

Article

Markan Spirituality of the Way

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Abstract: This paper investigates Markan spirituality through an examination of his use of “the Way” motif, with a focus on the story of blind Bartimaeus in 10:46–52. Mark arranges his narrative around the theme of the way, and in so doing, points to the spirituality of following Jesus on the way. Mark’s underlying spirituality is particularly unveiled in the story of Bartimaeus, where the evangelist carefully indicates that Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way once his sight has been restored. This episode is instructive for discipleship since the true disciple of Jesus is one who is ready to follow Jesus to Jerusalem and the Cross. Mark thus provides his audience with a model of sincere discipleship. In particular, the phrase “followed him [Jesus] on the way” presents the core values of Markan spirituality as follows: conformity, participation, identification, and incorporation with and into Jesus’s ministry. Accordingly, this research has implications for pilgrimage and the art of spiritual living, since Bartimaeus’s behaviour offers a prototype for both.

Keywords: Mark; Bartimaeus; spirituality; the Way; pilgrimage

1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate Markan spirituality through his use of “the Way” motif, with a focus on the story of blind Bartimaeus, who follows Jesus “on the way” (10:46–52). As part of this exploration, the article sheds light on the Greek term, ἡ ὁδός, “the Way”. This was an important name for the earliest Christian communities in the first century CE, where the followers of Jesus were considered people who belonged to the Way (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; cf. 13:10; 16:17; 18:25–26). The term ὁδός was used to designate a people who aligned themselves with God’s plan as manifest in Jesus (Green 1995, p. 102). Jesus’s followers distinguished themselves from outsiders and defined themselves as heirs to the way of truth and righteousness (Keener 2012–2015, p. 2:1627). For this reason, the Way, or ὁδός, functions as a Christian self-designation. Thereafter, the Way became an ideal symbol for Christians to express their religious identity. Given that Jesus defines himself as the Way (cf. John 14:6), it is not strange that Jesus’s followers employ the word as their own title. Just as Paul encounters Jesus, the Way, while he is on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:17, 27), so too early Christians aspire to encounter Jesus on the way. As seen in the Acts narrative, this concept of the way is used to construct an understanding of discipleship as it is practised in the community of early Jesus followers (Green 1995, p. 102).

Over time, this concern with the way expanded into the practice of pilgrimage. Since the second or third century CE, Christians have traced the way of Jesus, and have meditated on the life of Jesus, through visits to places such as Jerusalem.¹ Just as Jesus did, so too Jesus’s followers walk in their own way, contemplating the message of Jesus—“I must be on the way” (Luke 13:33). Pilgrimage means a spiritual practice of following the way, i.e., “the way into the Most Holy Place” (Heb. 9:8). Within Christianity, the practice of pilgrimage has become a visible image of the spiritual life. The primary understanding of pilgrimage is that it is a journey to a holy place that results in personal transformation. However, the journey brings about various further effects, since, in the course of church history, the practice of walking along a sacred way became the core means of establishing Christian spirituality (Flanagan 2019). Thus, while pilgrimage is a meaningful practice in



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terms of achieving the goal of arriving at a specific sacred place, the more important point is the journey in its own right.

Anselm Grün, a German Benedictine monk, claims that all Christians walk their own pilgrimage and that while walking, they can become knowledgeable (Grün 1983). This pilgrimage corresponds to walking where Jesus walked. By walking on the way, Christians can perceive the truth and instruction of Jesus. For instance, for literal pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago in Spain, the way is simply not a path leading to the final destination, Santiago de Compostela, but a way to reach Jesus Christ himself. As they follow the way of Jesus, their desire is to meet him on the way. Pilgrimage is thus a venue for encountering divinity and allows for the transformation of the lives of believers. Hence “the way” has been an important theological theme throughout church history. Even at this moment, the spiritual discipline of following the way is being performed across the world. Thus, it is very important to explore the concept of the way through the lens of spirituality.

