

Jesus' Leadership: Interpretation through the Exegesis of Mark 10:17-22

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### Abstract

This investigation provides an extensive understanding of the story of Jesus and the rich, young ruler found in the Gospel of Mark 10:17-22 using exegetical and hermeneutical techniques and applying it in today's organizational leadership. In evaluating the biblical text, socio-rhetorical criticism is utilized in the paper. The analysis resulted in the following themes: Christian leaders model the way; Christian leaders demonstrate action by serving followers; and Christian leaders count the cost of discipleship. This study uses the *American Psychological Association* style and the New King James Version of the Holy Bible. This effort will contribute to further exploration into the application of biblical text to leadership issues.

### Jesus' Leadership: Interpretation through the Exegesis of Mark 10:17-22

The young man had money and power. Why in the world would he approach a poor Nazareth teacher in the broad daylight? What does Jesus, the Master Teacher, do to cause a Jewish aristocrat to walk away in sorrow? These are only a few questions to solve while analyzing the Gospel of Mark for biblical insight. The focus of this study will review the story of Jesus and the rich young ruler found in the Gospel of Mark 10:17-22 using exegetical and hermeneutical techniques and demonstrating application to modern day organizational leadership. From the text of Matthew, the reader can find that the young man was on a quest for something. Was he looking for a more meaningful existence or just to latch on to the latest fad? The young ruler was missing something. In Matthew 19:20, he said to Jesus, "What lack I yet?" This investigation explores Jesus' leadership lessons based on the results of the socio-rhetorical criticism of Mark 10:17-22.

#### *Background*

*The Gospel of St. Mark.* The Gospel of Mark is important in Christian society because of the vital account of Jesus' life. This book provides a biblical context of Jesus Christ's humanness. Barclay (1956) argues that Mark's gospel is the most important book in the world because Mark is the earliest of all the gospels and provides the earliest insight on Jesus' ministry. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, St. Augustine argued, however, that Matthew was the oldest gospel, but modern scholars have discredited this assumption due to the fact that both Matthew and Luke defer to the authority of Mark (the Petrine Link, 2005). The first three books, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are referred as the Synoptic

Gospels; *synoptic* comes from two Greek words meaning to see together (Barclay, 1956).

Mark is divided into 105 sections. When comparing Mark with the other gospels, the results show the following: of the 105 sections, 93 occur in Matthew and 81 in Luke. Of Mark's 661 verses, Luke reproduces 320, and Matthew reproduces no fewer than 606. Luke actually uses 53 percent of Mark's actual words. Both Matthew and Luke largely follow Mark's event order (Barclay, 1956).

Much is known about the writer of Mark's Gospel. According to the New Testament, the author was the son of a well-to-do lady of Jerusalem and the nephew of Barnabas (the Petrine Link, 2005). Mark got his information for the gospel from various sources and probably heard from people telling their personal account of Jesus' ministry. Mark's style of writing is unique from the other gospels since he was a Gentile writer living in Rome. Mark's genuine and simple writings come from his Greek style. Mark usually inserts little vivid details into his narrative (Barclay, 1956). Mark never forgot about Jesus' divinity, but he did not hide Jesus' humanness (Barclay, 1956). Mark continuously writes to the impact Jesus had on the heart and minds of the people.

Most of the historical knowledge about these groups is derived, however, from the following three main sources: the work of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, the early rabbinical writings, and the New Testament (Huie, 2002). They also maintained their leadership in spiritual matters even though the Sadducees were the high priests in the Sanhedrin (Huie, 2002).

By the time of Jesus' ministry, Sadducees included families from the high priests as well as other wealthy nobles.

## Method

In evaluating the sacred text of Mark 10: 17- 22, socio-rhetorical criticism, a method that can assist in understanding biblical depth of scriptures, is utilized. Socio-rhetorical criticism integrates the methods people use language with the ways they live in the culture (Robbins, 1996). Intertexture focuses on the interaction of the language in the text with outside material, historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions, and systems (Robbins, 1996). It exhibits five different angles to explore multiple textures within texts: (a) inner texture, (b) intertexture, (c) social and culture texture, (d) ideological texture, and (e) sacred texture (Robbins, 1996). For this study, inner texture and intertexture analyses will be fully utilized. Inner text analysis focuses on verbal texture and simply evaluates the sense of the words (Robbins, 1996). This study utilizes repetitive, progressive, and opening-middle-closing. However, in order to fully benefit from the inner text analysis, intertexture analysis was first used to establish a solid foundation for the study.

