

Faith in Mark: Access to Power and Recognition of Authority

Brendan Gottschall, SJ
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (Boston, MA)

Abstract

Many scholars agree that discipleship is a central message in the Gospel of Mark. Despite this recognition, the theme of faith remains an under-appreciated aspect of discipleship. In Mark's Gospel, the disciples and those closest to Jesus are chastised for their lack of faith while the faith of others is often praised and rewarded with healings. A close reading of all the instances of the πιστ-stem words reveals that Mark uses faith in two senses, both of which shed light on the meaning of discipleship: first, faith as trust in Jesus' power is a prerequisite for access to healing and miracle-working; second, believing means recognizing Jesus' authority as the Messiah. Moreover, the author of the Longer Ending picked up on Mark's two-fold use of faith and cast believing as recognizing Jesus' resurrection which manifests both his miraculous power and authority as Messiah.

Text

The theme of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark has received great attention in recent scholarship. For example, Donahue and Harrington dedicate a section of their introduction to the theme and see stories of the disciples as “both paradigms for and warnings to the Markan community.”¹ Despite this continued emphasis, the related theme of faith remains an under-appreciated aspect of discipleship. Acknowledging that there is no abstract term for

¹ John Donahue and Dan Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina (ed. Harrington; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 29.

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“discipleship” in Greek, Donahue and Harrington point to “the verb *akolouthēin*, ‘follow’ (Mark 1:17-18; 2:14-15; 8:34; 10:21, 28; 15:41) and the related phrase “come after” (1:17, 20; 8:34)” as capturing “the meaning of what it means to be a disciple.”² While following/coming after Jesus is undeniably constitutive of discipleship, Donahue and Harrington overlook faith as a more substantive concept for abstracting the essence of discipleship.

In Mark’s Gospel, the disciples and those closest to Jesus are chastised for their lack of faith (4:40; 6:6; 9:19) while the faith of others is often praised and rewarded with healings (2:5; 5:34; 5:36; 9:23-24; 9:42; 10:52). A close reading of all the instances of the *πιστ*-stem words reveals that Mark uses faith/belief in two senses, both of which shed light on the meaning of discipleship: first, faith as trust in Jesus’ power is a prerequisite for access to healing and miracle-working; second, believing means recognizing Jesus’ authority as the Messiah. Moreover, the author of the Longer Ending picked up on Mark’s two-fold use of faith and cast believing as recognizing Jesus’ resurrection which manifests both his miraculous power and authority as Messiah.

This paper will proceed by first categorizing the 18 uses of *πιστ*-stem words in the Gospel of Mark as either related to trust in Jesus’ miraculous power or a recognition of authority. Secondly, I will look at how the Longer Ending of Mark, which uses *πιστ*-stem words another 7 times, synthesizes the two uses in the rest of the Gospel, especially in reference to Jesus’ resurrection. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about how Mark’s use of *πιστ*-stem words can refine our understanding of Markan discipleship and raise some potential contributions for the Pauline *πίστις χριστου* debate.

² Donahue and Harrington, *Gospel of Mark*, 29.

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Preliminary Notes

Before proceeding to consider individually all the uses of $\pi\iota\sigma\tau$ -stem words, I must acknowledge two limitations to this study. First, as Marshall reminds:

It is a basic semantic fallacy to think there is a one-to-one correspondence between words and concepts. The absence of the word ‘faith’ does not necessarily mean that the idea of faith is also lacking, for it could be expressed by various other word combinations, or by synonyms, or be implicit in the way action is described.³

Since this study is limited precisely to those occurrences of $\pi\iota\sigma\tau$ -stem words, it will not draw explicitly on those stories or *chreiai* in which Mark’s understanding of faith is addressed indirectly. References to those passages will be made where appropriate but I do not claim to have scoured every word of the Gospel for implicit references to faith, indeed a near impossible task.

Secondly, the distinction between faith as trust in Jesus’ power to heal and faith as recognition of Jesus’ authority as the Messiah is not a strict division in usage or categorization. Rather, with each instance of a $\pi\iota\sigma\tau$ -stem word Mark tends to emphasize one of the two aspects of faith. For example, the hemorrhaging woman’s trust in Jesus’ healing power may stem precisely from her recognition of Jesus as Messiah, but the emphasis is clearly on Jesus healing her, not explicitly on his divine sonship (although healing power may be sign of Messianic fulfillment!). Generally speaking, the earlier occurrences of $\pi\iota\sigma\tau$ -stem words in Mark’s Gospel show the link between faith and access to Jesus’ miraculous power, while the later occurrences connect faith to a recognition of authority and especially Jesus’ authority as Messiah. The shift reflects Mark’s narrative style as Jesus moves from a healing and preaching ministry toward the passion and cross.

³ Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30.

