveal they are not loyal to Jesus nor did they follow him with understanding. Their disloyalty is observable most acutely in Mk 14.50: "And they all forsook him and ran away".

In Mk, therefore, the function of mathetological prayer illustrates a disciple's commitments whether to selfish motive (ie the disciples) or to the self-sacrificial demand of God (ie, Jesus)

### Notes

1. J.R. Donahue, "The Revelation of God in the Gospel of Mk", Modern Scholarship: Its Impact on Theology & Proclamation, ed. P.A. Eigo (Villanova 1984) 168-69
2. Donahue, op.cit for a survey of the literature. This new trend reveals the recent reaction against a reductionist historical interpretation of Jesus' parables
3. The fusion of Ps.2.7 and Isa 42.1 in Mk 1.11 conveys the correct view of Jesus' identity as the Son of God who suffers on behalf of his people. Only Jesus with some exceptions knows his own identity but the disciples refuse to learn of Jesus' identity by following him to death
4. C.E.B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark (Cambridge 1959) 301
5. See Mk 4.17; 6.52; 8.17-21,32; 9.18,29,32,34,38; 10.13, 35-37; 14.4-5,32-42, 44-45,50,66-72
6. For a concise treatment of the christological emphases in Mk 9.14-29 see W.L. Lane, The Gospel of Mark, NICNT (Grand Rapids 1974) 329-35
7. W.H. Kelber, Mk's story of Jesus (Philadelphia, 1979) 43

8. D. Rhoads & D. Michie, Mark as Story (Philadelphia 1982), 51  
The book deals with isolated frames (6.21-43), but the literary technique of framing is also evident in broader sections within the narrative (8.22-10.52)
9. J.B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mk", JBL, 262  
refers to the disciples expecting a royal messiah, not a suffering Messiah which seems to be Mk's perspective of Jesus.
10. See J.D. Kingsbury, The Christology of Mk's Gospel (Philadelphia 1983) 91-102 for a survey of this issue.
11. This interpretation may preclude an identification of Jesus in terms of a hellenistic theios anēr; for this view in Mk see R. Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, (ET NYork 1963) 347. Among the more recent writings on theios anēr cf P.J. Achtmeyer, "Gospel Miracle Tradition and the Divine Man" INT 26, 1972, 174-97; C.H. Holladay, Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in NT Christology. SBLDS 40 (Missoula 1977); and J.D. Kingsbury, "The 'Divine Man' as the Key to Mk's Christology --The End of an Era?" INT 35, 1981, 243-57
12. S.H. Kio, "A Prayer Framework in Mk 11", BT 37, 1986, 323-28 .  
Kio rightly points out that true prayer carries with it horizontal responsibility, namely, the forgiveness of others.
13. Kio, op.cit. 324
14. Mk 14.10-11, 12-16, 17-21, 22-25, 26-31, 32-42, 43-44, 51, 53, 66-72; 15.40-41
15. See E. Best, "The Miracles in Mk", RevExp 75, 1978, 543.  
According to Mk, the disciples' understanding of Jesus' true identity is implied rather than stated. In all probability the author of Mk and the original audience assumed the resurrection of Jesus; cf. R.H. Lightfoot, The Gospel Message of Mk (Oxford 1950), 95
16. See Mk 4.10, 34; 6.31-32; 7.17; 9.2, 28, 33; 10.10; 13.3
17. For a perceptive proposal of the disciples' conscious rejection of true knowledge of Jesus rather than mere misunderstanding, see J.B. Gibson. "The Rebuke of the Disciples in Mk 8.14-21," JSNT 27, 1986, 31-47.
18. Mk's primary focus in the Gethsemane narrative is mathetology, not christology. The disciples' inability and unwillingness to stay awake is contrasted with Jesus' model for discipleship.
19. Note the connection between Mk 9.18 (ouk isousan) and Mk 14.37 (ouki ischusas). In both cases the inability of the disciples is the result of their rejection of the mathetological model of faith/prayer
20. In the UBS Greek text (3rd corr. ed.) there are 96 words attributed to the narrator and 85 to Jesus in Mk 14.32-42. For a thorough redaction-critical treatment of Mk 14.32-42, see W.H. Kelber, "The Hour of the Son of Man and the Temptation of the Disciples (Mk 14.32-42), The Passion in Mk ; studies in Mk 14-16, ed. W.H. Kelber (Philadelphia 1976) 41-60

Dr Bennie R. Crockett Jr, Th.D is lecturer in the  
Dept of Biblical Studies, Wm Carey College, Hattiesburg  
U.S.A.