## Analysis and Findings of Study

### *Intertext Analysis*

*Critical Characters in Markan Drama.* The Gospel of Mark provides an action-filled setting with an array of dramatic characters. The major Markan characters include the religious *Establishment*, the ever-present crowd, the disciples, and Jesus. These critical characters are found exiting and entering stories in topical Markan tradition (Marcus, 1992). From the previous historical analysis, it is evident that the Pharisees and Sadducees made up the religious establishments and provide the antagonists in most cases. These religious leaders during Jesus' time represented a special prestigious society. During the time of Jesus, they were the most influential Jewish group; however, their beginnings cannot be traced with any certainty (Huie, 2002). Although both groups were a part of the aristocratic class, these religious sects were dissimilar in many ways. The Pharisees' name is derived from the Hebrew *perusim* meaning, "separated one" or from the Hebrew *parosim* meaning "specifier" and this group primarily came from middle-class families.

The Pharisees, not the Sadducees, made the greatest impact on the common people because they held great authority over the worship service and provided the instructions (Huie, 2002). The Pharisees were zealous about the Mosaic Law (Huie, 2002). For them, the Torah was not just religious law but served as a guide for every possible contingency (The Interpreter's Bible, 1951). The Pharisees had much influence on the king or high priest because of their popularity with the people. This influence gave them additional political power so that even the Sadducees complied with pharisaic requirements because the Sadducees feared the response of the people (Huie, 2002).

While the Pharisees had a connection with the common people, the Sadducees were a stark contrast. The Sadducees got their name from the Hebrew *saddiq* meaning “the righteous.” The Sadducees were generally considered the noble blood of the Jewish aristocracy and had considerable influence in the court of Hyrcanus (Huie, 2002). The Sadducees made up the majority of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court; therefore, the Sadducee sect had the strongest political power because they were allies with the Herodian and Roman rulers (Huie, 2002). In spite of the Pharisees’ spiritual influence over the common people, the Sadducean aristocracy was able to maintain their political influences (Huie, 2002).

These varying backgrounds of the Pharisees and Sadducees put them at political odds. The two sects disagreed on the religious laws and details of temple procedures during feasts (Huie, 2002). The Sadducees were conservative in nature and only read the Torah, the five books of Moses (Ungerleider & Cohen, 2005). As a consequence, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. On the contrary, the Pharisees were the liberal sect and considered the most progressive (Ungerleider & Cohen, 2005). The Pharisees read and made reinterpretation of the scriptures; they were willing to modify their beliefs and accept new ideas (Ungerleider & Cohen, 2005). The Pharisees accepted the resurrection of the dead. The rich young ruler outlined in Mark 10:17-22 found himself a part of the Jewish aristocrats. In spite of the differences of these wealthy classes, they were both in opposition to Jesus’ ministry and became allies in this regard.

This conflict exists because the Pharisees and Sadducees feel threaten by Jesus’ popularity among the people (Weeden, 1973). This conflict between Jesus and the religious Establishment begin even at the outset of Jesus’ ministry and continued with

rhythmic regularity and accelerated intensity throughout this gospel (Marcus, 1992). The author builds this dramatic confrontation as seen in Mark 3:6 to the eventual climax of Jesus' death in Mark 15:1-39 when the religious Establishment finally orchestrates his death (Marcus, 1992).

Markan narrative surrounds Jesus with an ever-present crowd. Throughout the gospel storyline, the crowd that follows Jesus, plays a special role in this drama (Marcus, 1992). To some scholars, this is a literary device to dramatize the popularity of Jesus with the crowd while simultaneously generating bitter resentment by the Jewish elite (Marcus, 1992). Although the crowd and the religious hierarchy play prominent roles in Markan stories, the author clearly has a special interest in Jesus' disciples. Many might assume that the religious Establishment serves as the villains and the crowd as by-standers, and thus the Twelve represents the embodiment of proper discipleship; however, the role of Jesus' disciples in Mark is more complicated and difficult to understand (Marcus, 1992). Although Jesus' disciples are pictured by most Christians as heroes, they ironically emerge in the Markan drama with extremely poor performances in understanding Jesus' teaching and showing loyalty toward him in the midst of obstacles (Marcus, 1992). Mark clearly demonstrates that the disciples did not clearly understand Jesus' role as Messiah. His disciples constantly compare Jesus' future reign to other earthly kingdoms (Marcus, 1992). As a result, Jesus and his disciples are found in continuous conflict due to this dilemma in the Markan setting (Marcus, 1992).