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Mark's Use of πιστ-stem Words

As mentioned above, Mark uses πιστ-stem words 18 times throughout the normal text (excluding the Longer Ending): πιστεύω ten times (seven spoken by Jesus), πίστις five times (four spoken by Jesus), ἀπιστία twice, and ἄπιστος once (spoken by Jesus).⁴ Morgan notes that the relative frequency with which Jesus uses πιστ-stem words in Mark does not mean that the language can be definitively traced back to the historical Jesus, but it does prove useful in the early church because of the conceptual richness in the broader Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures:

Within Judaism, it is strongly connected with the faithfulness of God which enables the Israelites to be reconciled with God, even when they have sinned. In the Graeco-Roman world as a whole, *pistes/fides* is invoked especially at moments of crisis and decision-making; it functions equally in the public and domestic spheres, both of which are invoked as models for the Christian community...⁵

Morgan argues that, for writers like Mark, πιστ-stem words would have been natural to employ because they would be easily understood by all Greek speakers as connoting the trustful relationship necessary for the Christian. Moreover, if the intended audience of the Gospel of Mark is broader than a particular community or comprised of mixed households (believers and pagans), it would be even more important to use language that is understandable by all.

Mark's basic concept of πιστ-stem words follows the broadest meaning of "trust", particularly the human being's trust in God, what the *TDNT* calls "the religious relationship."⁶ Morgan observes: "Human beings are urged in Mark to put their trust in God and in the good

⁴ I do not count Mark's use of πιστικός in 14:3 to describe the purity of the ointment with which the woman anointed Jesus. This list differs slightly from Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (OUP, 2015), 349. She puts an extra πιστεύω in Jesus' mouth and finds another ἀπιστία somewhere.

⁵ Morgan, *Pistis and Fides*, 352.

⁶ *TDNT* VI, "πιστεύω", 205. While I did not detect anything problematic in this article, I wish to acknowledge the anti-Judaism of parts of the *TDNT*. See Maurice Casey, "Some Anti-Semitic Assumptions in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*," *Novum Testamentum* 41, no. 3 (1999): 280–91

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news, and some passages only make sense if people are also expected to put their trust in Jesus, but human beings are never urged to practice *pistis* towards one another...⁷ Also, unlike Paul, Mark never describes Jesus or God as having faith, although it may be assumed that Mark takes their faith for granted. Moreover, Jesus' faithfulness toward God is "strongly implicit in the obedience that leads him to 'serve and give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:25)."⁸ This location of $\pi\sigma\tau$ -stem words particularly in the relationship of the person to God underscores the significance of trust for discipleship. What it means to be a disciple is to trust in the power of God through Jesus who is Messiah.

In the following subsections, I categorize the occurrences of $\pi\sigma\tau$ -stem words in Mark based on their emphasis either on the connection of faith and miraculous power or on a recognition of authority (particularly Jesus' authority as Messiah). I offer a brief description of each and draw out the significance for understanding Markan faith. The following chart offers an overview of the categorization.

⁷ Morgan, *Pistis and Fides*, 350.

⁸ Morgan, *Pistis and Fides*, 349.

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<u>Trust in Jesus' Miraculous Power</u>			<u>Recognition of Authority</u>		
<u>Verse</u>	<u>Lemma</u>	<u>Phrase</u>	<u>Verse</u>	<u>Lemma</u>	<u>Phrase</u>
2:5	πίστις	"when Jesus saw their faith"	1:15	πιστεύω	"Repent and believe in the good news"
4:40	πίστις	"Have you no faith?"	9:42	πιστεύω	"these little ones who believe in me"
5:34	πίστις	"Your faith has made you well"	11:31	πιστεύω	"Why then did you not believe him?"
5:36	πιστεύω	"Do not fear, only believe"	13:21	πιστεύω	"Look! There he is!-- do not believe it."
6:6	ἀπιστία	"he marveled because of their unbelief"	15:32	πιστεύω	"so that we may see and believe."
9:19	ἄπιστος	"O faithless generation"			
9:23	πιστεύω	"All things can be done for the one who believes"			
9:24	πιστεύω	"I believe; help my unbelief!"			
9:24	ἀπιστία	"I believe; help my unbelief!"			
10:52	πίστις	"Your faith has made you well"			
11:22	πίστις	"Have faith in God."			
11:23	πιστεύω	"believe that what you say will come to pass"			
11:24	πιστεύω	"believe that you have received it"			

Faith as Trust in Jesus' Miraculous Power

The majority of Mark's uses of πιστ- language occurs in the context of miracle stories or logia on prayer and the miraculous power thereof. A few general observations can be made from these instances. First, it seems that πίστις is a prerequisite of sorts, on the part of a patient or the loved one of a patient, in order for Jesus to heal. Second, the πίστις required for a miracle (or access to miraculous power) entails some epistemic confidence in Jesus' power or the power of prayer. Finally, πίστις does not remain at the level of epistemic confidence but rather manifests

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in bold action as interpersonal trust. The passages below demonstrate this understanding of faith as trust in Jesus' miraculous power.

Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

After Jesus returns home to Capernaum, such a large crowd gathers in his house that a paralytic has to be lowered through the roof on a mat to draw near to Jesus. Jesus first forgives the man's sins, then, after some controversy with scribes, heals the paralytic. Before he declares the man's sins forgiven, Jesus is described as ἰδὼν τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν (lit. "seeing their faith"). This participle phrase is commonly interpreted temporally: "When Jesus saw their faith" (NRSV), but could also bear some causal weight (e.g., "because Jesus saw their faith"). It is also unclear as to whether the faith Jesus recognizes includes the faith of the paralytic man.⁹ In either case, Jesus' recognition of their faith precedes and occasions his healing.

While the text does not explicitly indicate that the group of men assented intellectually to any proposition about Jesus or his healing abilities, their actions imply that they shared such a belief. Verse 3 indicates that even before arriving at the house, they had the intention of bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus which points to their epistemic confidence in Jesus' healing power. Moreover, this confidence manifest in the bold action of removing the roof above Jesus and lowering the paralytic into his presence. If they did not believe that Jesus would heal him, their actions make little sense. By situating Jesus' response to them as a recognition of their faith, Mark is using πίστις as trust in Jesus' healing power as manifest in bold action.

Mark 4:40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

⁹ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, Anchor Yale Bible, 216.

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After Jesus calms the storm that so greatly disturbed the disciples, he rebukes them for their lack of faith. While this use of πίστις is not tied to a healing miracle, it is situated in the context of miraculous power exercised by Jesus. The implication is that if the disciples had the requisite faith, they would have been able to calm the storm themselves. As Yarbro Collins comments: “if they have trust (or faith) in God, they too will have the extraordinary power over the elements that Jesus exercises.”¹⁰ The faith that they lack is epistemic insofar as they do not recognize Jesus’ power over the elements. The pericope ends with their continuing to be confounded as to Jesus’ identity: “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:41) Their lack of faith is also a lack of bold action. The connection of the two is recognized in Jesus’ initial question of why they were afraid (v. 40). Lack of faith and fear (absence of bold action) go hand in hand.¹¹

Mark 5:34 He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

Along with the healing of blind Bartimaeus, Jesus dismisses the hemorrhaging woman with the logion "ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε" (literally: “your faith has saved you”).¹² It is clear from the use of the perfect tense that her faith was a condition or decision precedent to their healing. Furthermore, in this account, πίστις can be understood as epistemic trust: Mark makes clear that the woman assents to the proposition, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well”

¹⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (ed. Harold Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 262.

¹¹ Sug-ho Lee, “Unbelief as a Theme in Mark’s Gospel,” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2007), 155-6.

¹² This phrase appears also in Matthew’s account of the hemorrhaging woman (Mt 9:22, albeit just before the healing) and Luke uses it in the same two healing miracles as Mark (Lk 8:48, 18:42) and two more – the forgiving of the sinful woman who anoints Jesus’ feet (7:50) and the Samaritan leper who returns to thank Jesus (17:19).

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(5:28).¹³ This epistemic confidence is certainly an aspect of πίστις, but it is insufficient for healing/salvation. The woman’s intellectual assent turns into action which leads to the actualization of the healing. Not only is her action necessary, but it is “aggressive”¹⁴, courageous¹⁵, “emotion-charged”¹⁶, confident and bold¹⁷, and “socially transgressive”¹⁸. In other words, the πίστις of the hemorrhaging woman is an interior state that is necessarily manifest in personal encounter with Jesus before the healing/salvation can occur.

Mark 5:36 Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”

Surrounding the story of the hemorrhaging woman is the healing account of Jairus’s daughter. In this story, Jesus calls Jairus to believe (πίστευε) despite the reports that his daughter had died. Here again, a πιστ-stem word is used in connection with a healing miracle of Jesus. Jairus has already demonstrated an epistemic trust in Jesus through the bold actions of falling at his feet and begging him repeatedly to heal his daughter (5:22-23). With the news of the girl’s death and the remonstration not to bother Jesus anymore, “Jairus’s faith is assailed on two levels. His original hope that his daughter would be spared death is shattered... [and] the messengers implicitly call into question Jesus’ ability to help.”¹⁹ Although the text does not say how Jairus responded, it can be assumed from the context that he maintained his confidence in Jesus and did not back down from his bold request. By Jesus’ pairing “do not fear” (μὴ φοβοῦ) with “only

¹³ This seems to be Chrysostom’s interpretation. See Chris de Wet, “John Chrysostom on the Healing of the Woman with a Flow of Blood” *Journal of Early Christian History* 9 (2), 2019: 18.

¹⁴ C. Clifton Black, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1920.

¹⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Hermeneia*, 284-5.

¹⁶ F. Scott Spencer, “Your Faith Has Made You Well” (Mark 5:34; 10:52): Emotional Dynamics of Trustful Engagement With Jesus in Mark’s Gospel” in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 228.

¹⁷ Donohue and Harrington, 176.

¹⁸ Morgan, *Pistis and Fides*, 359.