It is noteworthy that the origin of this theme—the spirituality of the way—appears often in the Gospel narratives of the New Testament.² Among the biblical authors, Mark provides a valuable text presenting this understanding of spirituality. The term *ὁδός* appears repeatedly, sixteen times, in his Gospel (2:23; 4:15; 6:8; 8:3, 27; 9:33–34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52; 11:8).³ The way in Mark is not simply the path upon which someone travels, but has a deeper meaning, for he uses the word *ὁδός* in both a literal sense (e.g., 1: 2; 2: 23; 4: 4; 6: 8) and a metaphorical sense (e.g., 1:3; 4:15; 10:52; 12:14) (Black 2011, p. 229). Thus, the Geek term *ὁδός* does not simply refer to a road, but also to the way of the Lord (1:2; 12:14) and furthermore, as the way that takes Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem (Hooker 1991, p. 17). Mark skilfully uses this word to unfold Jesus’s salvific plan and develops its usage extensively. The image of the way provides structural unity to the Gospel of Mark from the beginning to the end (Trebilco 2012, p. 259). In particular, throughout the Gospel, *ὁδός* is connected to the disciples or to discipleship (Trebilco 2012, p. 259). When Mark depicts the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, he uses this term to inform his audiences of the meaning of discipleship.

Markan scholars have indeed paid attention to this theme of *ὁδός*. However, to date, much of their research tends to explore the theme in relation to Mark’s theological ideas about discipleship (Kelber 1974, pp. 67–85; Marcus 2000, p. 765; France 2002, pp. 421–25; Stein 2008, pp. 493–98; Strauss 2014, p. 472). As a result, the spiritual aspect of the way is overlooked. Accordingly, the current study focuses on the spirituality of the way, which is not to say it is the first attempt to do so. Scholars of spirituality have also explored the significance of the way over time. However, thus far their work mostly concerns identifying Markan passages as the basis for spiritual practices such as contemplative walking or pilgrimage. For a more comprehensive understanding of the way, this essay explores the spirituality of the way through biblical exegesis and thus provides a bridge between biblical studies and spirituality. In so doing, it shows how such a biblical study can lead to spiritual transformation.

What is remarkable is that Mark dramatizes the spirituality of the way through the stories of two blind men. He presents discipleship and its spiritual significance through the episodes of the blind men whose sight is restored on the way. Mark thus combines various themes: the way, discipleship, and the response of the blind after restoration of their sight on the road to Jerusalem. In sum, the current study aims to demonstrate that Mark has a spirituality based on the way motif and infuses his own spirituality within the stories of the blind—the blind man in Bethsaida (8:22–26) and Bartimaeus (10:46–52). The paper examines the underlying imagery of the way in the Gospel of Mark and then argues that Mark arranges his narrative around this theme, and in so doing, proposes a spirituality of following Jesus “on the way” after the restoration of sight. Spirituality in Mark can be characterized as participation in the passion of Jesus by following His path and His life. In other words, it is about Jesus’s followers sharing His destiny in their daily lives. To establish this spirituality, Mark induces his audiences to learn from Jesus and absorb his way of life, which he illustrates through two tales of healing from blindness.

2. Two Stories of the Blind on the Way

The Gospel of Mark is a well-woven narrative. Mark is a skilful composer who designs his narrative according to his theological intention. This intention can be discerned in the outline of the Gospel, which is arranged geographically—Galilee (1:1–8:21), the journey to Jerusalem (8:22–10:52), and then Jerusalem itself (11:1–16:8). The main storyline corresponds to Jesus’s itinerary from Galilee to Jerusalem. In terms of the geographical movement, 8:22–10:52 describes Jesus’s journey to Jerusalem to accomplish his salvific program. This section is widely considered the pivot around which the Gospel narrative turns (Black 2011, p. 188). This central section delivers Jesus’s spiritual teaching about the suffering and death that is anticipated in Jerusalem to his disciples on the road. In effect, Jesus is instructing his disciples on the spiritual way of life that his followers are to embrace (8:34–38; 9:35–37; 10:41–45) (Hartin 2011, p. 33).