*The Story of the Young, Rich Ruler.* In Mark 10:17-22, the author provides a story of a man who approaches Jesus with an important question about obtaining eternal life. Jesus provides him with the answer. The man does not like Jesus' answer. The man

leaves in sorrow because he is wealthy. To gain a more profound understanding, the investigation brings together all three Synoptic Gospels. Through Matthew 19:16-22, it is learned that the man was young while Luke 18:18-23 reveals that this man was a ruler; therefore, the familiar story of the rich young ruler ("The Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament," 2005). For this discussion, the term young, rich ruler (YRR) will be used to help reveal the spiritual maturity of this potential disciple of Jesus. In knowing this information, the investigation can rely on the culture of the time. The YRR can be considered part of the Pharisee sect since he believes in the resurrection of the dead. This young man is both impulsive and humble because he appears to Jesus in the daylight and kneels before his feet. Of course, there are other members in the Pharisee sect who admire Jesus but no one ever took a bolder step than young man. The young man is seen as educated and familiar with Mosaic Law from the initial conversation with Jesus. From this overall intertext analysis, one major theme that surfaces is the fact that Jesus' ministry, although popular with the common people, faced stiff opposition from the religious Establishment. Therefore, it can be concluded that Christian leaders set an example for their followers even in the midst of heavy resistance.

*Inner text Analysis*

*Repetitive Texture.* Through repetitive analysis, the investigation reviews the multiple occurrences of many different kinds of grammatical, syntactical, verbal, or topical phenomena (Robbins, 1996). If a word or phrase is repeated in a unit, the first occurrence is the beginning of the theme, and the second occurrence is its end; if a word or phrase is repeated three times, there are a beginning, middle, and end to the theme (Robbins, 1996). When the word or phrase is repeated five or more times, the repetitions are likely to cluster together in a pattern that starts, continues, and ends the theme (Robbins, 1996). Repetitive –progressive structure analysis can only mark the linguistic progressive and repetitive signs in a literary unit and does not answer all the questions related to textual exegetical inquiry (Robbins, 1996). In analyzing the repetitive texture and pattern, some of the important designations of characters are Jesus and the YRR; this is discovered by the use of pronouns (e.g., he, you, him, one, I, my, your, me). The investigation also identified key action words in the text as do, asked, and said. The critical concepts repeated in the text are good and teacher. The following is a listing of the number of times a key word appears in the text: *and* (10), *him* (7), *do* (6), and *you* (5).

It can, therefore, be assumed that the primary focus in this story is the YRR and Jesus while Mark narrates this dialogue. The YRR appears to be self-absorbed with himself because he uses first person pronouns (viz., me, I, and my) frequently in the text. The young aristocrat finds assurance in living the proper aristocratic lifestyle by showcasing to Jesus all the *do not's* that he has followed according to his Jewish traditions yet the YRR demonstrates few *do's* in the specific text. This point is clearly one of the young man's major problems. From the repetitive text analysis, the study is able to break down this passage into an opening, middle, and closing. The words "him" and "I" appear twice in Mark 10:17 and sets up the opening. The middle part of the story line is identified in Mark 10:18 with the phrase "do" not appearing five times. Lastly, the ending is picked up at Mark 10:21 with the word "and" appearing five times. These results will be further analyzed in another section.

*The Narratological Units of Mark 10:17-22.* There appears to be specifically defined narratological units within Mark 10:17-22. Narrational texture reveals some kind of pattern that moves the discourse programmatically forward (Robbins, 1996). The voices included in the text are the narrator, Jesus, and the young, rich ruler. Mark provides a short, action-oriented narration, from beginning to ending. Mark 10: 17 reads, "Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'"

In this text, Jesus is viewed as the master teacher and conveys to enlightenment to this young ruler. The plot focuses on Jesus addressing the perceived needs of this young Jewish aristocrat and moves rapidly along in the passage with quick interchanges between Jesus and the YRR is consistent with Markan drama. In summary, Jesus

provides a climatic ending by asking the YRR to forsake his riches and “take up the cross.” The young ruler decides that the cost to follow Jesus is too great and walks away.

These units are outlined by the following words that serve as narratological markers for the story.

