

Figtree Anglican Church

JESUS

The Time of His Life

Mark's Gospel
LifeGroup Studies

An Introduction to Mark

(Resourced from Paul Barnett, 'The Servant King - Reading Mark Today' & The Dictionary of Biblical Theology)

Mark's Gospel is the closest in time to Jesus and is based on information supplied by Peter. Few, if any, knew Jesus better than Peter. In this Gospel we are in touch with the historical Jesus and it lets us see Jesus through the eyes of a contemporary disciple. It is the shortest of the Gospels as well as the most action-filled. Mark is far more interested in teaching us theology through what Jesus did than by what he said. It is the connections and flow between various actions that teach deep truths about Jesus and gospel ministry. The narrative, while recording historical events, is far more ordered by theological themes than by chronology. He tells his story simply, in an understated way, but with great emotional power. The date of Mark is uncertain but some hints in Mark 13 suggest it was published in the early stages of the Jewish war with Rome AD 66-70.

Mark's Story

Now we know that at the time of writing, all reading was spoken aloud even when the reader was alone. Therefore it makes sense that Mark wrote his Gospel to be read aloud, to be listened to as a story or narrative and when it is read aloud the story actually comes alive. If you're doing these studies on your own I encourage you to read the text aloud and see the difference it makes.

There are two interconnected plots in Mark. The first is the **kingdom of God**: how it was announced and when it appeared. Interestingly Mark shines the spotlight on Jesus the preacher of the kingdom not on God. It soon becomes very clear that the kingdom of God is about Jesus. Yet it also emerges that Jesus will be no popular military deliverer fulfilling the first century expectations of the Jewish people. In fact throughout his three-year ministry he had persistently tried to suppress the fact he was the promised Messiah. Rather, he brought together the Old Testament promises of Messiah and the suffering servant of Isaiah (compare Isaiah 60:1-3), predicting that in Jerusalem he would be rejected, killed and on the third day rise from death.

Yet astonishingly when he arrives in Jerusalem he deliberately and publicly presents himself as ‘the king of the Jews’. It is with both surprise and shock that the hour of the kingdom comes when Jesus the King is crucified.

The second plot focuses on *the disciples*, whom we meet immediately following the introduction of the kingdom of God (see Mark 1:14-20). We are left in little doubt as to the nature of discipleship. It involves leaving everything to be with Jesus and to do what he does; engage in a mission to the whole world. As they bring the gospel to all the nations, disciples must follow and value Jesus above everything else, even their own lives and possessions. Like Jesus, everything is to be available for sacrificial service in their relationship with others. However, Mark doesn’t sugarcoat his presentation of the Twelve Apostles, who would after the resurrection of Jesus become the heroes of the early church. With raw honesty they are presented as stumbling and struggling to work out who he is and the servant nature of Jesus’ messiahship (kingship) and their discipleship.

Mark’s World

The Roman Empire into which Mark wrote was one where the now deceased Emperor Caesar Augustus’s achievements had made a deep impression. At his death Augustus had been deemed a god and Pontius Pilate had coins introduced into Israel, which stated that Tiberius was ‘*the son of the deified Augustus*’. It was no accident that Mark chose to present Jesus Christ to his readers in such a way as to leave in no doubt that the real new age had dawned not with Augustus but with the one who was truly the Son of God, Jesus the Christ (see Mark 1:1, 15:39). Mark’s purpose is to narrate the story of Jesus in such a way that the confession that Jesus is the son of God, humanity’s true Saviour and Lord is both compelling and plausible to Jews and Romans. He desires above all else that they will believe it and become disciples of Jesus, the Son of God.

Mark’s Author

The author of the second Gospel nowhere identifies himself by name. There was apparently no need: readers and writer apparently already knew

one another (see Mark 13:14). Who then wrote this Gospel and why? Fortunately a fragment of a book written early in the second century has survived which throws light on that question. Its author, Papias, explains how the Gospel of Mark came to be written. Papias was a bishop in Hierapolis in Asia Minor in the first half of the second century. He had been a disciple of the apostle John and so is a direct link to the era of the apostles.

Papias writes, *“Mark...having been the interpreter of Peter...neither heard the Lord, nor was he a follower of his, but at a later date of Peter.”* Peter, a Galilean, probably spoke some Greek along with his first language Aramaic; and as this passage suggests, Mark’s role may have been to assist the ageing apostle tell the gospel to Greek-speaking audiences. The New Testament links Mark with Peter in a number of ways (see Acts 12:12 and 1 Peter 5:13). However, Papias’ tone in the whole fragment is defensive, evidently Mark’s Gospel was thought to be inferior to Luke and Matthew. In fact this low opinion has persisted through centuries of church history. The second gospel was so brief. It lacked Matthew’s substantial slabs of Jesus’ teaching, Luke’s majestic historical sweep and John’s profoundly simple narrative of Jesus’ signs and dialogues. For a long time, Mark remained the neglected Gospel.