¹⁹ Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark*, 97.

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have faith” (μόνον πίστευε), Mark is again correlating fear and unbelief. Fear is paralyzing, inhibiting of the bold actions that manifest the personal trust of Jesus as healer.

Mark 6:6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The second major section of Mark ends with an *inclusio* of opposition by Jesus’ relatives and townsfolk (along with 3:20-21). In 6:1-6a, Jesus returns to Nazareth²⁰ and despite being “astounded” at his teaching, the residents are skeptical that the Jesus they know should be able to possess such wisdom and power (6:2). They take offense or are scandalized by him (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο, 6:3). This response, which Jesus will identify as “unbelief”, “means that the family and friends of Jesus could not move beyond their own prejudgments to accept the actions and teaching of Jesus.”²¹ In other words, they were unable to show forth bold personal trust in Jesus, even though they could intellectually recognize his healing power (“What deeds of power are being done by his hands!” 6:2).²² The result is that “he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them” (6:5). This interaction underlines both the insufficiency of epistemic consent alone to constitute true faith and also the necessity of bold interpersonal trust in order for Jesus to exercise his miraculous healing power.

Mark 9:19 "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you?"

This use of a πιστ-stem word and the next three all occur within the same pericope in which Jesus heals an epileptic boy. The boy’s father brings the child to Jesus because his disciples were unable to cure him. When Jesus hears of this he laments: “You faithless

²⁰ Presumably, although the text only calls it his “hometown”.

²¹ Donohue and Harrington, 185.

²² Marcus argues that this passage (6:1-6:6a) can be divided into two (vv. 1-3 then 4-6a) with the first part being an original positive reception of Jesus then darkened by the Markan redactor. See Marcus, *Mark*, 377. Since we are dealing here with how Mark portrays faith, his juxtaposition of ἐξεπλήσσοντα (v. 3) and ἐσκανδαλίζοντα (v. 4) can be validly used to understand the ἀπιστία attributed to the people.

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generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you?” (9:19). Mark’s only use of the adjective ἄπιστος is paired with γενεά evoking images of Old Testament human faithlessness to the covenant.²³ Yarbro Collins notes that Matthew and Luke add “perverse” to “faithless” thus referring to Deut. 32:5 more than 32:20: “This difference makes clear that ‘faith’ or ‘trust’ is the key theme in the Markan story.”²⁴ Jesus diagnoses the problem as a lack of faith that is preventing the boy from being healed, but it is unclear as to the exact referent of “unfaithful generation.” As we will see further below, the boy’s father does have some epistemic confidence that Jesus can heal his son because he brought him to him even despite the disciples’ inability. He could have easily dismissed the whole idea of Jesus’ miraculous healing power when the disciples failed. Moreover, his bold action also entailed enduring some controversy with the scribes while they waited for Jesus to return (9:14-17). In any case, it is clear that Jesus is frustrated by the lack of faith of those around him and its resultant limitation of his healing power.

Mark 9:23 “All things can be done for the one who believes.”

Jesus begins the second exchange with the boy’s father by inquiring about his son’s symptoms. As the father describes how the spirit often abuses the boy and seeks to destroy him, it seems that doubt begins to creep in and the man concludes by making his plea in a conditional statement: “if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us” (9:22). Jesus’ response is a rhetorical question, acknowledging the hesitancy in the man’s request: “If I am able?”²⁵ Then Jesus exhorts the man to trust: “All things can be done for the one who believes” (9:23).

²³ See Gen. 7:1; Deut. 32:5, 20; Ps. 95:10. C. Clifton Black, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1932.

²⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Hermeneia*, 437.

²⁵ Marshall notes that “The construction τὸ εἰ δύνῃ (v. 23a) is somewhat obscure and has occasioned some textual variants.” Marshall, *Faith*, 116.

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Exegetes debate whether “*the father’s* faith could make all things possible, including the cure of his son, or that all things including this exorcism, are possible for *Jesus*, the man of perfect faith.”²⁶ In either case, it is clear that the power comes from God and that faith is a prerequisite for accessing the healing power. In the narrative, the man clearly takes it to be his faith in question. He affirms his epistemic confidence in Jesus’ power (already evidenced by his plea) and doubles down on his bold interpersonal trust in Jesus by asking Jesus not only to heal his son but also increase his faith.

Mark 9:24 “I believe; help my unbelief!”

The father of the epileptic boy responds to Jesus’ exhortation to have faith by affirming that he does. “Sudden recognition (εὐθύς) that God’s unlimited power is available in Jesus provokes the haunting cry from the father, ‘I believe, help my unbelief’ (v. 24). The belief he confesses is an unreserved trust in that power and the exorcism follows.”²⁷ But the impact of the father’s credal statement is found in its paradox. How can πιστεύω coincide with ἀπιστία? Some read this as a recognition that the man’s faith is imperfect and still in need of development.²⁸ Marshall sees it simply as a recognition of the psychological realities of one who believes: “his words are intended to capture what the human experience of faith is invariably like... [faith] is finally a gift, not only because it emerges from an encounter with Jesus, but also because it remains forever contingent upon the sustaining power of the one in whom it is placed.”²⁹ Based on the analysis of πίστις as a prerequisite for healing, epistemic confidence, and interpersonal trust, the man’s paradoxical expression of faith shows both a capacity for growth in interpersonal

²⁶ Marcus, *Mark*, 661.