1. Mark 10:17 “...one came running, knelt before him, and asked him...”
2. Mark 10:18 “So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good...’”
3. Mark 10:21 “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him...”

*Progressive Texture.* Using Progressive Texture and Pattern, the researcher is able to take advantage of the Repetitive Texture and determine sequences of words and phrases in the relationship of text units (Robbins, 1996). Table 1 and Table 2 represent a progression throughout the text.

**Table 1. PROGRESSION OF MARKAN VERBS IN MARK 10: 17-22**

17: came running		Knelt	asked		Do				
18: said					Do	inherit			
19: know	do not murder do not steal do not bear do not defraud							honor	
20: answered	Said	Have	kept						
21: loved	Said	Go	sell	Have	Will	have	come	take	follow
22: was		Went	had						

**Table 2. PROGRESSION OF NAMES AND PRONOUNS IN MARK 10: 17-22**

17:	He [Jesus] Him [Jesus] Him [Jesus] Teacher [Jesus]	one [YRR] [YRR] I [YRR]		
18:	Jesus Me[Jesus]	him [YRR] you [YRR]	no one	One [God] God
19:	You [YRR] your [YRR] your [YRR]			
20:	Him [Jesus] Him [Jesus] Teacher [Jesus]	he [YRR] I [YRR] my [YRR]		
21:	Jesus Me[Jesus]	him [YRR] him [YRR] him [YRR] you {YRR] your [YRR] you [YRR] you [YRR]		
22:		he [YRR] he [YRR]		

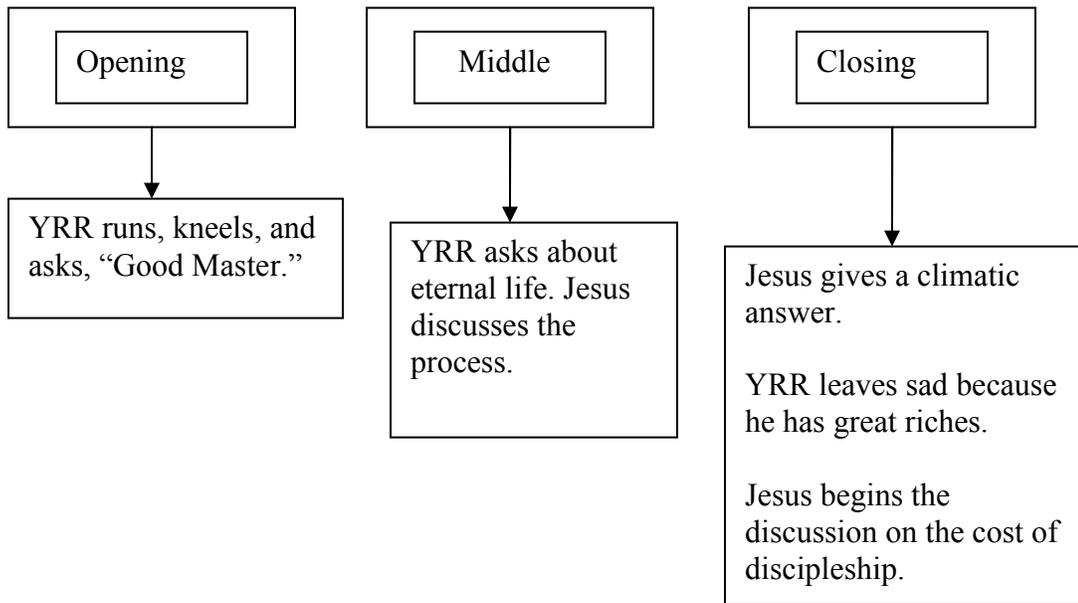
*Opening Middle Closing Texture.* The Opening-Middle- Closing Texture is used to help identify any unusual variations not discovered by the other inner text analysis (Robbins, 1996). From repetition text analysis, the investigation is able to further break down the Markan storyline (see Figure 1). First, the investigation breaks the opening of this passage from Mark 10: 17 and 18. It is at this point a member of the Jewish elite class rushes onto the scene and greets Jesus in platitudes. One thing is for certain the YRR was sincere because he approaches Jesus, a controversial figure among the Jewish aristocrats, and kneels before Jesus; this is a token of great respect and civility (“The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible,” 2005). Strangely enough, Jesus is not impressed with his greetings, “Good Master.” Jesus responds in Mark 10:18, “...Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” The young ruler uses an inconsiderate conventional language and takes an unwarrantable freedom with the word “good” in his opening (The Four Gospels, 2005).