This middle section begins and ends with “the way” (8:27; 10:52), which plays an important role as a backdrop in this part. In this central section, the Greek term *ὁδός* occurs seven times (8:27; 9:33, 34; 10:17, 32, 46, 52). At the beginning of the section, Jesus and the Twelve are described as being “on the way” (*ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ*) (8:27). The place where their discussions happen is also the way to Jerusalem (9:33, 34). Thereafter, Jesus is repeatedly said to be on the way to Jerusalem (10:17, 32, 46, 52). Here, one can see Mark’s skilful redaction, for these phrases reflect Mark’s intention to highlight the fact that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem and the Cross.

What is interesting is that this central section also begins and ends with two episodes of blind men to whom sight is restored—the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22–26) and the blind Bartimaeus (10:46–52). These two tales function as literary brackets around the central section (Collins 2007, p. 506). Mark often brackets an important theme within his narratives in something that has been called “a Markan sandwich” (Edwards 1989, pp. 193–216). Thus, Jesus’s spiritual teaching about discipleship is framed within these two episodes on the way (Kelber 1974, p. 70).

We might ask why Mark places the two blind stories in this way. Considering that Mark frequently refers to the topic of spiritual blindness in previous passages (cf. 4:12; 8:17), the placement of these tales is no accident. The spiritual ignorance of the disciples is one of the main topics in Mark. The meaning of blindness in the Gospel of Mark is not limited to its physical aspects; rather, it relates to the capability of recognizing the Messiah and following the right path. In other words, blindness in the Gospel represents not only a physical handicap, but also a spiritual obstacle to the recognition of Jesus.⁴ To highlight this point, Mark suggests that both the disciples and the literally blind should regain their sight, which is thus both a spiritual and physical condition. To this end, Mark introduces the story of a blind man in Bethsaida. In Mark’s depiction, Jesus puts saliva on the man’s eyes and lays hands on him (8:23). At first, the man sees only dimly (8:24), and so Jesus touches his eyes again. Then the man’s eyes are “opened”, his sight is restored, and he sees everything clearly (8:25). In this episode, Mark employs a two-step progression, which is the most pervasive stylistic feature in his Gospel (Rhoads et al. 1999, pp. 47–49). The two-step progression guides the reader to take a careful second look, which brings clarity and emphasis. Through this two-step healing, Mark elaborately implies two contrasting forms of blindness: physical blindness and spiritual blindness. There is a contrast between the spiritual insight of the blind man and the spiritual blindness of the disciples (Strauss 2014, p. 466). Through his actions, Jesus seeks to give the disciples spiritual insight and faith in himself (Hartin 2011, p. 34). Seeing is a kind of metaphor for their whole perception of Jesus. Thus, the healing of the blind man has a theological implication; that is, the spiritual blindness of Jesus’s followers also needs to be healed, in much the same way as the blind man’s physical eyes are opened.

Interestingly, Mark introduces another story of a blind man at the end of the journey (10:46–52). This is the story of Bartimaeus, a blind man in Jericho, and is the last healing miracle in Mark’s Gospel. As Morna Hooker points out, this story is an “appropriate climax” to the central section (Hooker 1991, p. 252). This raises a further question: why

does Mark re-tell a blind man's story here? To answer this question, it is necessary to understand the difference between the two blind men.

