

THE GOSPEL OF MARK THROUGH THE LENSES OF SOCIOCULTURAL VALUE SETS

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Introduction

To apprehend and embrace the Jesus of the gospels is undoubtedly one of the highest of aspirations, and yet this objective proves elusive and enigmatic at many points in the journey. One of the primary reasons for this is the challenge in properly grasping what the original authors had in mind for the original readers as they wrote the four Gospels nearly 2000 years ago. Society, values, priorities, worldviews, setting, authority structures and relationships were so different from what they are today, and there are significant obstacles for the modern reader to interpose him/herself into the ancient Scriptures. In the briefest of the four Gospels, which also many consider to be the most mysterious and perplexing, Mark portrays the life and ministry of Jesus embedded in the ancient Mediterranean culture. In order to understand well who this person was and what he taught and did, we must view Mark's account through those ancient Mediterranean cultural lenses. Of the various ways to examine Mark's account, this paper will focus on sociocultural value sets in an effort to unlock some of the meaning of what Mark has written. After a brief orientation and introduction, we will work systematically through the sixteen chapters of the gospel, highlighting on value constructs as they show up in the text. Periodically throughout this main body of the paper there will be brief excursions taken to probe more deeply into certain social constructs that are relevant at that point in the text. Finally, some concluding remarks and personal application from what has been studied will be shared.

It is the thesis of this paper that the meaning of Mark, and therefore the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the central figure in the gospel of Mark, can best be understood by utilizing the sociocultural lenses of value sets which were prevalent and embedded in the understanding of the original readers. These value sets include honor/shame, patron/client, innocence/guilt, power/fear, purity/pollution, limited good/wealth creation,

individualism/collectivism, hierarchy/egalitarianism and finally reciprocity. Originally it was my intention to look at each of these themes and choose a passage or two which highlights that theme. Yet as I continued to study the text and do scholarly research, it became clear that in nearly every passage of Mark there is an amalgamation of various themes woven together, and isolating one value set in any passage to the exclusion of the others would render the understanding incomplete. Therefore, it seems that the preferred way to proceed is to look at passages and discuss how these sociocultural value sets are intertwined to communicate Mark's intended meaning. While much more depth could be plumbed by further study, due to the limitations of this paper the investigation into these passages and themes must be considered an introduction, hopefully spurring the reader on to deeper personal study in these areas.

Many scholars suggest that Mark's writing was the result of his close association with the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13), who was one of the closest eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry, lending authority and authenticity to his account. Mark makes clear from 1:1 that his goal is to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. As we proceed through this study, it is my desire that the reader will respond to this gospel of Jesus Christ with worship, awe, praise, reverence, obedience and surrender, all of which are included in the value sets which will be studied.

Exploration of the Text of Mark

1:1-3 – Mark begins his account by stating from the outset who the central figure is in his book, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” (1:1), and “the Lord” (1:3), all of which are terms of profound and unique honor. In verses 2-3, Mark shares that “the Lord” has a messenger who goes before him, preparing his way. In verse 4 we see that this refers to John the Baptist. One

who has a herald or messenger to precede him, to prepare his way, is one who is worthy of honor and glory. If God is the One who is sending a messenger, the One coming must be most highly honorable. The relationship between the messenger and the Lord is one akin to the client who serves and strives to honor the patron. The messenger is also likely the client of the patron in the social constructs of the ancient Mediterranean world. Those reading and listening to Mark's account learn important information about Jesus in the very first verses that the characters in the story would not be privileged to know (Watson, 2010a).

1:4-6 – John came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In this study, sin is most often treated as an issue of guilt before a holy God, but there is also a way in which sin is stealing the Patron's glory in a patron/client system, or bringing shame to the One most honorable in an honor/shame system, all of which show disruptions in relationships. The fact that John's baptism was of repentance for the forgiveness of sins indicates there was a recognition of guilt, along with probably some shame, in which "all the country" was engaged (1:5). They are repenting, traveling out into the wilderness, to be baptized and forgiven of the guilt of their sins, which in truth only Jesus could do, yet John initiates their journey toward forgiveness. Also there is the value set of purity/pollution at work in these verses, for people are polluted and unclean due to their sin, but John offers cleansing (forgiveness, purification) through the waters of the Jordan. In this way, he serves as their patron, for they come seeking him, yet he recognizes the true Patron is the one who would come after him with an infinitely superior baptism (1:7-8). John's shame or humility before Jesus' high honor is quite significant (7). This lowest of positions, untying the strap of the sandal for another, is too honorable for John. Although the words John speaks may involve an element of patron-client relationship, yet the primary focus seems to be on the contrast between the great honor of the one who will

baptize with the Holy Spirit as opposed to the low position of John who baptizes with water.

Also, Mark highlights the clear hierarchy of Jesus over John and John over sinful Jews in need of baptism.

1:9-11 – In the way Mark portrays Jesus’ baptism, it does not seem to be as much a purity/pollution motif (for Jesus was not polluted with sin) as it is an honoring of the Son by the Father, acknowledging his identity and pleasure with the Son. In this case, the “Client” (Jesus) recognizes the worth and honor of “Patron” (Father) by pledging loyalty and obedience in the act of baptism. The Spirit alights on Jesus as a demonstration of honor and affirmation of Jesus’ identity, with the Father offering the ultimate honor statement directly to Jesus, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” John is an incidental part of the whole event. From the very beginning of Mark’s account of Jesus, Mark establishes Jesus’ “purity rating” with three witnesses: John the Baptist (1:7-8), God (1:9-11), and even Satan indirectly testifies to Jesus’ purity (1:12-13). (Neyrey, 1986) While Goh (2011) makes some good points as he argues that “Mark does not present John as recognizing Jesus’ mission and testifying for him,” (p.172) based upon his study of 1:9-11 and 2:18-22, yet I do not find his arguments in the end compelling. However, it can be stated that Mark’s portrayal of John is not nearly as strong in testimony of Jesus’ identity and work as the other gospels.

1:14-15 – Jesus begins his ministry following the temptations in the wilderness, and Mark emphasizes the primary element of Jesus’ preaching, calling people to repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. This is a call to purify oneself from the guilt of sin, to come back into the covenant family of God and to believe in the gospel. The ultimate Patron, ruler of the kingdom of God, is calling all people to come as clients through repentance and faith.

1:16-20 – Jesus enters a special relationship with his first disciples. He calls to them, invites them to follow him, and he will make them fishers of men. There are several important notes we can make in these verses. Jesus calling first disciples, “Come, follow me...” seems to indicate hierarchy rather than egalitarianism. Jesus was the leader of these men, and they followed him. They were specially chosen by Jesus, for others did not receive this same personal invitation. He would give them a purpose and a calling, “I will make you become fishers of men,” and they would give him allegiance, indicating a reciprocal patron/client relationship. In an unprecedented manner for Judaic tradition, Jesus calls these men to follow him, inviting them into a personal relationship. Rabbis of the time would receive students or disciples, but would not initiate the relationship (from recent sermon by G.Ginn). And they would call potential disciples to follow the Torah, the ways of Judaism. But Jesus is different. These men left security, identity, career, revenue, boats, servants, family, everything to follow Jesus. They are called to exchange all this for something far greater, a personal relationship with the Patron.

1:23-26 – As Jesus is authoritatively preaching (1:22) in the synagogue, there appears a man with an unclean spirit. Here the purity/pollution theme is at work as well as power/fear, for people fear the supernatural power associated with the demon-possessed. The uncleanness of a demon-possessed person is culturally extreme, and these people were to be avoided at all cost. Watson (2010a) points out that in Jesus’ rebuke for the spirit to be quiet, Jesus is refusing the highest ascribed honor (“Holy One of God”) which the demon grants to Jesus. In this culture, Watson shares that exorcisms “had the potential significantly to increase the honor of the one to whom the exorcism was attributed.” (2010a, 59) Yet Jesus refuses this ascribed honor since he will present an entirely new, inverted honor system, as will be discussed later in this paper. Jesus shows his supernatural power over the evil spirit, rebuking it and telling it to come out. The

pollution is removed. People are amazed, in awe (fear) of Jesus' teaching and actions, and his fame (achieved honor) spreads throughout the region (28). Thus although Jesus silences the ascribed honor from the demon, Jesus' achieved honor from the exorcism spreads and increases dramatically.

1:29-34 – Jesus heals many, including Simon's mother-in-law. Here we are introduced to an important theme which runs through many of the healings which Jesus does. These people are sick, polluted, unclean. Yet Jesus "took her (Simon's mother-in-law) by the hand..." He touched one who is unclean, and heals and cleanses her with his purity and his power, which is greater than any disease or pollution or evil power. This important element will be dealt with in ensuing passages. The crowd gathered looks to Jesus as their patron, their healer, and seek his assistance as his "clients," and he provides for them (33-34). In the ensuing verses (35-39), Jesus continues his itinerant ministry, but rather than receiving the praise and honor from crowds which are seeking him, he directs his disciples to new locations. This "secrecy" theme of Jesus withdrawing from crowds in order to follow his primary plan, even if it means sacrificing public honor, is significant and will be treated more completely soon.

1:40-45 – It is difficult for us today in our Western culture to grasp how utterly unclean "a man full of leprosy" would have been to people of this time. Chiang & Lovejoy (2015) share that this man would have had slim hope for ever regaining his health or honor, but was facing a life of crying out "Unclean!" along with lonely isolation from all others. One who was most unclean and polluted in Israel is made pure and clean by Jesus, in fact by Jesus' touching him. This would be extremely shocking for any Jew living in ancient Palestine, for in touching this polluted, diseased, unclean man, this would have made Jesus polluted and unclean. But instead, Jesus' purity cleanses the leper's impurity. "Jesus is not defiled by this touch but rather extends

cleansing by this touch.” (DeSilva, 2000, 284) This is truly remarkable and is a pattern we see often repeated throughout the gospels.

The relationship between the leper and Jesus is like a client begging for assistance from a patron. He is told to keep the healing secret (1:43). This is the first clear account in Mark of the “secrecy motif,” of Jesus commanding a healed person to remain silent rather than publicly offering the patron honor (Watson, 2010a). The language Mark uses in 1:43 is very strong, Jesus “scolds” the man or “sternly charges him” driving him away, which seems harsh in view of the compassion Jesus had for the man. There is much debate about what is behind this secrecy motif in Mark, and some thoughts will be shared later in the paper, but in short scholars are divided on exactly why Jesus commanded certain people to remain silent after being healed. Jesus instructs the healed leper to show himself to the priest and make an offering in accordance with the law of Moses as proof of cleansing (44). In this way, Jesus cares about the man’s honor so that he will be reintegrated back into society (Chiang & Lovejoy, 2015). Despite Jesus’ warning, the healed leper aligns with the value system of the day and spreads the honor of Jesus publicly, which is to be expected, for Jesus’ command must have seemed unconscionable and utterly strange (2010a). This was one small way the client could honor the patron, by publicly sharing the news and honoring him. Instead of obeying Jesus’ command, he proclaims the good news of his healing, therefore Jesus could not enter towns because of the crowds. This again emphasizes the patron/client relationship Jesus had with his followers in that they responded to his patronage as was common for the day, through spreading his fame far and wide, even when he told them not to. (DeSilva, 2000)

2:1-12 – There are several themes represented in this narrative, including collectivism, power/fear, honor/shame, guilt/innocence, patron/client and perhaps purity/pollution. In the

account, there seems to be a collectivistic theme with the four friends who are working together for the benefit of their sick friend. Clearly this is not an individualistic group, for they even destroy part of the roof, potentially subjecting themselves to shame and penalty, to get their friend close to Jesus. Perhaps there is an element of pollution if the paralytic is considered unclean according to Jewish law. What is certain is that the four men are bringing their friend to encounter the power and authority of Jesus, seeking him and his services as clients seek their patron. Jesus speaks to the paralytic, saying, "My son..." (2:5) which is a term of honor and compassion. Jesus starts the dialogue responding to the faith of the friends by saying the man's sins are forgiven, which is a statement about his guilt before God. He sees that this man's greatest need is forgiveness, cleansing of his sin before a holy God. In a strong honor statement about his own identity, Jesus states (1:10) that he has authority to forgive sins, basically making himself equal with God. Astonishing! Certainly it was to the Jewish leaders gathered there. Jesus' power and authority to forgive sins are affirmed publicly through the graphic demonstration of healing the paralytic so that he stands up and walks. In the dialogue, there is a hint of Jesus shaming the scribes as he sees into their hearts and perceives their doubting. All of this flows from Jesus' relationship with the Father, where he conveys certain benefits or "favors" on his followers from the Father through which he is the mediator (DeSilva, 2000) or "broker" which is another patron/client term that is used. Through the miracle of this healing Jesus confirms who he says he is, what he says he can do (forgive sins) and Who he represents.