²⁷ Marshall, *Faith*, 120.

²⁸ See, e.g., Donohue and Harrington, *Mark*, 279.

²⁹ Marshall, *Faith*, 121.

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trust and a recognition that the healing and the epistemic confidence are gifts. In other words, he acknowledges that his ability to affirm Jesus' healing power is a gift and that he can grow in trusting relationship with Jesus.

Mark 10:52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

As with the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus dismisses blind Bartimaeus with the phrase ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε, again making clear that faith is a prerequisite for access to Jesus' healing power. Bartimaeus's faith manifest in epistemic confidence in Jesus' ability to heal: When Jesus asked him what he wanted, Bartimaeus responded directly: "Let me see again" (v. 51). Unlike the father of the epileptic boy, Bartimaeus does not condition his confidence in Jesus' healing power. Moreover, his interpersonal trust of Jesus is evident by his bold and disruptive insistence on shouting after Jesus to get his attention (vv. 47-49). Marshall connects Bartimaeus's alacritous action in response to Jesus' summons with his discipleship: "Bartimaeus springs to his feet, throw aside his garment, representing for a beggar all his worldly goods and whole way of life, and makes his way to Jesus (v. 50). This action has discipleship overtones, but... [also] attests a ready volitional commitment."³⁰ Here we find an explicit nexus of faith, Jesus' healing power, messianic recognition, and discipleship, as Bartimaeus is said to "follow [Jesus] on the way" (v. 52). The same bold interpersonal trust that precedes healing is also a requirement of discipleship.

The Bartimaeus account also begins to connect faith not just to Jesus' miraculous power but also to a recognition of his authority as Messiah. Marshall points to a four-fold identification

³⁰ Marshall, *Faith*, 129.

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of Jesus in the passage: “Jesus of Nazareth” (v. 47); “Son of David” (vv. 47-48); divine mercy (“ἐλέησόν με” vv. 47-48); and “my teacher” (rabbouni v. 51). The specific identification of Jesus of Nazareth, “more than halfway through the gospel, indicates that the man’s hope and trust had become fixed on this one particular individual.”³¹ The title “Son of David” is only used by Mark in this passage. While scholars debate its significance here, Marshall sees Bartimaeus’s use of the title as expressing “his conviction that Jesus is not simply of Davidic lineage but is the one who fulfills the eschatological or messianic expectations associated with David.”³² Bartimaeus’s cry for mercy further acknowledged that Jesus is “the in-breaking of God’s eschatological mercy which brings with it the possibility of the restoration of sight to the blind.”³³ The use of the address “my teacher” “signals Bartimaeus’s acceptance of and submission to Jesus’ authority.”³⁴ Bartimaeus’s faith was not just in Jesus’ miraculous power but also in him as the Messiah, which corresponds to Mark’s other usage of πιστ-stem words as will be shown below.

Mark 11:22 Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.”

In the midst of a strange story about a fig tree that does not bear fruit, Jesus gives a short command to Peter and the disciples: ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ (Mk 11:22). This section of Mark (11:22-25) seems to be a “chain of originally independent exhortations” stitched together within a symbolic narrative about Jesus’ power over the Temple.³⁵ The cursing of the fig tree is sandwiched between the cleansing of the Temple and the questioning of Jesus’ authority. In this context, the call to have faith can be understood as trusting in God such that prayers will result in powerful manifestations of divine action in the world. Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree exemplifies

³¹ Marshall, *Faith*, 127.

³² Marshall, *Faith*, 127-8.

³³ Marshall, *Faith*, 128.

³⁴ Marshall, *Faith*, 129.

³⁵ C. Clifton Black, *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1920.

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what it means to have faith in God. The phrase πίστιν θεοῦ is ambiguous as to whether it is the disciple who is faithful or God, but the disciple expresses faith in prayerful petition which results in a miraculous show of God's power.

Most commentators agree that Mark 11:22-25 is a “catechesis on prayer and faith” intended for the instruction of Mark's audience.³⁶ How then does having πίστις θεοῦ relate to prayer? Without the important genitive θεοῦ (which some manuscripts lack), there might be a temptation to take the explanation in verse 23 in a way that implies that self-confidence is essential: “if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.” But the πίστις is of God and therefore the final clause (“it will be done for you”) is a divine passive. But does God actually make happen “whatever you ask for in prayer” (11:24)? Is any unanswered prayer evidence of some lack of faith? Yarbrow Collins points out that this confidence in God needs to be read alongside Mark's emphasis on suffering and Jesus' own submission to the will of the Father at Gethsemane: “Jesus expresses confidence that all things are possible for God; nevertheless, he subordinates his own wishes to the wishes or plan of God.”³⁷ True πίστις and prayer entails also subordinating one's own desires to God's will.