After the blind man's restoration at Bethsaida (8:25), and on the way to Jerusalem, Peter declares his own faith (8:27–30). However, when Peter hears Jesus's passion prediction, his response is negative. He takes his teacher aside and rebukes him (8:32) and attempts to divert Jesus from the way that must be travelled. The disciples, including Peter, are still hesitant about taking up the Cross on the way (cf. 8:32; 10:35–40). Peter confidently confesses his own faith on the way, but he does not completely embrace the teaching of Jesus. Each passion–resurrection prediction (8:31; 9:30–31; 10:32–34) is followed by Jesus's instruction on discipleship (8:34–38; 9:35–37; 10:41–45) (Kelber 1974, p. 71). Jesus alludes to his impending death, but the disciples do not want to take up the Cross. As such, this section records the misapprehensions about Jesus of the Twelve. Given their unfaithful responses (8:32–33; 9:32–34; 10:35–40), one can assume that the disciples are still in a state of spiritual blindness, which prevents them from embracing the message Jesus is giving them (Hartin 2011, p. 34). This is why Mark provides a second blind man story, the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

This tale mirrors the cure of the blind man in Bethsaida (8:22–26). Mark's informed audiences might have been aware of the resemblance between the two episodes and yet there is a difference too. This is because Bartimaeus immediately regains his sight and at once follows Jesus on the way (10:52). His prompt reaction to Jesus is what is required to be a true disciple (Carlos Ossandon 2012). To use the expression of C. Clifton Black, it corresponds to "Mark's capsule metaphor for discipleship (1:18; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21, 28; 15:41)" (Black 2011, p. 235). Indeed, this story goes beyond ordinary healing stories. Mark lays the foundation for Jesus's Passion narrative, which begins in 11:1 with this episode (Black 2011, p. 188; France 2002, p. 421). Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem to accomplish his salvific mission. Thus, immediately after the blind man regains his sight, he accompanies Jesus on the journey that ends with death on the cross. The road on which the blind man walks in 10:52 is the way of the Cross that is portrayed in the Passion narrative. Even though this blind man does not appear in the Passion narrative, Mark implies that he is a follower in the way that leads to Jerusalem. He thus becomes someone who follows Jesus to suffering and death (Collins 2007, p. 511; Beavis 2011, pp. 161–63; Bock 2015, pp. 284–85).

3. The Way and Following

In order to investigate Mark's spirituality on the way more deeply, it is necessary to explore the story of Bartimaeus closely. It ends with the formerly blind man's firm resolution: he "followed him on the way" (ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) (10:52). The conclusion of this episode thus has a theological implication that transcends the miracle story genre.⁵ In this passage, Mark's theological themes emerge from two words: ὁδός and ἀκολουθέω.

First, as discussed earlier, ὁδός is noteworthy. This word functions as a metaphor whose meaning could well have developed over time. It is literally translated as "the way", or "the path", and functioned for ancient people as their most important framework for experiencing the world. The ancient Greeks perceived reality from the perspective of the road, and in that way expanded their understanding of the inhabited world around them. Such an interest in "the road" appears in the Greek geographical text, the *Geography* of Strabo, in which the word ὁδός is repeated more than five hundred times, reflecting the way that ancient people were deeply influenced by conceptions of the road (Bekker-Nielsoe 2017). The term ὁδός literally means a path along which travellers move to their destination and a medium by which someone reaches or carries out something (Silva 2014, p. 3:451).

Not only used in such a literal sense for travel, ὁδός was also used in more figurative senses. The word was also connected to the idea of the ascent of the soul to the heavenly world (Silva 2014, p. 3:451). It was used to signify the correct moral path or lifestyle, such that pedagogical institutes were considered the ὁδός also (Keener 2012–2015, p. 2:1626). Teachers' instructions were considered the ὁδός, and furthermore, people's lives were compared to the ὁδός also. Greek writers portray scenes in which someone encounters two

contrasting ways of life: the way of virtue versus the way of evil (e.g., Hesiod *Op.* 287; Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21–34). In doing so, the author is asking readers to choose what kind of ὁδός, or moral life, they would prefer.