2:13-17 – In the calling of Levi, Jesus chooses one who is considered unclean and polluted by the Jews to be a part of his special closest group of followers, entering into a patron/client relationship with the words, "Follow me." This is an incredible honor for Matthew, one who likely viewed himself as least deserving of honor. Then Jesus goes a step beyond and

enters the house of this fellow that the Jews would view contemptuously, and he eats dinner with others similar to Matthew who are likewise polluted and guilty (tax collectors and sinners). In a public display of criticism, probably intended to shame Jesus, the Jewish leaders ask Jesus' disciples why he is doing this incredulous act, and Jesus states that he came for the sick and the sinners, not for the righteous and healthy. He honors the shameful and shames those honored by society. He cares about the polluted, the guilty, the shameful.

2:23-28 – In this passage, Mark recounts a time when Jesus and his disciples were wandering through grain fields, and Jesus allows his disciples to pick some of the grain. This is not a big deal, except that it is the Sabbath, when “work” of this sort is forbidden. The Pharisees see what is happening and are outraged and take the opportunity to publicly “question” (i.e. shame) Jesus. Perhaps what the disciples are doing is a guilt issue, for they are confronted by the Pharisees in their “unlawful” act (2:24). He is the disciples’ patron and is providing for his clients through grain in fields, and so they hold him responsible. Jesus responds to the Pharisees attempt to shame him and his disciples by turning the tables on them with a question that has a barb, “Have you never read...?” Perhaps there is also an element of limited (or unlimited) good in the example Jesus uses of David eating temple bread, which was not “lawful,” but in that situation it was allowed. DeSilva (2000) says that Jesus and his disciples “embarked on a holy mission” just as David and his soldiers had done, and in so doing they are excluded from the normal ceremonial restrictions. Jesus, who is much greater than the Sabbath, sanctifies the disciples’ “work.” He is saying that laws are made for man, they are to help man, not the other way around where man is to serve the law. In this way, for the Sabbath to be truly sanctified, it must serve man, and if Sabbath restrictions create hardship for man, they cease to be sanctified (2000). Thus in Jesus saying he is lord of Sabbath, he is placing a title of great honor and

distinction upon himself, making a claim to his identity which is above the Jewish Law. In this brief passage he clarifies how the law and man are to work together, what the goal of the law is, and which values must take priority.

3:1-6 – Power/Fear, honor/shame, guilt/innocence. In this account of Jesus healing the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, we encounter sociocultural value sets such as honor/shame and power/fear and perhaps innocence/guilt. Jesus is in the synagogue on a Sabbath, and the Pharisees and religious leaders are feeling threatened and fearful by Jesus' clear power, authority and refusal to submit to their system and authority. Jesus demonstrates his power in healing this man, but the main theme of the account seems to be the dialogue with the Jewish leaders as they seek to accuse (3:2) and destroy him (3:6). He asks "them" a question which they were not able to answer, and in so doing he shames them for their hardness of heart. He answers his own question through action by choosing to do good on the Sabbath and heal this man. Perhaps there was a bit of legal language involved when he asks if it is "lawful" to do good on the Sabbath, but clearly the leaders got the point, and experienced the shame, for they began to counsel together how to destroy Jesus. Jesus shamed them by once again rising above their law and traditions to do good.

3:7-12 – Crowds press in around Jesus as their patron seeking for him to heal them. Unclean (polluted) spirits are confronting Jesus, and he rebukes them to be quiet, not wanting their "ascribed honor." He has power over demonic spirits. There is also a power/fear element present in the massive crowds who followed Jesus, for as DeSilva (2000) brings out, the multitudes were a "visible representation of Jesus' fame and a potential power base for any public agenda he might entertain," (135) which would naturally lead the religious leaders and even the Romans into envy and fear which spiraled into murder.

3:13-19 – Jesus now withdraws and calls to himself a special group, select out of all his followers. Twelve are appointed by the “patron” Jesus to be in a unique relationship with him as his “special clients.” Out of all the followers, Jesus chooses twelve to be apostles, which seems to tie in with the hierarchical value set, for these are set apart for special purposes above others, to spend extra time with Jesus and serve him and be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons (3:14-15).

3:22-30 – Now in his home, scribes come from Jerusalem to accuse Jesus of being possessed by Satan, or at least by a powerful unclean spirit (30), which is an extremely forceful and negative, shameful attack upon Jesus. They are working to discredit him due to the power he holds over the people and their fear of him. But he confronts their accusations with truth. This is a power confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Also, he says that sins will be forgiven except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which deserves guilt for an eternal sin (28-29), thus the innocence/guilt theme is touched upon. In 3:28 he introduces a frequently repeated phrase, “Truly I say to you...” or “I tell you the truth...” which is an honor phrase and occurs 12 other times in chapters 8-14 (May, 1987). There is also likely an element of saving face, which is an aspect of honor/shame, tied with the accusation of scribes, for they are losing popularity and unable to stand against Jesus’ growing influence and his continual public shaming of them, so in order to save face they attack him. This face-saving was a strong cultural element in the ancient Mediterranean world as it is in many parts of the world today. It is a theme that appears repeatedly in Mark’s account, for particularly the Jewish and Roman leaders were constantly looking to save face, gain face and not lose face.

Watson (2010a) makes an interesting comment in regard to the patron/client relationship based in this passage (esp. 3:29), questioning if Jesus is the patron in granting healing, or if he is

acting more as a broker, mediating God's divine power granted him by the Holy Spirit to bless the client. He suggests that there is no definitive answer in Mark how Jesus acts, as patron or broker, but this passage may allude to the fact that Mark views Jesus' power as proceeding from the Spirit (v.29) in which case Jesus functions as God's broker. This is the view which Watson tentatively asserts, but at the end of the day he says, "Whether or not Jesus is a broker or the patron makes little difference." (2010a, 47)

3:20-21, 31-35 – Here we are introduced to some kinship issues. This issue of kinship in Jesus' life and teaching is very interesting. In 3:21, Jesus' family tries to seize Jesus, thinking he is out of his mind. Possibly they were ashamed of what Jesus was saying and doing and the attention he was calling not only to himself but to the family. They are most likely trying to guard the family honor more than Jesus' personal honor. DeSilva claims that Jesus' family is trying to guard their "collective honor" when it appears that one of the members is potentially bringing shame to the family (2000, 172). It seems that they may be trying to hide Jesus' behavior that seems inappropriate not only for his own sake, but for the sake of the honor of the entire family. In a collectivistic society as this was, they believed he would bring the honor of the entire family down through his crazily concocted notions (May, 1987). In 3:32, Jesus' family is considered special in the social hierarchy as the crowd informs Jesus that his family is seeking him. Yet Jesus in essence creates a new "fictive kinship" in that he makes all who believe (who do the will of Father) equal with his family. This seems to be an egalitarian, collectivistic view in kingdom of God, where fictive kin are equal with blood kin, which was a radical notion for that day. Is he shaming his family? No, more likely he is honoring his followers. The ultimate outcome, according to May (1987), is that "Jesus acquires honor at the expense of the scribes, and designates a new focal point of honor in a fictive kinship group." (83) He is shown to have

authority over the Jewish leaders and his own family, and he redefines who his kin are. He manages not to dishonor his family, and in so doing gains more honor for himself and honors those who join his fictive kinship by “doing the will of my Father in heaven.” (3:35)

4:1-20 – The sower who sows seed seeks a return for his investment. The interpretation seems to communicate that those who sow the seed of the Word will sometimes have a larger return than other times, meaning there will be a variety of responses to the preaching of the Word. This addresses the sociocultural value of reciprocity, which is sometimes generalized, sometimes balanced and sometimes negative. Perhaps there is also a reference to “wealth creation” instead of “limited good,” because the seed seems to be scattered very indiscriminately, without care or caution or concern for supply. There is unlimited “Word” to be sown to the nations, but the responses are diverse. 4:10-12 seems to indicate hierarchy in that some are given understanding and others are not – some are inside and know secrets, and others are outside and are left in confusion. 4:12 is a quote from Isaiah 6 (et al), and refers to turning from the guilt of sin and being forgiven.

4:21-25 – It appears that Jesus is teaching a form of balanced reciprocity here, for things that are hidden will be manifest and secret things will be brought to light. He teaches that with measure you use, it will be measured to you (24). To one who has, more will be given, and the converse to him who does not have. There will be a balancing out of all things, and in the kingdom of God one can be assured of absolute justice.

4:26-34 – One element of what Jesus seems to be teaching in these two parables about crops spouting during the night and the mustard seed flourishing into a large plant seems to be about “wealth creation” as opposed to “limited good.” Something small (seed at night or small mustard seed) grows into something quite large (harvest, mustard plant). A small thing through

no work of our own will result in bountiful harvest. God is able to return a bountiful harvest for the small investments we make. In 4:33-34, when Jesus teaches in public he always uses parables, according to 4:11 in an effort to hide truth from certain people. Yet for her chosen disciples, he privately explains all parables, indicating a hierarchy in the way Jesus reveals truth to people – some receive it clearly and others receive it veiled.

4:35-41 – This narrative is a great example of the power/fear social construct which can be used well in cultures where this value set is primary. Jesus is in a boat crossing a stormy Sea of Galilee with his disciples. They were filled with fear at the powerful storm, yet he was sound asleep in the boat. In a question with a twinge of shame they ask him, “Don’t you care that we are dying?” Jesus demonstrates great power over nature by instantly calming the stormy sea. Then he confronts them on their fear and lack of faith, and they are even more “filled with great fear” at who this amazing man is. In the face of great power, oftentimes people respond in fear. In the case of the Jewish leaders, I believe that there was fear motivating their attack of Jesus at his power and authority for they sensed they were losing control of their position, their honor, their authority and influence. For the disciples and the crowd, there was fear in the face of Jesus’ demonstrations of power, but it was more awe, wonder and amazement at the greatness of the One in whose presence they were, although they likely did not fully apprehend this.

5:1-20 – This story is an excellent example showing both value sets of power/fear and purity/pollution which must be taken into account to properly understand this narrative. The man with the demon(s) was thoroughly unclean, having “three strikes” against him in pollution: being inhabited by an unclean spirit (actually many spirits), living in tombs, which meant that he was constantly coming into contact with the dead which defiled him, and Luke’s account adds that he was naked which was further shame and defilement (Luke 8:27). This man had great power so

no one could restrain him, and clearly there was great fear of him by the townspeople. But he has no power next to Jesus, and Legion begs Jesus not to torment them, but to release them into pigs (more uncleanness/pollution). Herdsmen of pigs (14-16) were filled with fear at what transpired as Jesus' power over this powerful being is demonstrated. Perhaps this region was largely Gentile, another aspect of uncleanness, for Jews were not to travel into Gentile regions.

