

Mark's chiasm in laymen's terms:

The Markan Sandwich

A "Markan sandwich" (chiasm) is a writing technique that Mark uses in his gospel. The particular events he records, and the way he writes them, are sometimes grouped together in a "sandwich": two pieces of bread on the outside, with some filling on the inside. Mark uses this sandwich technique to help his hearers understand his story.

Mark's gospel can be divided into three acts:

- **Act I**, spanning chapters 1-8, is based in Galilee and swirls around the question "Who is this man?" as we see Jesus teach, heal, and perform miracles
- **Act II**, which spans chapters 8-10, takes place while Jesus is traveling the road to Jerusalem and is itself one big Markan sandwich*
- **Act III** is Mark's account of the passion in Jerusalem (Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection), taking up chapters 11-16.

ACT II: The Markan Triple Cheese Sandwich

In **ACT II**, the first piece of bread in the sandwich is the healing of a blind man in Bethsaida in chapter 8 (*Mark 8:22-26*). The sandwich filling has three pieces of cheese. The same pattern is repeated three times: Jesus predicts his death, the disciples misunderstand, and Jesus teaches about discipleship – or – following "**The Way**." The final outside piece of bread is the healing of a blind man in Jericho.

Mark is talking about spiritual blindness and discipleship – or – doing the will of God. The motif of "the Way" (Greek: *hodos*) serves as a central theological framework representing both the physical journey toward Jerusalem and the spiritual path of cross-shaped discipleship. [1,2]

ACT II will reveal a) clarity concerning Jesus' identity, b) the requirements for following the "Way," c) another affirmation from the Father, and d) revelation of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection.

Jesus Gets Real in Mark's second act.

Stick Around

"If Jesus' main purpose in life was to make friends, he seems to have done a poor job. Mark, in particular, highlights the lines that distinguish insiders and outsiders, and those lines are usually difficult to perceive. They rarely fall where you expect them, leaving us to wonder why are *these* people inside the circle and *those* folks out?

"Looking at those who sat around him, he [Jesus] said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

"(Oh no! People will think that the spiritual life actually involves *doing something*!) We don't know exactly what anyone in this crowd has *done*, and so our understanding of what it means to do 'the will of God' is sketchy.

"But it appears to involve sitting.

"The crowd that Jesus surveys is remarkable for being passive. For being patient. For being present. They're simply in the house with him.

"Remember that Jesus never walks away from his disciples, the ones who are so faithless and dull of spirit in Mark. Jesus does not quit when miracles do not come easy (8:22-26). All he asks is that people *follow*.

"There is no heroism in Mark, except from Jesus himself. The way into kinship—belonging—with Jesus is sticking around. It's to acknowledge that you've been caught up into a new reality—this transformational alternate reality called "the kingdom of God"—and to hold on for the ride. That's probably not the entirety of what it means to do or to accomplish or to commit to 'the will of God,' but it seems to be the biggest part, as far as Mark is concerned.

"What happens after that, once a person commits to sticking around and letting Jesus be Jesus, is where the surprises really start to occur."

Excerpts from: Matt Skinner, *Stick Around*, Working Preacher, May 30, 2021. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/stick-around>