In evaluating the opening of the text, the researcher discovers two key words, *good* and *teacher*. The word “good” is derived Greek word *Agathos* which has several meanings including “of a good constitution” and “honorable.” This form of the word appears 3,588 times in the Bible. It appears in Matthew (12) and Luke (13) while it appears twice (viz., Mark 10:17 and Mark 10:18) in the Gospel of Mark (“Heartland Search God’s Word,” 2005). Likewise, the word *teacher* is derived Greek word *dida/skalov* which has several definitions but for this passage means “one who teaches concerning the things of God and the duties of man.” This form of the word appears 1,321 times in the Bible. It appears in Matthew (11), Luke (16), and in Mark (12) several times (“Heartland Search God’s Word,” 2005). The Pharisees and Sadducees did not like Jesus and saw him as a threat to their lifestyle. No one can dismiss Jesus’ popularity among the common people, and this draws the attention of the upper class. There were some in this noble

class who had talked with Jesus (such as Nicodemus). Jesus' teachings intrigued some of these elitists, and many found Jesus fascinating; however, few nobles had ever approached Jesus in such a humble and impulsive way.

Secondly, the investigation outlines the middle of this passage from Mark 10: 19 and 20. The YRR asks the question about eternal life. From this line of inquiry, the researcher can deduct that the young man is a Pharisee because he believes in the resurrection of the dead while the Sadducee class does not. From the background, it is clear that Pharisees kept a very narrow perspective of the law but was also liberal enough to reinterpret any of the laws for their own benefit. Since the YRR grew up in a highly educated environment of religious law, it would be strange that he asked a poor teacher this question. The YRR must have felt something missing from his life.

Finally, the investigation outlines the closing of this passage from Mark 10: 21 and 22. A healthy discussion by Jesus and YRR has already taken place in the previous texts. The YRR asks Jesus what is left for me to do now. Jesus replies in a concise manner, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." This response is chilling to YRR. The young man walks away in sorrow. Like most Pharisees of his time, the YRR feels that eternal life is directly related to his *works* and not by *God's grace*. The YRR uses his strict obedience to the religious laws as an insurance policy for eternal life; however, it is also evident that this young man finds this Jewish philosophy lacking. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." In conclusion, the analysis shows the YRR did not accept the calling of discipleship offered by Jesus because he did not value discipleship above his earthly possessions.

Figure 1. **OPENING-MIDDLE-CLOSING TEXTURE ANALYSIS**

## Conclusion

Jesus provides today's leaders a model for daily living. There were several themes identified as a result of this review, which were: Christian leaders model the way; Christian leaders demonstrate action by serving followers; and Christian leaders count the cost of discipleship. In today's contemporary organizations, many Christian leaders forget to model the way for their followers. Jesus set the perfect leader and his lessons can transform others. Every Christian leader's purpose should be to bring God honor. Christian leaders demonstrate action by serving followers. In rushing to see Jesus, the YRR demonstrates a lack of maturity based on two factors: a) his impulsive nature to act and b) his inability to accept wise counsel from Jesus. Discipleship involves more than just talking; it is a process of doing. Likewise, religious leaders of today must be active in the day-to-day operations of their organizations.

Christian leaders count the cost of discipleship. Religious scholars cannot be certain what drew this Jewish aristocrat to Jesus. Was it Jesus' fame and the large crowds? Was it satisfying the YRR' curiosity about Jesus' authority? It is clear, however, that Jesus *loved him*. The YRR could not imagine the heavy requirements placed on him to become a disciple; however, Jesus' own disciples had left their families, fortunes, and a predictable lifestyle to follow Jesus. Jesus expects the same commitment from this young man and today's leaders. The young aristocrat places his earthly riches ahead of "treasure in heaven." Jesus serves as an example for his disciples by making personal sacrifices and bearing his own cross. Likely, today's leaders should count the cost of any decision. Finally, the results of this investigation can assist churches in developing the next generations of disciples. This effort contributes to further exploration into Jesus' lessons in leadership in view of biblical text and to the future development of future leaders.

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## **Appendix**

### Biographical Sketch

Daryl Green is pursuing a doctoral degree in leadership at Regent University. Mr. Green received a B.S. in engineering and a MA in organizational management. Currently, he is an ordained deacon and youth advisor at his local church.