Townfolk begged Jesus to leave, for they were likewise filled with fear (17) instead of faith, and Jesus requires the freed man (who wants to be with Jesus), similar to how a patron instructs a client, to remain and witness to his fellow townspeople of the mercy and goodness of God.

5:24-34 – The following two accounts, which Mark creates into a sandwich with the bleeding woman in the middle, communicate strong truths about purity/pollution as well as other value sets. First, there is a great crowd around Jesus, and a woman with a discharge of blood approaches Jesus. This was something from the Old Testament that made a woman unclean. For 12 years, this woman had been unable to enter the temple due to her uncleanness (Muller, 2000). Clearly she believed in a power/fear construct, for the thought that just touching his garment would convey the power she needed to be healed. Perhaps she was fearful to actually speak to him or that he might reject her. For her to touch Jesus made him unclean, but instead of him becoming defiled, as she touched his garment, his purity purified and healed her. In 5:30, Jesus perceives that power has gone out of him, which some think could possibly indicate an element of limited good or limited power, although this is unlikely since Jesus at no point seems to indicate that his power reaches a limit. After he calls out, the woman is filled with “fear and trembling” as she comes before powerful Jesus. Perhaps there is also some shame as she is caught. Jesus sees her faith and responds with a title and words of honor, calling her “daughter” and commending her for her faith.

5:21-24, 35-43 – The “bread” of the sandwich, which Mark places before and after the healing of the bleeding woman, is the encounter with Jairus, a man of honor and distinction who is a ruler of the synagogue. First we notice the honor paid to Jesus by Jairus, who falls at Jesus’ feet, a position of shame and humility, offering Jesus, the patron, much honor (22). Watson (2010a) calls this a “positive challenge” in that Jesus will now gain or lose honor based upon his response to the petition of Jairus to heal his daughter (23). Jesus does not respond positively or negatively, by healing or rejecting, but instead Jesus goes with Jairus. Watson points out that four times in this story there are demonstrations of Jesus trying to prevent public knowledge and proclamation of his honor as he performs the miracle of raising the girl. In this power encounter with death, Jesus tells Jairus not to fear, but to believe (36), to trust in the power of the patron even over death. Despite the large crowd which begins to shamefully laugh at Jesus for his comment that the girl is sleeping (which may have been another way Jesus tried to minimize his public honor), only Peter, James and John are allowed entrance with Jesus (37), indicating again a hierarchy of certain ones with preferred position. Touching a dead person was another cause for pollution and impurity, yet Jesus once again removes her impurity (death) rather than taking her impurity upon himself, and he gives her His purity, life (41). Incredible power again demonstrated by the patron for a humble client resulting in amazement, no doubt with some fear.

This may be a good point to touch on the important sociocultural value set of the patron/client relationship. This was very common in Jesus’ day, as it still is in many parts of the world, but Western readers may miss fully understanding certain passages because this system is less common in the West. Several of the accounts we are examining in Mark must be discerned in light of the patron/client relationship. People come to Jesus as their healer, their provider, their “patron,” and they are his “clients” in the sense that they respond to his beneficence by

worshipping him, having faith in him, believing him, obeying him and publicly honoring him by proclaiming the amazing deeds he has done. DeSilva (2000) sees that each of the miracles Jesus performed for people was a type of “benefaction” or patronage for his “clients.” Certainly healing a leper, casting out a demon, and providing food for massive crowds could be viewed this way. Even his teaching ministry can be viewed this way, considering his authoritative and true teaching as a gift from a patron, “since good advice and guidance were valued and valuable commodities.” (2000, 134) In the Mediterranean value system of patronage, Watson (2010a) states that in this vertical, reciprocal relationship, the patron would offer goods or services, such as healing, food or teaching in Jesus’ case, to clients who would then respond with public statements honoring the patron and showing him loyalty and trust. In this way, the patron-client system acts with a sort of reciprocity where there is an expectation of giving and receiving throughout the relationship.

6:1-6 – In contrast to the many places where great crowds accepted Jesus as their “patron,” Jesus was not accepted as a benefactor, a good teacher, healer or prophet (or patron) in his hometown area, and because of their unbelief he left them. Jesus is shamed (without honor, 1:4) by the response of the people in his hometown, and so pronounces shame upon them. This is also an example of collectivism (Richards & O’Brien, 2012), since a person’s identity is linked inextricably to their family and home region. The people of his home region cannot see Jesus apart from his family and upbringing. It seems there may be a hint that even Jesus’ family and relatives did not accept him as the “Son of Man.” (1:4) Those who reject Jesus as their “patron” and are ashamed of him are in turn rejected by Christ and do not receive the benefaction of the patron.

6:7-13 – Jesus confers power and authority on his disciples to cleanse unclean spirits and to preach the truth and heal the sick. They are his “clients” sent by the patron to do his bidding. In this way, he is breaking down the hierarchy between him and them, and empowering them to do the same type of ministry he has been doing, so that although he is still the ultimate source of power, yet they have some power as well. In this way, they can be considered “brokers” to use patron/client language, for they serve as mediators between the patron and the people. By virtue of the fact that Jesus grants power and authority to his disciples without him losing authority or power, this touches on the concept of limited good (or limited power), which Jesus demonstrates is not limited, but can be shared with others. In this ancient Mediterranean culture, as in many places in the world today, it is believed that to give power, goods, honor or authority away means there is less of it for the initial agent. However, Jesus shows that this is an incorrect view, for in fact as he empowers others and gives authority and honor to his disciples, he receives more honor and authority instead of less.

6:14-29 – King Herod is filled with fear as he hears of the power and fame of Jesus in doing miracles and gaining popularity. The account gives us some background to Herod and his relationship with John the Baptist. Herod was involved in a shameful affair with Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife (17). John confronted him on his shameful behavior, and Herod feared John (20) for John was a righteous, honorable and holy man, and the people believed he was a prophet. Herod was afraid of losing face and being dishonored through this relationship. Then Herod gets drawn into a shameful act at the request of Herodias and her dancing daughter Salome. Once Herod has extended the offer to grant Salome whatever she asks for (22-23), he cannot retract the offer and still save face before his guests (26). And so in an honor/shame culture such as this was, saving face is more important than anything to Herod and he succumbs

to the request and kills John. This narrative is a good example of several aspects of power/fear and honor/shame, including the fact that Herod undoubtedly saw himself as the patron before his guests (clients). Goh (2011) interprets Mark's account of John's death to mean that just as John suffered a shameful end as a prophet of God, so it should not be surprising in view of the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth (6:1-6) that Jesus is likewise to suffer a shameful demise in obedience to God.

6:30-44 – As Jesus is teaching the crowd, they are in a desolate place and have no food. The disciples try to send the crowd away, so they can perhaps save face by not providing for their “clients,” but Jesus has compassion on the crowd (34), like a patron on his clients, and instructs the disciples to give the crowd food. Here we are presented with a clear picture of limited good and limited money and limited food, only five loaves and two fish present, which one boy possesses, but is used collectively for all, but certainly is not enough for the crowd. Jesus has a different perspective, seeing the unlimited good (wealth creation) and unlimited provision for his “clients,” and he blesses food and distributes food to everyone with 12 baskets left over, which was more than they started with. So here we have a confrontation between a limited good perspective and an unlimited good perspective. It is also significant to note that there is certainly no “secrecy” to Jesus miracle in this case, for possibly 20,000 people are first hand recipients of his patronage and witness his honor and power at work.

6:45-52 – Again Jesus demonstrates great power over natural elements in this narrative account. The disciples are sent by Jesus in a boat to other side of Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida. Jesus is praying and watching them (48) similar to how a patron might watch over and protect his clients, as they are struggling to cross the sea against strong winds. Late in the night, he is walking across the sea, meaning to pass them by, which is interesting. They see him and are

terrified (49-50) for fear of the supernatural (ghost). He calms their fears and calms the wind in a demonstration of supernatural power over nature (51) to which they respond with utter astonishment, and likely fear at this one who is now in the boat with them.

6:53-56 – Jesus continues to heal many who are sick from all villages, cities and the countryside. If they even touch the fringe of his garment, the sick are healed. Here are examples of Jesus as the patron caring for clients, his followers, as well as demonstrations of power and perhaps purity in cleansing diseases.

7:1-23 – In this lengthy section, Mark addresses the sociocultural construct of purity and pollution in one of Jesus' clearest teachings on the subject. He in essence upends and inverts the entire purity/pollution system that Judaism had developed, and instead teaches about true purity and pollution and what truly defiles a person and what does not. So at this point we will address this issues in some detail.

The Pharisees are gathered together, along with some scribes from Jerusalem, and they witness that Jesus allows some of his disciples to eat with ceremonially defiled (unwashed) hands. He is their patron, and so responsibility rests with him. They are focused on the externals of the law, on traditions, on hand washing and other cleansing rituals (3-5). These are the things that pollute, according to the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law. Yet Jesus teaches that what is inside, not outside, is what defiles. What is in the heart of a person is what is most important (6-8). He teaches that the command of God is about obedience from the heart, not just external practices. DeSilva says that Jesus sets the scene for a "radical reinterpretation and redrawing of purity and pollution lines, now entirely in an ethical direction." (2000, 281) For example, honoring parents is set aside by Pharisees if the child devotes things to God, thus nullifying the weightier command to honor parents (10-13). Jesus teaches that it is not what goes into man

from the outside that defiles him (foods, unwashed hands or utensils), but it is what comes out from his heart that pollutes/defiles him (evil thoughts, sexual immorality, etc.) (14-23). Chiang & Lovejoy affirm this thought and also address the corollary by saying, “Rituals, sacrifices and foods (externals) cannot purify a person from defilement (internal).” (2015, 65) In this way, Jesus redirects the focus of Old Testament Jewish traditions of purity/pollution to address the deeper focus behind the commands. In so doing he radically overturns the entire dietary purification system of the Old Testament, placing instead the emphasis upon the heart of a person, teaching that internal sin flowing from the heart, whether spoken or enacted, is what defiles (2000). In fact, Muller (2000) says that Jesus teaches that it is man himself who is unclean, not the food, animals, dirty hands, etc. The heart of man, in his basic condition, is what the issue centers upon. As Muller points out, it is man who needs a Savior, a “cleanser” from his defiled condition. These are all purity/pollution issues which are important to understand in their cultural context in order to fully grasp the message behind them.

In this account there is again a challenge to the honor of Jesus by the Pharisees, for they question what honorable teacher would be so negligent as to fail to teach his disciples about fundamental purification procedures of hand washing. Yet Jesus returns the challenge by going back to one of the commands from the Decalogue which opened up a scathing rebuke of the Pharisees from the words of Isaiah (7:6-7). Again this is an example of public interaction with honor and shame, as well as purity and pollution, at the epicenter of the dialogue.