Mark 11:23 “If you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.”

Just as faith is required for Jesus' healing power to be activated, so too for the disciple in prayer, faith is a prerequisite for God's power to manifest. In order to move mountains, there needs to be an epistemic confidence that God can and will do what is asked for. In the age after Jesus has departed this world, prayer is the replacement for the bold action of interpersonal trust.

³⁶ Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 330.

³⁷ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 536.

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There are two risks in interpreting this verse. First, the call for absolute subjective certainty “runs the risk of transposing faith, and indeed mountain moving, into an outstanding human achievement.”³⁸ Again, the passive voice verbs when referring the fulfillment point to the fact that it is God’s power at work. Secondly, the absoluteness of the promise sets up the disciple for disappointment, as evidenced by later additions of qualifications.³⁹ The connection of faith with absolute miraculous power has eschatological significance in Mark: it is “a testimony to the sense of advent that pervaded the ministry of Jesus and the earliest post-Easter church: God’s new-age power has broken into the world, and therefore the age of eschatological wish fulfillment has arrived.”⁴⁰ This teaching on faith and prayer moves the confidence in Jesus’ power from the narrative of his life to the life of the disciple in Mark’s audience.

Mark 11:24 “So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

This verse continues the same theme of faith and power but moves it explicitly into the context of prayer. In both 11:23 and this verse, the verb πιστεύω is followed by ὅτι, reflecting a particularly epistemic meaning of “believe” as trust that some state of affairs is real. While this may seem to diminish the interpersonal aspect of faith, it is important to recognize that Mark has organized these teachings on faith and prayer under the heading (in a sense) of the command to “have faith in God” (11:22). Faith in God entails epistemic confidence but also interpersonal trust in order to access divine power.

³⁸ Marshall, *Faith*, 167.

³⁹ Marcus, *Mark*, 795.

⁴⁰ Marcus, *Mark*, 795.

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Faith as Recognition of Authority

In Mark's use of πιστ-stem words, while the majority are related to trust in Jesus' healing abilities, five times the verb πιστεύω is used outside the context of miraculous power. These usages can be broadly categorized as instances where πιστεύω recognizes the trustworthy authority of someone or something. As with the trust in Jesus' power, there is an epistemic element to this meaning of "believing" but recognition of the authority of the Gospel or Jesus as Messiah goes beyond mere intellectual assent. It also entails "trust and personal commitment, often with an orientation toward a threatening future."⁴¹ Mark's use of πιστεύω in these five cases all point the authority of the gospel or person that demands a personal response of full commitment which entails suffering or danger.⁴²

Mark 1:15 The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.

At the conclusion of Mark's prologue, Jesus begins his Galilean ministry and Mark puts into his mouth "an accurate summary of the main thrust of Jesus' ministry in word and deed: the proclamation of God's kingdom, and a change of heart and faith as the proper human responses."⁴³ Belief (πιστεύω) in this verse has an object, namely εὐαγγέλιον which is put with the preposition ἐν, but nevertheless is properly understood as the object of faith.⁴⁴ The gospel in which Jesus is calling people to believe is the good news of "the fulfilment of time and the

⁴¹ Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 71.

⁴² Biblical scholarship refers to "kerygmatic faith" as distinct from "miracle faith." The former can be understood as "reception of the message of salvation" and often scholars point to Mark 1:15, 9:42, and 15:32 as examples of kerygmatic faith. I include 11:31 and 13:21 as non-miracle faith usages of πιστ-stem words to show that what is essential to these usages is not reception of salvation but a recognition of and trust in authority. See Marshall, *Faith*, 53.

⁴³ Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 72.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Faith*, 44.

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proximity of the kingdom.”⁴⁵ Jesus in his power and authority personally manifests the kingdom of God. As Marshall maintains, it would be a mistake to reduce “believe in the good news” to “believe that my words about the coming kingdom are true”; rather, the imperative “implies a deeper, existential relationship between the believer and the object of faith.”⁴⁶ Therefore, faith in the gospel is also a personal commitment of the disciple to Jesus as an authority. Moreover, as this verse is summary of Jesus’ teaching and actions, it can be understood that the importance of faith for taking up the cross for those who would follow Jesus (8:34) is implied.

Mark 9:42 “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.”

As with the first passion prediction in Mark (8:31-38), the second passion prediction (9:30-50) is followed by misunderstanding on the part of the disciples then instructions on discipleship from Jesus.⁴⁷ It is in the context of these instructions that Jesus speaks of “these little ones who believe in me.” The exact identity of the little believers is widely disputed. Yarbrow Collins reads “little ones” as actual children who belong to the Christian community and are at risk of sexual exploitation.⁴⁸ Marshall takes a narrative approach and see the referent as all the characters in Mark who have responded to Jesus with faith.⁴⁹ Donahue and Harrington and Marcus present the most convincing view, based on the fact that the phrase was likely an

⁴⁵ Marshall, *Faith*, 46.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *Faith*, 49.