But all this changed last century with the rise of linguistic analysis of biblical texts. Now Mark is almost universally regarded as the first Gospel to have been written and the major narrative source on which Matthew and Luke depend. It’s also now widely believed that despite its apparent simple style, this Gospel is written with considerable dramatic skill and with profound development of its leading themes.

Our author’s two names John (Hebrew) and Mark (Latin or Greek) are consistent with the profile of John Mark as an educated and bilingual Jew, who would certainly have had the literacy required to write the Gospel that bears his name. He had strong associations with noted Christian leaders (Acts 13:4-5, 15:39, Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4:11, 1 Peter 5:13). There is also some evidence to suggest that the *‘ministers’* mentioned in Luke 1:2 is referring specifically to John Mark (the term used here by Luke is exactly the same as used to refer to John Mark in Acts 13:5).

Mark's Literature Type

While Mark is rooted in the history of Jesus' life, it really isn't accurate to call it a history or biography of Jesus, as there is no reference to his parents, background and chronological details of his life. Mark calls his work 'gospel' (Mark 1:1), a word which in its time meant an announcement, usually of an official and important kind. So Mark's Gospel is the announcement about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is in the form of a dramatic narrative of part of Jesus' life, from the beginning of his preaching in Galilee of the approaching kingdom of God to his death and resurrection in Jerusalem. But we also observe many people's reactions to Jesus, their belief and unbelief, culminating with the centurion's confession, '*Surely this man was the Son of God!*' (Mark 15:39). In other words, this narrative is a piece of literature that brings Jesus before us, the readers, so that we might make a faith commitment to him. It is a *Gospel*, not a history or biography.

A Final Comment and Challenge

Given Mark is a first century evangelistic document written in a dramatic narrative style, three things make perfect sense. First, that we should read the book recognizing its narrative (story) nature, which is that theology emerges from the interconnecting of the events. Second in preaching on specific stories we remember no story simply stands on its own but is part of a larger narrative. Third, that we should all be praying that our family and friends who are not-yet-Christians would accept our invitations to come to church and that they might come to faith in Christ by hearing the Gospel of Mark preached.

Suggested Resources for Small Group Leaders

I highly recommend the following commentaries:

Paul Barnett, The Servant King: Reading Mark Today, AIO, Sydney Square, 1991

William L Lane, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1974

Content of the LifeGroup Bible Studies

Mark 1:1-20	'The Beginnings of the Gospel'
Mark 1:21-2:12	'The Priorities of the Gospel'
Mark 2:13-3:6	'The Need of the Gospel'
Mark 3:7-35	'The People of the Gospel'
Mark 4:1-34	'The Teaching of the Gospel'
Mark 4:35-5:43	'The Champion of the Gospel'
Mark 6:1-56	'The Challenge of the Gospel'
Mark 7:1-37	'The Heart of the Gospel'
Mark 8:1-9:1	'The Vision of the Gospel'

Study 1 – Mark 1:1- 20 ‘The Beginnings of the Gospel’

Structure:

- 1:1-8 Introducing Jesus: the Messiah, the Son of God
- 1:9-11 Jesus’ Baptism and Divine Authentication
- 1:12-13 Jesus’ Testing: The Spiritual Nature of his Mission Highlighted
- 1:14-15 Jesus’ Ministry: Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom
- 1:16-20 Jesus’ Calls People to Join his Mission

Getting Inside the Text:

Read the passage through, looking for connections between each paragraph. Try to ignore the existing headings in your Bibles, as these are not part of the inspired text and can be unhelpful.

1. What does Mark’s opening sentence suggest about the contents of the rest of the Gospel? Mark 1:1

2. Mark quotes from the Old Testament (OT) prophet Isaiah almost immediately (1:2-3). What does this tell us about the Jesus and his relationship to the OT and Judaism?

3. What was John the Baptist’s message to the people of Judea?

a. Mark 1:4

b. Mark 1:7-8

What about us?

- In your own words write out the 2 parts of John's message? Mark 1:4-8
 - a.

 - b.

- What elements of this message are relevant for today and which are not? Why do you think this?

4. In his baptism what spiritual phenomena did Jesus see and hear, and why do you think this was significant? Mark 1:9-11

[Hint: It will be helpful to remember John's Baptism was for the forgiveness of sins and yet his Heavenly Father has just declared he is well pleased with him.]

5. What do you think is the significance of the fact that immediately after Jesus is baptized and spoken to by his Father in heaven he goes into the desert and is tempted by Satan?