Going just a bit deeper into the purity/pollution dialogue, Neyrey (1986) makes some important introductory statements when he says that what is “in place” is considered pure, but what is out of place is considered polluted. Those who are polluted or impure are not only impure in themselves, but they make polluted those who come in contact with them. In Mark’s

gospel, Jesus is usually cast as being out of place, associating with those who are outcasts (according to Leviticus 21:16-24 et al), touching the polluted, going against the acceptable, traditional system. He travels into places that are “polluted,” Gentile lands where he is exposed to pollution on all sides, such as regions on the other side of Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-42), the region around Tyre and Sidon and Decapolis (7:31). He blatantly disregards the purity maps of people, body, time and places (1986). In fact, Neyrey says, “The basic presentation of Jesus in Mark’s gospel is done in terms of purity.” (124)

Jesus challenges the traditional structures, and also works to reform them, to correct abuses and “pollutants” that have corrupted the system. In this way he is working to purify a system that is polluted rather than himself being polluted against the backdrop of a pure system. He crosses boundary lines that the Jewish leaders consider inviolable, and in so doing brings down the wrath of the established religious hierarchy. What is his authority to do this? He is “God’s agent of holiness,” commissioned by God to reform the people of God (1986) and re-establish those who are inside the group and those who are outside. Those who cross the traditional boundary lines and become believers are purified and are inside the new group, and those who refuse to cross and remain unbelievers are outside the new group and remain polluted.

Perhaps just one more thought is appropriate tied with the tactile nature of defilement. There seems to be a theme in Mark of Jesus reaching out and touching those who were polluted and unclean, and instead of him becoming impure and polluted, they receive his purity and are healed. In the Old Testament, the touch brought pollution, and now the touch brings purification. He regularly did actions which were considered impure, polluted and unclean in the culture of the time (Rohrbaugh, 1996, 81). It is significant that Mark describes the evil spirit in Mark 1:23 as “unclean,” and the leper in Mark 1:40-42 requests to be “cleansed” and not merely healed.

The menstruating woman and the dead daughter of Jairus would have been extremely unclean for Jesus to come in contact with. Jesus stays in the home of “Simon the leper” in Bethany, which was quite possibly in a leper colony (DeSilva, 2000). It almost seems he had complete disregard for the Old Testament purification laws, for the patterns we see are of “defilement” through tactile contact with lepers, demon-possessed, dead people, a hemorrhaging woman. And yet instead of their pollution, defilement and disease coming into and consuming him, his purity, power and health extend to them. These were clearly forbidden in Leviticus (Chiang & Lovejoy, 2015), yet Jesus reframes what is truly pure and polluted. Therefore, we can see that Mark is showing us an entirely new system of what constitutes purity and pollution through the teachings and actions of Jesus.

7:24-30 – This interesting, albeit challenging, story shows Jesus communicating with and ultimately helping one that others would utterly reject as unclean and impure. She had “three strikes” against her for Jesus talking to her, for she was a woman, she was a Gentile (26), and she had a daughter who had an unclean spirit (25). Jesus confronts her in a hierarchical manner, stating that Jews are most important, and insults her by calling her a dog, thus shaming her (27). She responds with amazing faith and humility, and based in her response, he does as she asks and heals her daughter. While Jesus is not proposing egalitarianism, and in fact teaches hierarchy, he does something that is quite unprecedented in talking to and complying with this woman’s request. He pronounces honor on her, affirming her for her faith, and grants her request as a patron would the request of a client (29).

7:31-37 – The significance of Jesus healing this deaf man seems to be not in the uncleanness of the man (deaf/mute), but in how Jesus heals. Much attention is given to him putting his own fingers in the man’s ears, spitting, touching the man’s tongue, speaking words,

and through this the man is healed (33-34). These graphic, tangible demonstrations of crossing purity lines communicate volumes about Jesus restructuring the purity/pollution system. Also emphasized is that Jesus charges people to be quiet, but people are “astonished beyond measure” (37) and proclaim all the more about what Jesus had done. Instead of being filled with fear at his supernatural demonstrations of Jesus’ power, they are drawn all the more to him.

8:1-9 – In this account of Jesus feeding of the 4000, which was only men so in all likelihood the whole group may have been 15,000 or more, there are many similarities to the previous account in chapter six of Jesus feeding the 5000. It is amazing that the disciples didn’t remember the previous situation, but hopefully the reader will and therefore not much fresh attention will be paid to this narrative. Jesus produces unlimited good from limited means, and shows that he is like a patron for these people, having compassion on them (2) and providing for them (6-8).

8:14-21 – Jesus now teaches his disciples, warning them of the leaven of Pharisees and Herod, a substance that is considered polluted at certain times/settings in the Old Testament. Yeast spreads through the loaf, and so the teachings or influence of Pharisees and Herod can spread to many. Then, following up on the disciples’ consuming attention on the lack of bread, Jesus rebukes and shames his disciples who are so slow to catch on, and are caught up in their thinking about their limited supply of food (16-21). They don’t get that Jesus has an unlimited supply to meet their needs.

8:22-26 – Again we see Jesus graphically and tangibly crossing purity lines as he meets this blind man, who begs that Jesus would “touch him.” This is interesting, because although healing was undoubtedly desired behind the touch, yet Mark does not emphasize this, but rather that Jesus would make physical contact with this blind man. Mark continues to emphasize this by

drawing attention to Jesus taking the man by the hand, leading him out of the village, then spitting on the man's eyes (spit and other bodily excretions have strong pollution connotations) and placing his hands on him, he does a partial healing. It seems in the question Jesus asks that he knows and intends this to be partial, for then he places his hands on him again and completes the healing. He then sends the man home instructing him not to enter the village.

In this unique narrative, this is the only time we see Jesus healing someone in two stages, partially healing at first, and then fully healing subsequent to that. Some conjecture this two-stage healing is a picture of a key theme in Mark, which documents people understanding partially at first, and later fully, who Jesus is and why he came. Others consider the two stages healing representing the two stages of Jesus' ministry where in the first eight chapters he is increasing in honor and popularity and the last eight chapters he is moving toward the cross and shame. The next account of Peter's confession (8:27-30) is an example of this, for it flows into Jesus rebuking Peter (33). Ch.1-8 is Jesus becoming more popular, and ch.9-16 is him becoming less popular, for he begins teaching of his suffering, death and resurrection.

Watson (2010b) observes that on four occasions following healings Jesus performed, he attempts to hide the fact of the healing from the public (1:40-45; 5:21-24, 35-43; 7:31-37; 8:22-26). This is extremely counter-cultural, for this was a primary way of acquiring honor in society, which everyone was clamoring after. While a patron was not to be seen seeking honor, he nonetheless sought it but while not appearing to do so. But Jesus does just the opposite, intentionally trying to hide from honor that is due to him.

Perhaps this is a good point for a brief excursus on the issue of the Markan "secrecy motif." In Mark 4:21-25, Jesus has taught that secret things will be revealed, and yet there seems to be much about the teaching and actions of Jesus that he wants to keep secret for the time

being. For example, when he was in public he taught in parables so that he might hide the clear meaning from some (4:11-13, 33-34) and privately reveal it to others. Oftentimes he commanded healed people to remain silent about the healing he had performed (5:43 et al). Why was he at times so secretive, and at other times blatantly open and public?

The secrecy motif that has often been associated with Mark's gospel is challenged by both Watson (2010a) and Winn (2014). Both conclude that Mark's original readers would not have understood the so-called "secrecy" texts in terms of secrecy. Rather, the Mediterranean culture at the time would have understood these pericope in terms of the honor/shame value system. Watson argues that in the accounts where Jesus healed someone and then ordered them not to tell others, this is because there is a patron/client relationship at work, and the healed client would be obligated to spread the honor of and news about the healer-patron to the public. Yet Jesus did not want this "achieved honor," Watson suggests, and so Jesus tells them to be silent (2010a). Likewise, when Jesus encounters demons and they "ascribe honor" to him by proclaiming titles for him (e.g. "Holy One of God" – 1:24), Jesus tells them to be silent not because he wants his true identity kept secret (the traditional view), but because he does not want the "ascribed honor" from the demons. Instead of Jesus rejecting the Mediterranean honor/shame system entirely, he is inverting the system, replacing the traditional characteristics which earn honor with ones like service, self-sacrifice and suffering. Therefore, in Jesus' honor system, it is the least, the suffering and the servants who are the ones honored instead of the great and powerful (2010a). At a point when we would expect Jesus to affirm the claim of Peter that Jesus is the Christ, and that they should spread this message, instead he tells Peter and the disciples to "tell no one about him." (8:30) Watson states that the call by Jesus for his followers to be silent (8:30) has less to do with Christology or Messiahship, and more to do with Jesus "renunciation

of traditional components of honor.” (2010a, 72) In 18 other cases which contrast this pattern, Watson notes that Jesus receives the honor of the public and works within this system to communicate what true honor looks like (2010a, 87-114). (Cf. Mark 1:21–28, 29–31, 32–34; 2:1–12, 28; 3:1–6, 7–12; 4:35–41; 5:1–20, 24b–34; 6:30–44, 45–52, 53–56; 7:24–30; 8:1–9; 9:14–28, 38–41; 10:46–52. Also cf. Mark 11:7-10 when Jesus receives honor from crowds at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.)

Winn (2014) states that these 18 cases draw into question Watson’s argument, for why would Jesus receive honor in many places and reject it in many others if his goal was to invert the existing Mediterranean honor/shame value system. Winn suggests that other elements are at work, keeping Jesus within the honor/shame system as he resists praise at certain times. He notes that this very same thing was done by Emperors Augustus and Tiberius, and in fact was a political ideal that Mediterranean people held up for their leaders to follow. On the part of these Roman leaders, this deferring of honor is not true humility, but rather it is Roman political ideology (2014). In other words, according to Mark’s account, Jesus is cast as the ideal ruler. Winn supports his arguments in three ways, including that Mark was written from Rome, Mark presents Jesus as a world ruler, and finally that Mark presents several challenges to the imperial claims of Rome. Therefore, Jesus’ resistance to honor is in line with Mark’s presentation of Jesus as the ultimate emperor, the ideal ruling political leader (2014). In this way, “through resisting public honor, the Markan Jesus out-Caesars the Caesars.” (2014, 600) Winn says that similar to the Roman emperors, Jesus as the Son of God is expected to receive honor at times and resist it at other times. While I understand and see some validity to Winn’s arguments, I am still inclined to view the Markan “secrecy motif” in view of the honor/shame system with Jesus presenting an inverted honor system through his teaching and actions.

8:31-9:1 – In this section, there appears to be a critical turning point in the book of Mark. Beginning in 8:31, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection. Jesus teaches that great shame is going to come upon him through suffering, rejection, death and then resurrection (31). Peter rebukes Jesus, shaming him (privately), but then Jesus shames Peter more publicly by confronting Satan and his evil tactics at work in Peter (33). The ultimate focus, according to May (1987), for each person living in the first century was his/her level of honor. Peter senses the shame Jesus is predicting in 8:31 will be put upon himself and the group, and strongly objects, perhaps also because his own honor/shame is at stake. Then Jesus begins to teach that those who follow him must be ready to be shamed, to lose face. They must be ready to lose everything, including their life, to follow Jesus (34-35). “Deny himself” (34) includes denying his own reputation, his own honor-standing, which is all part of face which must be relinquished. In 8:35-38, Jesus teaches that instead of the cross bringing shame to the one who bears it, those who are unwilling to bear it, and by association the Christ who hung on it, are put to shame. So salvation and not being put to shame are “functional equivalents.” (Wu, 2012) An important verse dealing with shame is 8:38. Although shame has some different nuances from being ashamed, they are related. If one is ashamed of Jesus, Jesus will be ashamed of him in the age to come, for Jesus will ultimately come with power and honor “in the glory of his Father with the holy angels,” which is very strong honor imagery. Jesus teaches that now, he has very little glory/honor, but he will return with great glory/honor. Therefore, we must be careful not to feel shame over Jesus now, but rather to feel honor over him now, and then when he comes in glory he will bestow honor upon his true followers. Mark’s Jesus is calling his followers to an entirely inverted value system, to an eternal perspective, to loyalty, trust and patronage to a soon-to-be shamed, crucified patron. This commitment to Christ must even be above one’s family and his own life

(35). Those who are unwilling to adopt the new value system as Jesus defines it are cast away from the new covenant community and experience the public shaming of the Son of Man when he returns in glory. As we can see in this section, Jesus uses very strong honor/shame language to call his followers to a higher standard, an inversion of the traditional perspective of honor and shame, and he uses honor and shame to motivate and guide his followers. This power of honor and shame, Watson (2010a) argues, must not be underestimated, for it was a most powerful and useful means of directing society.