⁴⁷ Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 289.

⁴⁸ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 450.

⁴⁹ Marshall, *Faith*, 158.

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independent logion originally, that “little ones who believe in me” are simply those who have faith in Jesus.⁵⁰

In terms of what it means to have faith, this is the only instance in Mark where Jesus is the explicit object of πιστεύω, albeit with some textual evidence against the inclusion of the phrase εἰς ἐμέ.⁵¹ In any case, the description of the little ones as believing or trusting in Jesus without further qualifications can be taken as those who recognize Jesus’ authority. The phrase evokes the image of a child who trusts fully and absolutely in her parents’ authority. Moreover, the believers are clearly called to make a personal response to Jesus, which some will seek to disrupt by putting a stumbling block in the way.

Mark 11:31 They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

After Jesus’ Temple Action (11:15-19), the chief priests, scribes, and elders meet him in the temple and question his authority (11:27-28). Jesus responds adeptly by bring up John the Baptist: “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” (11:30). Mark then shows them arguing with one another about how to respond. In the context of this argument, they admit that if John’s baptism was of heavenly origin, they ought to have believed in him (“ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ”). In this context, belief is the proper response to one who has the authority of coming from God. The implication is that one who recognized John’s authority would have made a personal trusting commitment to John. Given John’s fate, there is certainly a danger lurking for anyone who put their trust in him as well.

⁵⁰ Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 287. Marcus, *Mark*, 689.

⁵¹ Marcus, *Mark*, 689.

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Mark 13:21 “If anyone says to you at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There he is!'-- do not believe it.”

Just as the recognition of John as coming from God demands a response of faith, the appearance of false messiahs in Jesus’ eschatological discourse requires a warning not to trust them. The Greek imperative simply is μή πιστεύετε. Most translations supply “it” as the object of believe, implying that the statements are not to be trusted. Donahue and Harrington supply “him” as the object, referring back to the “anyone” who might say such things.⁵² The text could also bear the translation “Do not believe in them!” If the false messiahs are the implied object of the warning not to believe, the implication is that belief is the recognition of the authority of the messiah, which would entail a personal response of commitment (hence false messiahs would “lead astray” 13:22). In the context of the apocalyptic language in the section in Mark, danger is always implied.

Mark 15:32 “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.”

The final use of a πιστ-stem word in the original text of Mark occurs in the context of the passion. The chief priests and the scribes mock Jesus on the cross, calling him the Messiah, the King of Israel, and call on him to exercise his miraculous power in order that they might see and believe (15:31-32). Their ironic demand is a reversal of the normal sequence of believing in Jesus followed by an instance of his miraculous power. While a connection to Jesus’ power is implied, the use of πιστεύω here is more directly linked to the recognition of his authority as the Messiah. The chief priests and the scribes state that seeing Jesus’ power would allow them to

⁵² Donahue and Harrington, *Mark*, 373.

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believe, to trust him as the Messiah, but they never actually call into question the factuality of any of Jesus' miracles. The evidence is already there for them to see. Yarbrow Collins interprets this passage ironically: "even if these outsiders did see Jesus come down from the cross, they probably would still not believe."⁵³ This highlights the volitional and the graced aspects of believing as recognizing authority. The personal response demanded by such a recognition is a choice on the part of the believer, but also the ability to make that choice is a gift not accepted by everyone.

The Longer Ending and Faith in the Resurrection

It is widely accepted that the "Longer Ending" of Mark (16:9-20) was not written by the author of the rest of the Gospel but was written in the first half of the second century by an editor who thought it necessary to have resurrection appearances with the Gospel.⁵⁴ I cannot address all the issues surrounding the Longer Ending and its purpose and history, but I will simply accept it as a valuable early interpretation of Mark which has canonicity in many traditions. As such, its 7 usages of πιστ-stem words, especially with their reference to resurrection faith, integrate both a trust in Jesus' miraculous power and a recognition of his authority as Messiah.

In verses 11-13, the lack of faith of the disciples is highlighted in response to the resurrection testimony of both Mary Magdalene and the two disciples on the road. First, in response to Mary, "when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it (ἠπίστησαν)" (16:11). The use of ἀπιστέω in the aorist without an object could also mean "they did not have faith" or "they failed to believe." In response to the two disciples, the others "did not believe them (οὐδὲ ἐκείνοις ἐπίστευσαν)" (16:13). The failure of the disciples to

⁵³ Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 750.

⁵⁴ James Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 2.

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believe entails not just a lack of acceptance of the truth of the testimony of Mary and the two, there is also a lack of trust in God's power to raise Jesus from the dead, as well as a lack of recognition of the authority of Jesus as the Messiah.

