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Two Essay Questions

- 1) Respond to these words of description offered by David DeSilva: "Mark made an important contribution to the church, bringing together **diverse strands** of Jesus sayings and traditions into a coherent narrative that is more than the **sum of its parts**. Mark's theological and pastoral genius is now broadly recognized. He preached the gospel of the suffering, self-giving Messiah, and demanded that all the **traditions about Jesus** as a wonder-worker be read in that light. He also called the churches to the radical, self-sacrificing discipleship that matched the pattern of the Messiah that the church claimed."

Diverse Strands

DeSilva observes the importance of Mark as a gospel that was written either to comfort persecuted Christians (during a time of suffering in Rome) or challenge Christians who are reserved regarding their witness for Christ (DeSilva, 198). As the earliest of the gospels, Mark's intent was to clearly weave together the various strands of the early church's Jesus tradition. Early church members in Rome were familiar with the stories of Jesus. DeSilva and others observe that Mark connected these stories into something more than a biography. Many scholars have commented on the plot movements that are evident in Mark's writing. While some compare Mark's writing to that of a Greek tragedy, others note the exceptionally happy ending which is very Jewish and reflects the faithfulness of God.

Traditions About Jesus

The early church could clearly have been reminded through the failures of the disciples in Mark that there was a need for them to strive to lead the life that the words

and actions of Jesus had demanded of them. DeSilva says it best when he states, "Discipleship itself depends on a right understanding of Jesus' Messiahship." Mark's ability to redefine the tenants of the Jewish faith (Torah, Temple and Piety) through the teaching and actions of Jesus provide a strong sense of connection to the early Christian church with its ancient Jewish traditions. The so-called Messianic secret that Jesus concealed His identity as the messiah is even noted by some Biblical scholars as following the Davidic tradition. This is a tradition where David was not named the king until his enthronement and Jesus likewise was coronated at the cross. Thus the messianic secret was revealed not through political means, but rather in a retrospective view of His mission.

Sum of its Parts

Mark wastes no time in presenting his gospel. After a single sentence of introduction, he drives us directly to an event that shatters the way the church looks at and experiences the world. The sooner we get the message, the better off we will be. The message is so good; God is here and He is on our side! He is actively seeking to help us in the way we need it most. For the early church, this Gospel served to dispel an enormous amount of guesswork and gossip that could have resulted in runaway superstition, anxiety and exploitation among the early Christian-Jewish Church. Mark's hurry to share the truth of the Birth, Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus lead the reader to the event that reveals the truth of God to the Church, both then and now, that God has sent the Messiah because He is passionate to save His people.

- 2) Respond to the quotation from Graham Stanton: "In the early church Matthew's gospel was used more widely and more extensively than any other of the gospels. The reasons for its popularity are not hard to find. Matthew has ordered his whole gospel more effectively. His prose is rhythmical and often poetic; individual sections contain carefully balanced and readily memorable phrases. Matthew's gospel is nearly half as long again as Mark and contains many more sayings."

DeSilva categorizes two main contributions of Matthew to the early church (DeSilva, 244). The first is the church's relationship to the sacred tradition of Israel. The wide variety of traditions which Matthew assembled in his gospel, such as the controversy between Jesus and other religious teachers, are cited as examples of this contribution. The second Matthean contribution that DeSilva notes is the careful selection and placement of many of Jesus' sayings. The organization of Jesus' sayings into five significant discourses makes Matthew extremely useful as a handbook of instruction for the church and is likely a key to the heavy use of this gospel in the early church. Powell points out that the first and most famous of these five speeches, The Sermon on the Mount, contain such well-known items as the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer and the Golden Rule (Powell, 62). Powell highlights the impact on western culture where popular sayings such as "Salt of the earth," "Turning the other cheek" and "Wolves in sheep's clothing" that are found in Matthew have had. Powell sites the Sermon on the Mount as being a text identified by Thomas Jefferson that provided moral principles on which the United States should be founded.

Clearly the five discourses of Jesus found in Matthew emphasize an exploration of what the kingdom of God is. Ulrich Luz presents a chiasmic arrangement in his commentary on Matthew that highlights three great themes. The first theme includes Jesus and His teachings on how to interpret and understand the law. Secondly, A new understanding of how to worship God and finally an emphasis on social issues and

explanations on how we are to relate to our neighbors. This arrangement highlights the Lord's prayer as the central piece and leads this writer to wonder if this was Matthew's intention; to hinge the sermon on the mount with this important teaching on prayer.

The contents of Matthew's gospel has been marveled over by many theologians. Powell presents a concise list of some of the unique characteristics of Matthew's gospel. He highlights Matthew's use of distinctive characteristics. The five great speeches of Jesus and a possible connection to the five books of the Pentateuch are one example that this writer found intriguing. Matthew is also fond of pairs, what is called a 'doubling motif', such as His teaching on divorce that is reported in both 5:32-34 and again in 19:9. The disciple, Peter, receives more attention in Matthew than any other Gospel and Jesus speaks of how the church is to continue after He is gone only in this gospel. Powell also states that Matthew is both strongly Jewish in its orientation in respecting Jewish authorities and anti-Jewish in its orientation in encountering hostility with Jewish leaders. Matthew's gospel shows interest in the law and the fulfillment of prophecy and even contains an apocalyptic vision of the world that is well beyond the scope of the other gospel accounts. Finally, the presence of God is a theme found throughout Matthew's gospel. "God with us" is certainly a theme that the church at any time in history should resonate with.

Finally, the stylistic organizational device of grouping triplets as highlighted by the Allison and Davies outline sets a standard for teaching and training that the church has followed for generations. This writer has certainly written and preached his share of three point sermons! The use of triplets as a tool for communication, teaching and

instruction, highlight the useful and necessary writing of Matthew and the use of this gospel in the spreading of the good news.