9:2-13 – Jesus selects just his three “closest” disciples (indicating hierarchy) and goes up on a high mountain with them, and reveals just a portion of his true glory and honor in a remarkable, unprecedented display (2-3). In addition, two of the most respected and honored Old Testament figures are present with him, and somehow Peter recognizes them. Peter is overwhelmed, and terrified (6), and doesn’t know what to say, so suggests they build shelters. This suggestion shows that Peter is still trying to honor Jesus with the traditional cultural trappings of the honor system, thus he does not yet understand Jesus’ new honor value system (2010a). Then the Father pronounces a blessing and profound honor on Jesus, “This is my beloved Son,” along with a command, “Listen to Him,” which ironically Peter has been having a difficult time doing (7). So great honor, glory and power on the part of God the Son are met with fear on part of disciples. Jesus again predicts his suffering, mockery, shaming and death, and also resurrection (9-13). In the transfiguration, then, Watson (2010a) shares that Jesus is ascribed maximum honor.

At this time a brief note can be added about the value set known as Hierarchy/Egalitarianism. Mark communicates that Jesus frequently selects just his disciples to reveal his full teachings to, or at other times just Peter, James and John to join him in some

important activity. This seems to indicate a hierarchy in Jesus' mind of certain people over others, not necessarily in importance, significance or merit, but perhaps in a special purpose or plan he has. While all (including races, genders, age, status, background, etc.) stand equal in value and worth before God, yet certain ones are given more opportunities, honor and different roles in God's divine economy.

9:14-29 – This is an account of the disciples, who previously had been able to cast out demons (6:7-13) and perform other miracles, not being able to cast out a particularly difficult mute and deaf spirit (18). Perhaps there is some shame and loss of face involved in the disciples not being able to heal the boy. When they bring the boy to Jesus, the spirit seizes him and throws him into convulsions (20). In dialogue with the father, he asks if Jesus can heal the boy, and Jesus responds, “All things are possible for the one who believes,” indicating unlimited good. Jesus in fact takes issue with the boy's father when he expresses a bit of doubt that Jesus might be able to help his son, which indicates that he expected the complete trust of those who sought his patronage (DeSilva, 2000). Jesus encounters the spirit, and commands it to leave, and it does so (25-26). Jesus then takes the boy by the hand, communicating purity over pollution, helps the boy to his feet, and then privately so as to save their face he instructs his disciples that only through prayer can this kind of demon be removed (29).

9:33-37 – Jesus continues to instruct his disciples about the shameful treatment which will be coming to him, but they do not understand and are afraid to ask, perhaps because they want to save face or for fear of Jesus' disappointment or anger. Along the way to Capernaum, the disciples are discussing who of them is the greatest. This is a clear picture that the disciples completely do not grasp the new honor value system Jesus has been trying to teach to them. Jesus asks them what they are discussing, and they are ashamed, so remain silent, for to speak up

would most certainly mean loss of face and honor, and the displeasure of the patron. Jesus takes the opportunity to teach them about true greatness. The power of the moment can be felt down through the centuries as the One with ultimate “ascribed” and “achieved” honor teaches his fledgling “clients” how true honor and greatness are to be defined. “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (35). The one wanting honor must take the shameful position of a servant to all. The traditional Mediterranean system of honor is vehemently refuted and inverted in favor of an entirely new perspective on honor. Jesus uses a graphic picture to emphasize his point by drawing to himself a young child, who would have no honor in the traditional system. He says that this young one is the path to bring true honor, for the one who receives an honorless child receives honorable Christ.

9:42-50 – Following Jesus affirming the ministry of another unnamed person outside the disciples’ circle, Jesus teaches about how to respond to sins in life. There is a flavor of the innocence/guilt value set here in the dialogue about sin and punishment. He contrasts a “little one,” who is perhaps innocent and has faith in Jesus, with one who is guilty of causing an innocent to sin, and the terrible penalty due to him (42). Jesus teaches that his followers are to be drastic in their removal of anything that causes them to be guilty of sin. The hyperbole of cutting off the hand, foot or eye that causes one to sin rather than losing your soul in hell hits upon the seriousness of sin and guilt before a holy God. It is better to go through shame or loss in this life than to experience eternal shame and guilt before God.

10:1-12 – In an effort to test Jesus, with the goal of entrapping him and shaming him publicly, the Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce, knowing it is a loaded topic. Jesus first turns the Pharisees to the law (3), and then drives the point home that this law was given because of the hardness of heart of the people. In this way, he actually shames the recipients of the law, who

needed this law which was not God's original intention for marriage (6-8). Jesus goes back to Genesis and creation to elevate and honor the sanctity of marriage. What God joins together, man is not to separate (9), indicating that this is a God-ordained, honorable institution. In private, the disciples later ask Jesus to clarify his teachings and he makes the issue even more clear, teaching that the one who divorces and remarries another stands guilty before God. This again is another example of the Jewish leaders approaching Jesus with a question that is not really a question but is rather a dispute and debate with the goal of entrapment of Jesus, trying to shame him publicly (Neyrey, 1998b).

10:13-16 – The disciples are rebuking people who are bringing children to Jesus for his blessing (literally, “that he might touch them”), since children were seen as possessing no honor in this culture. Clearly they totally did not understand the teaching of Jesus in 9:37 or they would have had a very different posture. The disciples serve as sort of mid-level client “brokers” for Jesus by trying to “regulate the flow of access to Jesus” (DeSilva, 2000, 138). Jesus is indignant with the disciples, and shames them, causing them to lose face by countermanding their behavior. He says that he wants these young ones to come to him, and then he bestows great honor on them by saying that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Even beyond this, he says that those who want to enter the kingdom of God must follow the example of a humble, helpless, dependent, “honorless” child and in simple faith to believe like a child believes. Jesus blesses children, much like a benevolent patron would bless his dependent clients. Jesus must continually reinforce for his disciples that serving the Patron means setting aside pursuit of our honor and high position in favor of welcoming others, including the lowly, into a relationship with the Patron.

10:17-31 – In this familiar passage, a man comes to Jesus and honors him by kneeling before him and calling him “good teacher.” However, in an unusual response, Jesus does not accept this ascribed honor. This would be an example of a “client” seeking knowledge from his “patron,” for the man wants to know what to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus lists commandments, which the man says he’s kept. Jesus looks with love at the man, and knowing his weakness, and tells him to sell his goods and follow him (21). The man went away sorrowful and ashamed, realizing his weakness, unable to fulfill his patron’s requirements. Perhaps he had a “limited good” perspective, and did not want to give up material wealth which he believed could not be replaced by spiritual wealth. Jesus uses the occasion to teach about how difficult it is for rich to enter heaven (24-25). Those with great wealth, which may include glory and honor, in this life, will likely miss out on wealth, glory and honor in the next life. Those who sacrifice much in this life, including those who experience shame in this life from loss of family and possessions for Christ’s sake, will be honored and blessed much more in the life to come (29-30). Jesus again reiterates the kingdom inversion, that the first will be last and last will be first. In this way, “Christ does not merely transform culture; rather, he forms a culture, a community...” which is based in honor/shame where people share in God’s honor (Wu, 2012, p.214). Indeed, the one who follows Christ joins a much larger family, receiving the honor and new identity of that family, God’s family (Chiang & Lovejoy, 2015).

This may be a good point for a note on honor/shame. According to Hellerman (2000), honor was the most highly valued “commodity” in the Mediterranean world. It was more highly valued than truth or than wealth, for money was really a way to acquire the more treasured possession of honor. Watson (2010a) says that the primary reason to gain wealth in the ancient Mediterranean world was that in so doing, one would acquire honor. Honor was the goal of life,

and the reciprocity of the client who would publicly honor the patron was crucial for the system to work properly. There is no doubt that “honor was a central cultural value for the persons among whom Jesus walked and taught in first-century Palestine.” (2000, 216) Jesus does not work to destroy the Mediterranean honor system, but rather works from within it. He reframes and reorganizes what the highest sources of honor are, ranking them differently than either the Jewish or secular systems did. As Neyrey (1998a) states, “Far from dismantling the system, he redirects how honor is bestowed and withdrawn.” (221)

Another thought on honor and shame has to do with the “messianic secret,” or as Winn (2014) and Watson (2010a) describe it, “intentional resistance to honor.” (2014, 583) This is such a highly debated subject in scholarly circles related to Mark, and figures so prominently in the honor/shame discussions, that it seems appropriate to explore these issues a bit more. In contrast with the prevailing social pattern of the day, where clients are expected to offer public honor to their patron, on several occasions Jesus commands those he has healed to remain silent and not give him honor (1:40-45; 5:21-24, 35-43; 7:31-37; 8:22-26). Likewise, he oftentimes heals people in a private setting rather than in public where he would have received more honor (5:21-24, 35-43; 7:24-30; 8:22-26). The two experts agree in this, but disagree in what is behind Jesus’ resistance to honor. While Winn says that Watson argues for Mark inverting the honor/shame value set, he (Winn) argues instead the reason for this resistance is found in Roman political ideology. The Roman emperors who were the most powerful and most beloved frequently resisted honor, and this provides the context for Jesus’ resistance to honor (2014). Watson’s argument also carries weight as he uses passages such as 8:27-9:1, 9:33-37 and 10:35-45 to make the point that Jesus is working to revise or invert the traditional honor system, “Among the followers of Jesus, what most people would consider honorable is not so, and what

most people would consider shameful is in fact honorable.” (2010a, 62) In fact, from 8:27 on, Jesus offers a completely new understanding of what constitutes honor and shame, reversing the widely held Mediterranean value system of the time. Ultimately the death of Jesus is the supreme example of his teaching being carried to the point of death, for in the most shameful of events, Jesus finds profound honor, glory and joy (Hebrews 12:2). God affirms this by raising Christ victoriously from the dead as Jesus had predicted, and crowning him with utmost glory and honor (Philippians 2:9-11).

At the same time, it must be clearly seen from the study to this point and beyond that Jesus oftentimes, in fact on dozens of occasions in Mark’s gospel, received the praise and honor, both ascribed and achieved, for who he is and what he has done. This may be called the “publicity motif” as compared to the “secrecy motif,” however these two themes are not in competition with each other (2010a), but they blend together along with a variety of other themes to reveal a beautiful and diverse tapestry of messages and values which are woven together by Mark to communicate the life and teachings of Jesus. Watson (2010a) states strongly that Mark simply does not consistently portray Jesus as hiding his honor or concealing his identity from the public. There are many times that he does, and many other times he does not, and the occasions on both sides are too pervasive to account as exceptions. While there are many who offer possible reasons for this, none are conclusive or convincing as to why we see both demonstrations of Jesus engaged in honoring public activity and attempts at hiding honor. As Watson says, every passage has its own purpose in Mark’s account. Perhaps this is the best way to leave the debate. There is a mystery in Mark which scholarship has not fully resolved, and perhaps this is by the intent of the divine Author.