The Hebrew Bible also employs this pattern and then decorates it with religious implications. Everyone faces a decision between two ways: the way of the righteous (ὁδός δικαίων) or the way of the wicked (ὁδός ἀσεβῶν) (LXX Ps 1:6). In the Jewish tradition, ὁδός was used to indicate a person's life values. For Philo, ὁδός indicates the way that leads to the knowledge of God (*Migr.* 195). This term is given a whole variety of expressions in the Qumran texts, where it is combined with meanings of righteousness and justice. For the Qumran community, influenced by Isaiah 40:3, the concept of ὁδός was perceived as “the way of the Lord” (1QS VIII, 12–16) (Silva 2014, p. 3:456). The community believed this passage in Isaiah referred to them because they had renounced a society they considered unrighteous and had gone into exile in the wilderness. Those who chose the way of truth and righteousness would be on the highway in the wilderness (1QS IX, 17). Seen in this light, ὁδός designates a distinctive way of life in contrast to other secular communities.

Such a usage appears in the New Testament also. The noun ὁδός occurs 101 times in the NT, although almost 80 of the occurrences are found in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 22, Mark, 16, Luke 20) and 20 in the Acts of the Apostles. In particular, the Gospel authors use the term in both literary and figurative ways. In its figurative use, ὁδός is a designation for the Christian community and its message. For Jesus's followers, ὁδός became an ideal concept for expressing their religious identity. Mark's usage can also be understood in this manner. According to Mark's description, John the Baptist employs this term, quoting Isaiah 40:3: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (1:3). In Mark, to “prepare the way of the Lord” means to “prepare a way for the Lord God” (Collins 2007, p. 137). John the Baptist's preaching reminds us of the texts from Qumran (1QS VIII). John prepares “the way of the Lord”, and this way will become the way of salvation for his followers (Trebilco 2012, p. 266). In this usage, the way is an object that should be prepared by the righteous. Those who are preparing the way should have a strong resolution to disconnect themselves from past and secular values. After the resurrection of Jesus, the ὁδός becomes strongly connected with his disciples as a form of group identity. Seen in this light, the ὁδός can be characterized as the style and model in which Jesus's followers should live; namely, the way is “a Jesus way of life”. Paul Trebilco offers helpful information about self-designations in the first century CE. There were various terms used to define the group identity of Jesus's followers.⁶ Among them, ὁδός is categorized as one of the internal self-designations. By this term, they express their conviction about who Jesus is and identify themselves as a people who align themselves with God's plan as manifest in Jesus (Green 1995, p. 102; Trebilco 2012, p. 266). This designation appears in various forms in Acts: “the way of salvation” (ὁδός σωτηρίας) (16:17), “the way of the Lord” (ὁδός τοῦ κυρίου) (18:25), and “the way of God” (ὁδός τοῦ θεοῦ) (18:26) (Silva 2014, p. 3:459). Paul is also portrayed by Luke as one who belongs to the way (24:14). In Acts, ὁδός is thus equivalent to Christianity.

Returning to Mark, and given that there is a possibility that ὁδός was used as a self-designation for Jesus's followers in the time when Mark was writing his Gospel, Mark's intention in employing this term as a key element in the narrative seems clear: Mark connects ὁδός with the sacrificial death of Jesus. Namely, ὁδός epitomizes the salvific plan of Jesus. Thus, the self-designation of those who belong to the way reflects their faith, devotion, and firm resolution to pattern Jesus's cruciform life through their own lives, that is, through their ὁδός.

Second, regarding the ideal response on the way (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ), Mark suggests a keyword, ἀκολουθέω, “follow”, which is the appropriate reaction to the ὁδός. The term ὁδός can be intertwined with the decision of whether to follow Jesus or not; in other words, whether to be a disciple or not. In 10:52, Mark associates the determined reaction of the blind man with the ὁδός. In so doing, Mark asks his readers to respond also. Regarding the response to the ὁδός, Mark uses a two-step progression: (1) preparing and (2) following.