In verse 14, Jesus makes clear that their response to the news of the resurrection was ἀπιστία and goes on to describe it in a ὅτι phrase “because they had not believed (οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν) those who saw him after he had risen.” The author of the Longer Ending makes abundantly clear the importance of πίστις as the proper response to the resurrection. Kelhoffer sees this as a narrowing of the conception of faith from the Gospel of Mark: “unlike Mark 16:9-20, the Gospel of Mark does not offer an explicit definition for the content of this faith.”⁵⁵ While I agree with Kelhoffer that the application of πιστ- language in the Longer Ending is narrowed to focus on the resurrection, I think it is possible to read that as picking up on the two ways that Mark uses of πιστ-stem words. Moreover, if one reads Mark through the resurrection lens, one might appreciate more the subtle call to trust in the resurrected Jesus, who has miraculous power and authority as Messiah.

After calling the eleven to go out and proclaim the good news, Jesus makes explicit what the good news means: “The one who believes (ὁ πιστεύσας) and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe (ὁ ἀπιστήσας) will be condemned” (16:16). While Kelhoffer reads the influence of the Gospel of John in the Longer Ending's emphasis on faith, the connection between πίστις and σῶζω is already present in the Gospel of Mark, particularly in Jesus' healing miracles.⁵⁶ For the hemorrhaging woman and Bartimaeus, faith is the cause of their salvation (“ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε” 5:34, 10:52). The writer of the Longer Ending would not see the

⁵⁵ Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission*, 80.

⁵⁶ Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission*, 102.

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salvation offered in Jesus' healing ministry as distinct from the salvation offered through baptism in the second-century. Both are manifestations of God's miraculous power in Jesus. The salvation/healing of Jesus requires faith, both as a prerequisite epistemic and personal trust in His power and a recognition of his authority as Messiah. The Longer Ending's start division between believers and unbelievers highlights the necessity of the virtue of faith for the disciple.

The final use of a $\pi\sigma\tau$ -stem word in the Longer Ending connects faith back to miraculous power. "These signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (16:17-18). Although not all of these sorts of miraculous deeds are attested in the Gospel of Mark, the author of the Longer Ending is drawing again on the Markan connection between faith and power from God. This belief should not be disassociated from the belief in the resurrection mentioned earlier in the Longer Ending; rather, the same personal trust in and recognition of the authority of the resurrection enables the believer to share in God's power in miraculous ways.

The author of the Longer Ending capitalizes on the dual use of $\pi\sigma\tau$ -stem words in Mark to connect Jesus' resurrection to his miraculous power and authority as Messiah. The dense employment of $\pi\sigma\tau$ -stem words shows how $\pi\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ developed as an essential virtue for the disciple of the church of the 2nd century. Unlike Kelhoffer, who looks outside of Mark's Gospel for influences on the writer of the Longer Ending because the style is clearly different than Mark, I tend to see the Longer Ending as a valid ecclesial interpretation of the Gospel of Mark. Notions of faith and discipleship developed between Mark's time and the time of the Longer Ending, but

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there is still continuity in how faith is understood as a trust in God's power and recognition of Jesus as Messiah, particularly as manifest in the resurrection.

Conclusion

Discipleship is certainly a central theme in Mark's Gospel, but the πίστις (faith/faithfulness/trust/confidence) which is a primary marker of good discipleship is often overlooked. By showing how Mark uses πιστ- language, I hope to have highlighted some aspects of what Jesus demands of his disciples, at least implicitly: epistemic confidence in his power to heal and save, bold actions of interpersonal trust in him, and recognition of his authority as Messiah. Presumably, these virtues would have been necessary for the first-century Christian community to whom Mark writes. They remain perennial calls for anyone who wishes to follow Jesus as his disciple.

Although Jesus is never called faithful in Mark, it is reasonably clear that Jesus embodies perfectly the same πίστις to which the disciples are called. Just as disciples are called to show πίστις toward Jesus, Jesus shows πίστις toward God. In Pauline scholarship, there is much debate over the phrase πίστις Χριστοῦ and whether to interpret it as an objective genitive ("the faith we have in Christ") or a subjective genitive ("the faith Christ has [in the Father]"). Some have drawn on the Synoptics to support the latter view. For example, Peter Bolt sees the Jesus' concern with faithfulness in Mark as evidence for the subjective genitive in Paul: "The logic of this *imitatio Christi* theme must also drive us to conclude that Jesus must show the kind of faith he promotes in others. If this was a strong part of the gospel message, it could also in turn provide a 'narrative

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substructure' for the subjective genitive in the Pauling expression."⁵⁷ I hope that I have shown that faith is a strong part of the Gospel message, at least in Mark. If we look at Jesus through Mark's understanding of faith as outlined above, we can see that Jesus does indeed perfectly embody faith as epistemic and personal trust in God's power which manifests in bold actions and a recognition of the authority of the Father.

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⁵⁷ Peter Bolt, "The Faith of Jesus Christ in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Michael Bird and Preston Sprinkle (Peabody, MA: Paternoster, 2009), 215-216.

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