10:32-45 – Following Jesus once again predicting his suffering, shaming, death and resurrection, the disciples reveal that they are on a different planet from Jesus. Far from grasping Jesus' teaching and example of a new system of honor that inverts the popular Mediterranean system, Jesus' disciples in this passage focus on traditional competition and one-upmanship to grasp any honor they can get, which was the prevailing sentiment of the time. James and John approach Jesus asking to receive positions of greatest honor, on right and left of him in heaven (in Jesus' glory) (37). They are merely cooperating together in the quest for honor, which would be quite natural for kin to do (DeSilva, 2000, 220). Jesus teaches them that first comes the shame (38), which they say they are prepared for but of which they do not in reality have the least comprehension. This time the patron does not grant the request of his clients. The patron is not obligated to give client what he asks for, but the client is free to ask nonetheless. I have experienced this repeatedly in my work in Africa, where African pastors present requests to me claiming, "It never hurts to ask." In addition, James and John have a view of limited good or glory in the eternal kingdom, for they consider that there are only two of these highest positions available.

The ten are indignant (41) when they find out, revealing their own desire for those honored positions, recognizing that they would lose out on the "limited good" if the positions were given to James and John. In this way, they are all thinking very competitively, individualistically rather than collectively. Watson (2010a) shares that this comes from a cultural view of limited good in the sense that honor is limited, and so if James and John receive it, then there is less honor for the rest of the disciples. They approach issue in a hierarchical more than egalitarian sense where everyone is equal, and clearly there is a distinction between the brothers and the others, at least in James' and John's minds. Clearly they are still buying into the

prevailing honor system of the day rather than embracing Jesus' teaching on system inversion. Jesus uses it as opportunity to teach again about greatness using specific honor/shame vocabulary. The worldly perspective, which he refers to as Gentile leaders but it could just as easily be Jewish leader, is that the one with greatest honor rules over all those below him (42). Rather, Jesus teaches that the one who wants honor should take the low position, the shameful role, the servant, even the slave of all (43-44). In the kingdom of God, kinship values require that people don't work in competition but in cooperation, which is true honor in the family of God (DeSilva, 2000). Even the one with greatest honor, the Son of Man, came as the ultimate servant, giving his life as ransom for many (45). The patron of the world who should have received highest honor instead relinquished it all and took incarnate shame upon himself in order to save the people he loved (Philippians 2:5-8).

10:46-52 – A blind beggar named Bartimaeus, a person of low status with no honor, calls out repeatedly to Jesus for mercy, making somewhat of an annoyance and even a fool of himself. However, he has little to lose, and everything to gain if the healer will choose to bless him. He approaches Jesus, calling him a title with much honor, "Son of David," as his patron begging for mercy and healing (47-48). In clear contrast to the bickering disciples who wanted positions of honor (10:36), when Bartimaeus is asked what he wants Jesus to do for him, he responds to his patron with a plea for his sight. "Rabbi," again a title of honor, "let me recover my sight." (51) Jesus demonstrates power in healing Bartimaeus, and also honors him by affirming his faith (52), and Bartimaeus responds reciprocally as a good client by following Jesus.

11:1-10 – As Jesus draws nearer to the cross, Mark shares one of the most honoring episodes in Jesus' life, which interestingly enough he embraces. Jesus, the patron, sends a couple disciples to get a donkey colt, and those who were near the colt recognize that this is for their

“patron” and Lord, and so they willingly send the colt for Jesus’ purposes. Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey colt which had never been ridden, in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, with people draping cloaks on the colt and on the ground and spreading out leafy branches, all of which are demonstrations of extreme honor, as for an arriving king. The crowd in Jerusalem calls out “Hosanna!” and other accolades that give much glory to Jesus. This is honor beyond simply their patron. He is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! It is interesting that Mark gives no further details about Jesus’ activity or teaching, but simply that he went along with the fanfare.

11:15-19 – Mark again makes a sandwich by placing the narrative of Jesus cleansing the temple in between the accounts of the fig tree which he withers. It is a graphic picture of something that looks good on the outside, but upon closer examination is empty and “fruitless” inside, which is a powerful description of the temple, and particularly of the Jewish leaders who were overseeing temple activities. “The temple was full of activity but was bearing no fruit.” (Richards & O’Brien, 2012, p.149) When Jesus enters Jerusalem, he goes to the temple and witnesses a shameful situation. Moneychangers are getting rich off people, particularly foreigners, who are trying to worship. Merchants are extorting people. And in great wrath he shames the religious leaders who were behind all this by driving out those who were both buying and selling, pronouncing judgment upon their activities and calling them “robbers.” (17) Jesus crosses a purity boundary line by going against the religious traditions in Judaism and acting in a way that indicates disrespect for their system (Neyrey, 1986). It is likely that Jesus lost some “face” through this episode, but he doesn’t care, for an inexcusable and deplorable activity must be stopped, and in other ways through this episode he exerts his authority. Jesus shares the Father’s heart in a passionate, consuming desire for worship by the nations, and anything that stands in the way of this must be removed. The Jewish religious leaders were seeking to destroy

him (18), for they recognized he had much power with the people, and they feared him, which reminds us again of the power/fear value set. We must understand that the public affirmation of honor was absolutely central in Palestinian life, and so when people in positions of authority, such as the religious leaders, felt their honor threatened, especially in the eyes of the public, there could be no higher stakes, no more important cause for which one must fight (Hellerman, 2000).

11:25-33 – Following the temple cleansing and the fig tree, Jesus is teaching his disciples about the vital importance of forgiving others. In legal language representing the innocence/guilt value set, Jesus teaches that his followers must forgive others so that God the Father will forgive their own sins. The picture is of a judge acquitting or condemning people based upon how they treat others.

Following this, Mark shares an important episode that deserves some investigation in 11:27-33. As was frequently the case, the religious leaders pick a fight with Jesus, trying to trap him and shame him publicly through clever questions. But Jesus sees their intentions and instead traps them in a question which they cannot answer. The formula which oftentimes occurs in the debates between Jesus and Jewish leaders follows four elements: Claim to Honor (explicit or implicit) followed by a challenge and then a riposte, and then the ensuing public verdict (Hellerman, 2000 in reference to Malina and Neyrey, “Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts,” 30). In this case, the authority and honor of Jesus are asserted in the cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-19). This assertion of authority is then followed by the challenge to Jesus’ honor by the priests and scribes in 11:27-28 followed by Jesus brilliant riposte in 11:29 which turned the shame back upon the leaders’ own heads. Finally, the public verdict is implied in the inability of Jesus’ opponents to give an answer (11:31-33) and their fear of the crowd (11:32). Therefore, the

entire debate is summarized in the battle between “saving and losing face in the public contest of honor.” (Hellerman, 2000, 228).

It must be understood that public questioning in ancient Mediterranean culture was always a contest for “limited good,” whether honor or respect or influence or popularity or power or resources (Richards & O’Brien, 2012). Honor was a primary “limited” commodity for which people would struggle, and every exchange was an opportunity for someone to gain or lose honor or some other limited good (May, 1987). People would not want to honor someone else, for in so doing it would deprive them of some of their own honor (Neyrey, 1998b). If someone truly desired information, as we see the disciples asking Jesus in 9:28, they went to Jesus privately. We frequently read how Jesus was questioned publicly by various people, particularly religious leaders. Neyrey comes up with the following list of “responsive chreiai” or challenges to the honor of Jesus including riposte (2:1-12,15-17,18-22,23-28; 3:1-6,22-30,31-35; 4:35-41; 6:1-6; 7:1-13; 8:11-13; 9:9-13; 10:2-9,13-16,17-22,35-41; 11:27-33; 12:13-17,18-27,28-34,35-37). These include various forms of responsive chreiai, such as challenging questions, responses of question to a question, and the honor-game of challenge and riposte (1998b).

In most cases, those who were publicly questioning Jesus were not seeking truth as much as striving for “limited honor” and trying to shame their competition, Jesus. “If you silence your opponent, you gained honor and they lost some.” (Richards & O’Brien, 2012, p.129) This “honor-game” is serious business, and ultimately led to the Jewish leaders killing Jesus, for in every contest, they lost honor while he gained honor. (Cf.12:13-17) The interactions in Mark 11-12 are in the temple, the most important place for religious honor in all of Israel, and so the stakes could not have been higher and much face would be gained or lost. The final statement in 12:34 is very significant, “After that no one dared to ask him any more questions.” At this point

in Mark's account, the leaders give up trying to shame Jesus and instead start scheming to kill him. Their honor is at stake, and so they must publicly disgrace him in order to get their honor back, and execution as a criminal will work perfectly (Richards & O'Brien, 2012).

12:1-12 – Jesus speaks a parable that is powerful, memorable and poignant, laden with meaning and a particularly devastating blow against the Jewish leaders. A patron, a landowner, leases his property to tenants (clients) to work it for him. They act shamefully multiple times in how they treat servants that are sent to collect for the patron, each treatment of the servants escalating in brutality and shame, even killing some of them (3-5). There is much honor/shame at stake in this parable. Bailey (2008) says, “the abusing of his servants is an insult to his (the patron's) person, and he is expected, indeed honor bound, to deal with the matter.” (416) After shameful, violent treatment of the servants three times, the reader is shocked to find the owner sending his own son, alone and unarmed, to resolve the situation. By the owner placing himself, or his son, in a position of complete vulnerability, he hopes it will awaken in the hearts of the violent tenants a forgotten sense of honor, “they will respect my son.” (Mark 12:6) (literally, “they will feel shame in his presence.”) (2008, 419) But instead the shameful tenants treat him shamefully as well, indeed even killing the son (6-8). Jesus then says that the owner will come and bring about “balanced reciprocity” for their evil actions, and kill those wicked tenants. The “inheritance” (12:7) which the violent tenants sought is ultimately given to others who desire to honor the owner/patron.

The meaning behind this parable is clear, as Jesus teaches in v.10-11. The one who is rejected becomes the key central figure, and this is all according to the Lord's plan, which is worthy of praise. Bailey (2008) says that in the cultural context, clearly the vineyard owner is the hero of the story, one who is in a position of power and able to exact vengeance but chooses not

to, repeatedly “putting his anger far away,” literally (2008, 410). Bailey shares that this entire parable is told in response to the cleansing of the temple followed by the questioning of Jesus’ authority by religious leaders. While he does not answer their question directly, he shares his source of authority through telling the story. The Jewish leaders again seek to arrest Jesus because they feel fear at the power Jesus has over the people, and feel shame over the fact that he is speaking against them. They obviously caught the point of the parable and responded just like the evil vineyard tenants in the story (12:12).

12:13-17 – Again the Pharisees and Herodians are trying to trap Jesus where he will shame himself and pronounce guilt upon himself through stepping into their trap of a clever question. Either answer Jesus might give for whether or not to pay taxes to Caesar would trap him. But again he evades their trap, seeing their hypocritical intentions and calling them on it (15). In his answer he gives some honor to the governing authority and gives ultimate honor to God (17).

12:18-27 – Now it is the Sadducees turn to try to trap Jesus as they ask about the resurrection. Sadducees who do not believe in resurrection ask Jesus about a particular scenario involving the resurrection, and in his answer he shames them for their ignorance about the Scriptures and the power of God (24), speaking about kinship issues in the resurrection and referring to the writings of Moses to substantiate the resurrection. At the end of teaching about the resurrection, he tells them blatantly that they “are quite wrong,” (27) again a shameful rebuke. Clearly, from this series of accounts one can see that Jesus is not one to be trifled with, and every attempt to shame him or dishonor him turns back upon the Jewish leaders. Although the desire to trap and shame Jesus is not as explicit as in previous encounters, it seems that Mark

portrays Jesus as offering an honorable response to a question meant to trip him up (Rohrbaugh, 1996, 62).