In the prologue of the Gospel, John the Baptist proclaims “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (1:3). Here, the expected response is trust in the good news of Jesus. In this passage, *ἐτοιμάζω*, “prepare”, means to abandon those ways they have become accustomed to in the past (Black 2011, p. 50). This statement by John appears in the other Gospels also (Matt 3:3; Luke 3:4; cf. John 1:23) but Mark supplements it with a reaction that goes beyond the first step (preparing), that is, with following, and with strong resolution, as seen in the case of Bartimaeus. Following is the essence of discipleship (8:27; 9:33–34; 10:32, 52) (France 2002, p. 425). The statement that the blind man decides to follow Jesus is Mark’s exclusive redaction. As Richard Bauckham points out, the task of preparing the way might have been considered already complete (Bauckham 2003, p. 76). The way has already been prepared by John the Baptist and thereafter it has been undertaken and completed by Jesus. Thus, for the earliest Christian community, the next step should be “following” the way, and the following should be a continual process (cf. 8:34) (Stein 2008, p. 407).

The Greek verb, *ἀκολουθέω*, “follow”, offers various meanings, both in its literal sense “to go after”, and in its figurative uses, “to understand”, “to be guided by”, and “to obey” (Silva 2014, p. 1:204). In the Greek world of the first century CE, this term was widely used to illustrate the life of a pupil as the apprentice of a master (cf. Hengel 1981, pp. 34–35). That is to say, the pupil shares the master’s life and destiny as part of his apprenticeship. Furthermore, it means living in conformity with that which has been divinely disposed. It also means the identification of one’s being with the gods through incorporation (Silva 2014, p. 1:204). So, in the Gospel of Mark, this term can be understood as participation and incorporation in the salvific program offered in Jesus (Kittel 1964, p. 214). In other words, it means participation in the fate of Jesus, with an allegiance that involves the responsibility of mission (Black 2011, p. 70). Considering that the *ὁδός* implies the need for a strong decision, *ἀκολουθέω* provides a strong response to the command of Jesus.⁷

Mark uses *ἀκολουθέω* as an ingressive imperfect to stress the beginning of the action of Bartimaeus (Strauss 2014, p. 472). What is particularly interesting is that Mark adds an adverb, *εὐθύς*, to portray the following behaviour of Bartimaeus. This usage strengthens the attitude of the newly participating disciple, Bartimaeus. In fact, *εὐθύς* is a prevalent term in Mark, who gives it an exclusive theological connotation. Mark employs *εὐθύς* from the beginning of the Gospel, along with *ὁδός*, as follows: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (*ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ*) (1:3). After this initial occurrence with the sense of “straight”, Mark utilizes *εὐθύς* forty further times in his Gospel with the sense of “immediately” or “at once”. Most commentators note that Mark uses *εὐθύς* more frequently than the other Evangelists. The reason is to highlight the urgency of salvation by Jesus and to elicit a prompt response from readers. Mark’s characteristic *εὐθύς* serves as a transitional word without temporal significance (Strauss 2014, p. 83). Through this adverb, Mark implies that the decision to follow Jesus should come without hesitation.

Such following is connected to participation in the way to the Cross and resurrection. Even though Bartimaeus does not appear again in the remaining part of the Gospel, Mark provides other characters who follow Jesus in the Passion narrative. When the disciples have all abandoned Jesus, a few women remain (15:40–41). Mark indicates that the women have followed Jesus since he was in Galilee (15:41). In this passage, *ἀκολουθέω* has special meaning. This occurrence of *ἀκολουθέω* encapsulates the entire experience of following from Galilee to Jerusalem. This is because the following of the women reaches the final destination of the way—the crucifixion and resurrection. Eventually, these followers—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome—become the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus (16:1). In this sense, one can argue that those who follow Jesus will arrive in the holy space of resurrection. The women are representative models of the essence of a true disciple (Hartin 2011, p. 37). Through this scene, Mark’s informed audiences might have recollected the following of Bartimaeus on the way to Jerusalem and hence the true meaning of “following on the way”.

Mark's spirituality of the way can be characterized as the sharing of Jesus' destiny. Indeed, it is unconditional participation in the destiny of Jesus. Mark's portrayal of the blind man in 10:52 presents the author's characteristic understanding of spirituality, i.e., that Jesus's followers should be willing to participate in the passion of crucifixion, and even martyrdom. Mark's employment of the term *ὁδός* can thus be seen as the epitome of his own spirituality.

4. Spirituality in the Gospel of Mark

This article has discussed Markan discipleship and spirituality through the story of Bartimaeus. Mark's spirituality can be summarized as follows: conformity, participation, identification, and incorporation into the ministry of the Way, Jesus. By following Jesus, they learn from him directly and absorb his way of life. And their following results in identification with Jesus.⁸

Werner Kelber illustrates the meaning of the way as follows: "If they follow after the Jesus *proagon*, they will not only learn their leader's identity, but in the process find themselves and their own calling. Full knowledge of Jesus will give them insight into their own nature and destiny. But again, if they are to grasp Jesus and know themselves, they will have to go the way of Jesus, and they will have to walk it to the end" (Kelber 1974, p. 71).

Seen in this light, Markan spirituality of the way functions as a guideline for Christian pilgrimage today. Pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place as a way of impacting one's spiritual life with the revelation of God associated with that place. Pilgrims allow for the pilgrimage to be a transformative journey (Lincoln 2004, p. 29). Thus, pilgrimage has served a valuable role in church history. Nowadays, many Christians go on pilgrimage, whether to Jerusalem, Santiago, or some other destination, but few think about it from the perspective of the biblical sources. The climax of pilgrimage should not simply be regarded as the moment of arriving at one's destination. Pilgrimage is not a literal road, but a metaphorical way of life, a certain kind of life, or more fully, the goal of human life (Klink 2016, p. 617). Mark's narrative teaches us that the core value of pilgrimage is based on recognition of the genuine meaning of *ὁδός* through which pilgrims participate in the way of Jesus.

Stephen Barton claims that "Christian spirituality is cruciform" (Barton 1992, p. 49). Christian pilgrimage is richly attested, starting from the second century CE. Indeed, a large number of Christians have participated in pilgrimages that can be characterized as cruciform throughout church history. Jaś Elsner cites a letter about pilgrimage written by St. Jerome in 404 CE.⁹ The letter portrays "the burning enthusiasm of a woman pilgrim". In the letter, the woman's pilgrimage is finalized at the Cross, and then she falls down and faithfully kisses the very shelf on which the Lord's body has lain. The scene continues with her deep lamentation. For pilgrims, the spiritual journey is to arrive at the Cross and to take up their own crosses as disciples of Jesus. That is a life-and-death struggle. This particular letter, written in late antiquity, presents the important lesson that pilgrimage is not simply meditation or contemplation; rather, it is a resolution to face passion, death, and the Cross on the way.

This point reminds us of John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which portrays the spiritual journey of a pilgrim. Christian, the main character in the book, is on the way to the Celestial City. He must be there. Readers can find countless references to the way, and the primary reason that the author repeatedly uses the concept is that "the way is the path of all Christians from this world to the Celestial City, but it is also the way of faith of the individual . . . there is only one way—the way of the cross—for any person to become a Christian pilgrim" (Batson 1988, p. 50).

As for the meaning of the way, Christian speaks to a character called Formalist as follows: "I walk by the rule of my Master; you walk by the rude working of your fancies. You are counted thieves already, by the Lord of the way; therefore, I doubt you will not be found true men at the end of the way. You come in by yourselves, without His direction; and shall go out by yourselves, without His mercy" (Bunyan 2014, p. 43).

In this book, Bunyan concentrates on portraying the way Christian *must* go. For Christian, the way signifies “an inner commitment of the Spirit, a commitment to the rule of his master”, as Stanley Fish points out (Fish 1974, p. 228). As long as he walks by this inner commitment and direction, any path he walks will be “the way” (Fish 1974, p. 228). Thus, a strong determination is required from every pilgrim. The pilgrim must be ready to die, just like Jesus. For Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the way is not a literal pathway but Jesus himself. Furthermore, the final destination of the way is not a specific holy place, but Jesus the Lord.