12:28-34 – In an unusual conversation with a Jewish leader (a scribe), there is a positive flavor to the interaction as the scribe asks a sincere, legitimate question, with no apparent intention of shaming him, although it appears he already knows the answer to his question. Jesus responds wisely and sincerely (29-31), and then the scribe honors Jesus by supporting and agreeing with his response (32-33), and Jesus honors the scribe by commending the scribe's response (34). However, after this exchange Mark shares the important commentary, "After that no one dared to ask him any more questions." People saw that losing face was nearly inevitable if one went toe to toe with Jesus, and no one wanted any more face loss.

12:35-37 – Jesus teaches that one of the most honorable leaders in Judaism, King David, gives greater honor to the "son of David" whom he calls his "Lord." In this way, Jesus teaches that the one coming after David would have higher honor than David himself, and in fact would himself be divine in fulfillment of the Psalm 2 prophecy, but would also be human, "the son of David."

12:38-40 – Just in case any missed the scathing rebukes of the Jewish leaders by Jesus, he now shames the scribes for their condemnable hypocrisy. They have much religious pretense and like to be elevated before the people, yet their actions are evil in devouring widows' houses and their condemnation is assured.

12:41-44 – As Jesus watches people give offerings (which is interesting, apparently indicating offerings are not always a private matter), he sees many rich people contribute large amounts, which is very honorable in the Jewish religious system. But then he observes one poor widow who gives a shamefully small amount, so small many would have been embarrassed to

give it. Yet Jesus honors her greatly by saying that proportionate giving from the heart is what matters to God, not the amount, and she has proportionately she has given by far the most. She has extremely “limited good,” in the sociocultural language we are using, yet has chosen to honor God with her limited good, and he is pleased. Perhaps there is also an element of reciprocity in the concept of offerings, where she gives back to her “Patron” a small portion of that with which he has blessed her.

13:1-2 – The temple was one of the greatest sources of honor for the Jewish people. Jesus now says it will be utterly destroyed. In this way, he “shames” the honoring of the building by one of his disciples, and again reminds that true honor is not found in the traditional “structures,” but in his inverted kingdom values.

13:3-37 – In an extended teaching on the end times, Jesus communicates to his followers about signs of the end, and the need to be prepared. There will be great persecution, and powerful signs in the world and heavens before the end. Fear, for good reason, will be prevalent in the face of persecution and God’s powerful wrath being unleashed. There will be much shame upon the followers of Christ (9-13) with persecution, trials, opposition and hatred even within families. The closest of social structures, the family, will be torn apart in the last days. But at the end, the Son of Man will appear with great honor, glory and power, (26) and the elect, those chosen by the “Patron” to be his eternal “clients,” will be gathered together to the Lord (27). In answer to his closest disciples’ question about when this will happen (4), as the patron he is not obligated to answer, and he in fact says that he does not know the time, but only the Father knows (32-37). In this way, it seems like Jesus is more of a “broker” for the Patron, and although he knows certain things, he is not privileged with all information.

14:1-9 – Just two days before the Passover, the chief priests and scribes are trying to figure out a way to put Jesus to death. He has so completely shamed them, and is such a threat to their authority, that they must remove him. However, they must save face and so they fear the people who love Jesus. The “limited good” of power, influence, honor and authority is once again in view. While in Bethany, Jesus is staying at the home of Simon the leper. This would be a very unclean place due to Simon’s leprosy, and although it is likely that he had been healed by Jesus, yet the home was still unclean and may even have been associated with a leper colony. At this point a woman anoints Jesus with a bottle of perfume worth a tremendous amount of money (3). This is an extraordinary demonstration of honor for Jesus, her Patron, with something that was a very limited good. We can think of the theme of generalized reciprocity as she offers Jesus a valuable thing in exchange for the more valuable thing he will offer her of forgiveness of sins through his death. Others are angry at her extravagance, yet Jesus accepts her worship and honor as an anointing before his death and burial (6-8). He honors her in return by saying she will be remembered globally for this extravagant gift (9).

14:10-11, 18-21 – Judas schemes to do a most shameful act by betraying his Lord, Teacher and Patron. He works with the Jewish leaders (10-11) to form a plot to betray Jesus. During the Passover feast with the disciples, Jesus warns the disciples with Judas present that one in their company of disciples would betray him (18-21). In this way, perhaps Jesus is trying to bring Judas to a point of conviction and guilt over his evil plot without causing him to completely lose face. Perhaps there are three parties involved in balanced or negative reciprocity in the sense of Judas doing something very bad for the Jewish leaders, is being paid for it, and as a result Jesus pronounces a grievous woe upon him, that it would be better if he had never been born (21).

14:12-17, 22-25 – The disciples look to their patron to guide them about where they will eat the Passover meal. As Jesus directs, an upper room is offered to Jesus and his followers by an unknown master of the house, perhaps in a patron/client relationship. All the disciples have to say is that the Teacher (i.e. Patron) requests his guest room (14). In 14:22-25, the Patron teaches that he is giving his body and blood for the clients' blessing. Obviously this is an extreme sacrifice to which he is referring, far above what a patron would typically give for his clients. In the bread and the "cup," Jesus gives a tangible reminder of the sacrifice he is about to undergo for them. There may also be an element of generalized reciprocity as Jesus' body and blood are given for the good of many with nothing gained in return.

14:26-31 – From this point on, things go quickly downhill, starting with Jesus predicting that all his disciples will fall away (27), where he uses the imagery of a shepherd being struck so his sheep scatter, although we can also imagine they would have had in mind the patron being struck and the clients scatter. Peter vehemently denies that it will happen, perhaps to save face, and in trying to put himself before the others says that even if they all fall away, he most certainly will not (29, 31). Yet Jesus says that very night Peter would three times shamefully deny ever knowing Jesus (30). Perhaps there is also some of the power/fear construct at work, for in this prophecy Jesus says that fear will consume the disciples, including Peter, in the face of the power of Jesus' captors.

14:32-42 – After arriving in Gethsemane, Jesus tells his disciples to sit and wait for him while he prays, then taking his three closest he goes in a bit further being greatly troubled and instructs them to keep watch, but three times they fall asleep while he is praying. There was likely some shame or guilt when he roused them the first time and confronted Peter (37-38), who just moments before had been ready to die for Jesus, but there is not enough shame to keep

them awake. In Jesus' prayer he is fully submitted to the Father, willing to do His bidding, although Jesus' preference would be to avoid the cross (36). The people of that time may have understood that Jesus as the client is willing to do whatever the Patron asks of him, although the language seems to suggest a son obeying the will of his Father. It is easy for us in the West to think Jesus told his disciples to wait while he went off to pray so he could be by himself. But Richards & O'Brien (2012) make the case that the Garden was probably packed with people, especially at that time of the year since it was Passover. If privacy was what Jesus wanted, as our individualistic culture would lead us to believe, the Garden of Gethsemane was a lousy choice. Instead, the disciples, particularly Peter, James and John, were with him, collectively, separated by just a small distance, and Jesus was certainly not there praying in private.

14:43-52 - In one of the most heinous, shameful, treacherous acts of all history, Judas, a trusted disciple of Jesus, pronounces an honored title, "Rabbi," upon Jesus, and then betrays with a kiss (45) his "patron," the Lord of heaven and earth, the one who is fully good in all he is and does, who is worthy of singular, greatest honor. Jesus is handed over to an armed crowd intent on killing him. This shameful act will live forever in infamy. One near Jesus, probably Peter, strikes with his sword, and then all of his closest companions flee from Jesus (47-52). This is an act of fear in the face of power, and fulfills Jesus' words from 14:27.

14:53-65 – Mark now turns our attention to the trial of Jesus before the Jewish council with an interplay between shame and guilt throughout the narrative. Chief priests and the whole council are trying to find testimony with the goal of putting Jesus to death. Their mind concerning his guilt is already made up. Justice is absent. All the proceedings reflect shamefully on the Jewish leadership. The trial is conducted at night which was against the law, indicating more shame and guilt. They already know what they want to have happen, and now they just

have to find a way to do it. Even before the trial Jesus stands guilty and condemned in their eyes (55). They even bring false witnesses to try to corroborate a testimony against him, which is a shameful, unlawful act, but they cannot agree together, for he is innocent (56-59).

In response to the high priest's question about who he is, Jesus responds that he is the Christ, and they "will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (62). This is clearly a position of greatest honor of which Jesus alone is worthy. The social construct of hierarchy is in view with Jesus stating he has the highest, most honorable position, far above the shameful high priest and religious leaders who are trying to hold onto their positions of power and authority. They probably also feared losing power and authority since Jesus was so popular with the people, which is part of the power/fear construct. Next we see the high priest's accusation and pronouncement of guilt and condemnation, and the assent of those gathered, followed by the actions of the Jewish guards and others who spit, struck and beat Jesus. All of these are shameful acts, aimed to shame Jesus but in truth they shamed the Jews (63-65).

14:66-72 – Peter is confronted twice by a servant girl and once by bystanders that he must know Jesus (67-70). In fear of the power of the officials, or of being discovered and incarcerated, he strongly, even with curses, denies knowing Jesus (68-71). In all likelihood a big factor in why he denies Jesus repeatedly is that he wants to save face before the people. Yes, he is filled with fear, and is thinking more of himself than Jesus as he doesn't want to experience the shame of being associated with this condemned man. Following the denial, the rooster crows a second time, and Peter remembers Jesus' words. He experiences profound shame and guilt, much greater than he would have if he had been true to Jesus. He breaks down and begins

weeping (72). This is a strong example of the power of shame as one will go to great lengths to save face.

15:1-5 – There seems to be much focus on levels of authority within the Jewish network as well as within the Roman network, which indicates Mark is writing to people well accustomed to a hierarchy value set. Jesus is shuffled from one group to the next, and we know from a synopsis of the other gospels that Jesus goes through as many as 6-7 “trials” before Jewish and Roman authorities. When questioned, Jesus makes very few replies.

15:6-15 – Pilate is governor of the province, acting as a patron of sorts for the Jewish “clients,” but it is a fine line he walks, for although he is in authority over the Jews, if they get sufficiently agitated then they are likely to revolt and he will lose control. He constantly must work to save face with the Jewish people to keep them under control, thus power and fear elements are certainly at work. As a face-saving tactic with the crowd, Pilate offers to release one prisoner, and only one, indicating “limited good,” and the crowd is able to choose: a known murderer and violent criminal, Barabbas (7), or Jesus, “the King of the Jews.” He has not found Jesus to be guilty, and he hopes that they will make the obvious choice and request the release of Jesus, the one who is far from a menace to society (10), but his plan backfires, and the crowd, stirred up by Jewish leaders, chooses the release of Barabbas. Pilate is confused by their choice, for he senses Jesus is without guilt and is innocent (14). But they shout all the more for Jesus to be crucified (13-14). Pilate now demonstrates where his values lie, “wishing to satisfy the crowd” (15), out of fear of the crowd and to save face with the Jews, Pilate releases Barabbas, but scourges Jesus and delivers him to be crucified.

15:16-20 – The entire battalion of Roman soldiers gathers around Jesus and shamefully mocks him by putting a purple cloak on him, symbolizing mock royalty. They twist a crown of

thorns and press in on his head and then salute him and kneel before him, calling out, “Hail, King of the Jews!” While their words are accurate, the sentiment behind them is meant to profoundly shame Jesus. They are also spitting on him, which is significant because bodily fluid is considered polluted and shameful, as they are also striking him on the head with a reed so the thorns dug into his skull. When they had finished they put on his own clothes and led him out to crucify him.