To sum up, the stories of numerous pilgrims and the main character of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* give us important lessons about the essence of pilgrimage. Those stories provide instructions about the attitude that pilgrims on the way should sustain. Interestingly, the instructions are found in the story of Bartimaeus in the Gospel of Mark. For this reason, Bartimaeus can be seen as an exemplary model for Christians in terms of discipleship and spirituality.

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has investigated Markan spirituality through his employment of “the way” motif, with a focus on the story of blind Bartimaeus. Mark arranges the narrative around the theme of the way and the spirituality of following Jesus on the way. Through the story of Bartimaeus, Mark teaches the meaning and spirituality of discipleship; that is, conformity, participation, identification, and incorporation in the ministry of the Way, Jesus. Mark introduces the episode of Bartimaeus only briefly, but the significance of this story is enormous. This essay claims that Mark’s spirituality culminates in 10:52, which encapsulates all the discourses of the way. The behaviour of Bartimaeus provides a meaningful message for those who decide to follow Jesus today. Like Bartimaeus, those who follow Jesus will arrive in the holy space of resurrection. This study of Markan spirituality invites people to read the Gospel of Mark from a new angle in terms of the way and following. This is because Mark provides a theoretical basis for the spirituality of the contemporary practice of pilgrimage. We should be aware that Mark’s spirituality offers a good lesson to the pilgrims of today.

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Notes

- ¹ For a comprehensive study on pilgrimage, see Kujawa-Holbrook (2013). For Christian pilgrimage, see Bartholomew and Hughes (2004) and Maddrell et al. (2015).
- ² For the implications of pilgrimage in the New Testament, see (Lincoln 2004).
- ³ Trebilco notes that “In context, [Mark] is clearly a true follower of Jesus, since he has faith in Jesus’ power, confesses his authority, and is willing to follow Jesus ‘on the way’. This is what discipleship in Mark is about” (Trebilco 2012, p. 260).
- ⁴ Definition of blindness is a delicate task. It should be discussed in both physical and spiritual aspects. This essay overall associates blindness with spiritual ignorance to highlight Markan spirituality. For further study on blindness in terms of spirituality, see Hull (2003), Steiger (2019), and McNeill et al. (2020).
- ⁵ Marcus claims that “The conclusion of the story, which is probably a Markan addition, enables it to transcend the miracle story genre” (Marcus 2000, p. 764).
- ⁶ The internal designations categorized by Trebilco are as follows: “brothers and sisters”, “the believers”, “the saints”, “the assembly”, and “disciples”.
- ⁷ ἀκολουθεῖω is used as a technical term for being a disciple in 8:22–10:52 (cf. 8:34; 9:38; 10:21, 28, 52) (Stein 2008, p. 406). In 10:52, Mark holds up Bartimaeus as the exemplary model of discipleship. Jesus is walking ahead of the disciples on the way (cf. 10:32), but their responses are filled with fear. The Greek term προῶγω, “ahead of”, has a Christological meaning. To the Christological

event, there corresponds on the part of human beings an ἀκολουθεῖν, which means following in the deeper sense of discipleship (Schmidt 1964, p. 130).

⁸ “Discipleship involves identifying with Jesus, an identification that embraces an openness to follow him along the same path to suffering and death” (Hartin 2011, p. 41).

⁹ She fell down and worshipped before the Cross as if she could see the Lord hanging on it. On entering the Tomb of the Resurrection she kissed the stone which the angel had removed from the sepulchre door; then, like a thirsty man who has waited long, and at last comes to water, she faithfully kissed the very shelf on which the Lord’s body had lain. Her tears and lamentations there were known to all Jerusalem—or rather to the Lord himself to whom she was praying (Jerome, *Ep.* 108). Quoted from (Elsner 2006).

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