“The way a body is treated is often a representation of honor or dishonor,” (DeSilva, 2000, 31) and so in the way that we see Jesus slapped, beaten, mocked, bound, mutilated and eventually killed, all this communicates the assault on his honor. “Crucifixion in the Greco-Roman world was the utmost shameful experience.” (Pilch, 1995, p.65) The trial and torture beforehand were equally shameful, stripping the criminal naked, scourging on front and back to the point that shock and pain caused the sphincters to relax leading to loss of bowel control during torture and on the cross (1995). In a short space of time, Jesus experiences what Watson (2010a) describes as the clearest of cases of absolute public humiliation, being arrested, abandoned, put on trial, spit upon, beaten, denied, condemned by the crowds, flogged, tortured and mocked by Roman soldiers, crucified next to criminals and then further mocked while upon the cross. It is shameful for any man to go through that, but for the Son of God, Creator of everything, infinitely honorable in who he is and what he does, it is unimaginable and nauseating. However, we must remember that Jesus was not a helpless victim in all he endured. Rather, as Neyrey points out, “He was no victim, but a hero who knowingly, voluntarily, and courageously embraced his trials and death. He was never shamed by ordinarily shameful events, but endured them courageously and fittingly.” (Neyrey, 1998a, p.162)

15:21-32 – In the crucifixion account in Mark, we see elements of honor/shame, innocence/guilt, purity/pollution, patron/client, and limited good all represented. The soldiers bring Jesus to Golgotha and crucify him. Oftentimes, Romans crucified criminals naked, stripped of clothing, exposed before bystanders as a further source of shame and ridicule, and this appears to be the case for Jesus (Muller, 2000). Crucifixion was considered the worst, most shameful of the three methods of execution, the other two being burning and decapitation (Watson, 2010b). Only the lowest ranking and most shameful of people were allowed to be crucified. “Crucifixion represented the loss of prowess and power in the extreme,” which were central values for any male in Mediterranean culture, and thus shame was heaped upon the one crucified (2010b, 711). The soldiers offer Jesus wine with myrrh to dull his senses, but he refuses, for he is pure and does not want to be polluted and numbed to the full weight of the sins of world (23). They cast lots for his garments, for there is not enough clothing for everyone, another example of “limited good” (24). The shaming continues as two ordinary criminals are crucified next to him (27), and bystanders, religious leaders and even the criminals mock him (29-32). In the crucifixion is the ultimate act of patronage for humanity. Through his voluntary death, paying for the sins of the world, “he grants deliverance from sin, death and the power of Satan.” (DeSilva, 2000, 136) The gospel writers communicate the truth and meaning of the event, for they point to the fact that behind the shameful crucifixion is the ultimate honorable act of self-sacrifice for the good of others. This is seen through Jesus repeatedly predicting his own suffering and death, he voluntarily moves toward it, and silently endures it, in fact in joy “despising the shame” of the cross (Hebrews 12:2). No one made him go to the cross, but in complete honor he embraces his calling for the ransoming of many (Mark 10:45). Pilch (1995) states that the Mediterranean cultural values of endurance, obedience and suffering in silence without complaining are

perfectly demonstrated in Christ as a man of honor, and are emphasized in the gospels. On the cross, Jesus experiences shame and guilt so that we may be freed from our shame and guilt due to sin. “In the atonement, God glorifies himself by taking away human shame.” (Wu, 2012, p.210)

15:33-39 – Darkness covers the whole land from sixth to ninth hour (33). Darkness symbolizes shame, guilt and pollution, all of which is profoundly present in these dark hours. God turns away from the Son, who at this point is incarnate sin. This must be the darkest moment of the entire ordeal, for Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (34) These are the only words recorded by Mark that Jesus utters. More guilt and shame than any human would ever be able to bear is heaped upon Jesus. The exquisite honor, purity and innocence of Christ, as well as his divine power, are hidden. Jesus utters loud cry and the Son of God dies (37). At that moment the curtain in the temple, separating man from the holy presence of God, is torn in two, and there are other miraculous signs of great power, according to other gospels. All this leads the centurion present, who witnesses the way Jesus dies, to cry out, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (39) Perhaps there was some fear of the powerful signs and heaviness of the moment which he experienced, but most certainly this is a proclamation of honor for Jesus Christ, the second time in the book after Peter’s declaration in chapter 8 when Mark draws attention to these words being stated publicly.

Pilch (1995) states that Jesus died an honorable death according to Mediterranean culture in that he was silent up until the very end, making a significant impression upon the presiding centurion. Pilch postulates that perhaps this is proof Jesus was reared well, having been trained through suffering as a youth, or it is the result of Mediterranean ideology which was reinforced as the expectation for how an adult should act (1995). Either way the fact stands that according

to Mark, Jesus died not with the shame one would expect of a criminal on the cross, but with honor as “the Son of God.”

15:42-47 – Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable and respected member of the council, takes on the role of patron for Jesus, asking Pilate for Jesus’ body in order to bury him (43). Since the Sabbath is quickly approaching and there are restrictions on what can be done, they need to quickly complete the task. When death is confirmed, Joseph takes the body down from the cross, which would have defiled Joseph in touching a dead body, and he wraps the body in a pure linen shroud. A normal dead body was polluted and unclean, yet this high ranking member of Jewish council chooses to deal with the body, perhaps driven by shame at the dishonorable proceedings of the council of which he was a respected member (46). There was no shame in this act, but rather honor, no pollution but rather purity, for just as Jesus had purified and cleansed people by his touch during his life, so he defiled no one in his death who came in contact with his body. Any citizen of this time would know that there are certain places where people of honor are buried, and other places where shameful people are buried. Although Jesus is crucified like a shameful person, he is buried with honor in a tomb cut out of the rock.

16:1-8 – Once Sabbath is past, the women come to Jesus’ tomb to anoint his body with spices, as a sign of honor and purity. When they arrive at the tomb and enter it, they see an alarming sight. A young man dressed in a white robe, which is a symbol of purity, is present, sitting to the right side (5). Perhaps they perceive that this is an angel, for he has knowledge about their purpose and a most important announcement. “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.” (6) He instructs them to share the great news with “the disciples and Peter.” In this passage we encounter the most tremendous act of power, the resurrection of Jesus, which should not surprise us since he has foretold about it several times.

This astonishing news, along with the angel's powerful presence, caused the women to flee in fear and trembling (8), keeping quiet about the matter, perhaps to save face, but more likely just because they were so overwhelmed.

16:9-20 – Although this section does not appear in the earliest manuscripts, a few brief comments are still in order. Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene, who we are now informed was at one time extremely unclean, being possessed by seven demons. Jesus healed her, and now she receives the honor of being the very first person to see the risen Lord (9). After appearing to two others (12), Jesus appears to the eleven disciples, rebuking them for their lack of faith because they did not believe Mary and the two disciples when they told the eleven they had seen the risen Lord (14). There is no doubt shame involved, for they did not expect his resurrection and hearing his disapproval must have been difficult. Then he commissions them, which is a pronouncement of honor, committing to them the gospel message to be taken to all creation (15). This is also possibly a statement of collectivism and egalitarianism in the sense that now all nations, not just Israel or a few disciples, are to have the gospel preached to them. This gospel is not a “limited good,” but is wealth for all creation. In a statement touching upon the legal language of innocence/guilt, Jesus says that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (from sin and hell), but whoever does not believe will be condemned (16). Signs of power will be present (17-18) in those who believe in order to validate their message. In an amazing demonstration of power and honor, Jesus is “taken up into heaven and sat down at right hand of God.” (19) And the disciples obeyed Jesus' commission, preaching and doing miracles, and he worked with them by performing many signs of power (20). He remains their Patron, and his “clients” continue to proclaim his message to this day.

Conclusion

It has been the thesis of this paper that the meaning of Mark, and therefore the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the central figure in the gospel of Mark, can best be understood by utilizing the sociocultural lenses of value sets which were prevalent and embedded in the understanding of the original readers. The value sets which we have explored through this paper include honor/shame, patron/client, innocence/guilt, power/fear, purity/pollution, limited good/wealth creation, individualism/collectivism, hierarchy/egalitarianism and finally reciprocity. In nearly every passage of the book of Mark, we have witnessed at least one and most oftentimes multiple value sets at work, which help to give a clearer picture of how the original readers would have understood Mark's gospel. During the course of carefully studying every verse of Mark, it has become clear that these themes can never be completely separated. In any given passage, several themes are usually integrated together, blending with various shades and nuances to communicate a complete, multi-faceted picture. This is a testimony to the divine authorship of the Bible, for no human author would be able to so fully comprehend and utilize every value set so as to exquisitely craft such an intricate masterpiece of written literature which will be exegeted and internalized by people from every tongue, tribe, nation, language, age, historical setting, culture and sociological background. Truly the Word of God is a treasure which can receive a lifetime of study and yet not be fully fathomed.

On a personal note, this journey of pouring over and probing into every verse in Mark and investigating many scholarly works written about these themes has been a thrilling revelation of insights and truths which previously I have never seen. It is critically important that any Bible student carefully consider how the original readers would have understood the text. In fact I teach this to pastors in Africa whom I train in expository Bible study and preaching

principles. Yet it has only been recently that I've been exposed to studying these sociocultural value sets which were so prominent in the biblical world. A new world is opening up as I discover how people in Mark's day would have viewed a "polluted" leper, or a "power" encounter with an unclean spirit, or crowds of people seeking healing from their "patron," or the "honor-game" being played out as Jewish leaders try to shame Jesus publicly. These factors were not tangential in their world, but rather from our study it is clear that nearly every action, every interaction, even the motives of people go back to these value sets. It will be extremely important in my own study, as well as training of others, to be more observant and diligent in studying and teaching any given passage through the appropriate sociocultural lenses and not just my natural Western orientation.

Another fundamental discovery is that these value sets were not only a part of the ancient Mediterranean world of biblical times, but they are also profoundly significant in our world today. Various sociocultural constructs are more central in different cultures, for example honor/shame is embedded in the core of life in Eastern Asia far more than in America, where innocence/guilt is the prevailing construct. In Africa, where I work, power/fear is a primary value set, and informs much of life and worldview for the Africans with whom I work. In view of this, it is important to teach biblical accounts that tie in particularly closely with the predominant value sets held by that culture. So for example it will be wise for me to teach narratives that communicate a message about power/fear to my brothers in Africa who live in a power/fear culture. Using language and concepts that communicate in the locally held values will result in much more effective communication.

This is particularly relevant when trying to communicate the Gospel message. Depending on what culture one is working with, from the study in this paper it would be easy to share

certain portions of Mark that would communicate Jesus' message in a way that is clearly understood by that culture. In America, we would focus on Mark's innocence/guilt passages to communicate the message of Jesus, but in Africa I could focus on Jesus' encounters with demons or with the powerful Jewish religious structures in order to communicate his message. This insight will be extremely helpful in my work of training pastors. It will also help me to be more sensitive to and intuitive about which value sets are most influential in global locations where I train. Before making assumptions or bringing my preferred value sets to bear upon those I train, it will be important to ask questions, watch, listen and learn about the people I'm trying to reach. I pray this will translate into greater wisdom and effectiveness in serving the Lord, bringing greater honor to him globally.

Mark begins his book with the words, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." In a similar way, I feel like I should entitle this paper, "The beginning of a deeper understanding of the gospel of Mark utilizing sociocultural value sets." I am filled with joy and excitement at where this will lead, and sense that God is well-pleased with the launching of the journey. It is most certainly true, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.... More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." (Psalm 19:7-10) To utilize several of our sociocultural themes in one concluding verse, I will end with this doxology from Revelation 7:12, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

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