[Hint: When Saul (1 Samuel 9-11) and David (1 Samuel 16-17) were anointed by God as the Kings of Israel they immediately had a victory over Israel's enemies.]

What about us?

- Given that in Christ, God is our Heavenly Father and we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, how does Jesus' experiences in 1:9-13 provide encouragement for us in our Christian walk?

- What temptations do you find yourself struggling with the most?

6. As soon as John was put in prison Jesus began proclaiming God's good news. What does this fact suggest about gospel ministry when it is confronted with opposition? Mark 1:14

7. What was the content of God's gospel Jesus proclaimed? Mark 1:15

What about us?

- Using contemporary language and illustrations write this message out in your own words?

8. What can you learn about Jesus and his preaching mission from Mark 1:16-20?

a. Jesus - Mark 1:17-18, 20

b. His Mission - Mark 1:17, 20

What about us?

- In regard to gospel ministry and the nature of authentic discipleship someone once said: *'There is no following Jesus without fishing with Jesus.'* Discuss the validity or otherwise of this statement and provide other verses of Scripture to support your conclusion?

- If you have agreed with the quote above discuss why Christians appear to largely find it so difficult to engage in fishing for people?

- How might we overcome some of these difficulties? Does Mark 1:1-20 provide any biblical truths that could encourage us?

- Before closing in prayer ask each member to provide the name of at least one person they'd like to see be caught in the good news fishing net. Make a list of the names and encourage the members to pray for these people throughout the week.

Close in Prayer: [Make sure that everyone on the list just made is prayed for before the prayer time is concluded. If not already maybe this could become a regular practice of your group]

Structure:

1:21-34	Jesus’ Teaching and Power
1:35-45	Jesus Priority to Preach Openly Frustrated
2:1-12	The Priority of Word over Healing

Getting Inside the Text:

Read the passage through, looking for connections between each paragraph. Try to ignore the existing headings in your Bibles, as these are not part of the inspired text and can at times be unhelpful.

1. What can you learn about Jesus from Mark 1:21-34?

2. Why do you think Jesus did not want the impure spirit (1:23) and demons (1:34b) to let the people know who he really was?

[Hint: What were the first century expectations of the people regarding the promised Messiah, the holy one of God?]

3. What responses do people have towards Jesus in Mark 1:21-34?

What about us?

• In 1:22 and 1:27 the idea of teaching with authority is noted. What do you think are the qualities of contemporary authoritative teaching? Can you provide any Scriptures to support your position?

4. In the next paragraph Mark 1:35-39 Jesus does something quite uncharacteristic, he clearly turns his back on people who are looking for healing (see 1:37, compare 1:32)?

a. Why did he do this? 1:38

b. Where did he find the resolve to do this? 1:35

5. The next two scenes (Mark 1:40-45 & 2:1-12) are placed here by Mark to reinforce the wisdom of Jesus' decision to give priority to gospel proclamation over the more popular powerful healing ministry.

a. What happens once the healed leper ignores Jesus and blabs about his healing? Mark 1:45 compare Jesus desire in 1:38-39

b. Why could Jesus no longer go into towns and why do you think Jesus went out to the lonely (wilderness, 1:45) places instead?

[Hint: Who is it hard to take into isolated places?]

c. In Mark 2:1-12 Jesus appears to have sneaked into Capernaum and he is in a house preaching the word (i.e. the good news of Mark 1:14-15). Why is he interrupted?

d. How does Jesus turn this interruption into a visual aid for his gospel preaching? Mark 2:5

e. What do we learn from this encounter about both the identity and priorities of Jesus? Mark 2:5-12

What about us?

- Given the priority of Jesus to preach the good news but also exercise a ministry of compassion what can we learn about how we (your group) ought to exercise good gospel ministry today? Can you come up with a practical way your group could do such ministry?

- Is it possible to preach God's good news without speaking, i.e. by good deeds of compassion alone? Some would refer to passages like Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 3:1 to argue you can. Do you agree?

Close in Prayer: [Don't forget to pray for our contacts who need Jesus.]

Structure:

2:13-17 Jesus Shows and Teaches the Target Audience of God’s Gospel

2:18-22 Jesus’ Teaching Demands a New Approach to Current Judaism

2:23-3:6 Jesus’ Clash with the Jewish Establishment Intensifies

Getting Inside the Text:

Read the passage through, looking for connections between each paragraph. Try to ignore the existing headings in your Bibles, as these are not part of the inspired text and can be unhelpful.

1. What does the calling of a tax collector, Levi (Matthew), indicate about the message Jesus is preaching? Mark 2:13-14, 17

2. The Pharisees, part of the Jewish establishment are clearly offended by Jesus behavior (2:15-16). How does Jesus answer their question about his dining with Jewish outcasts? Mark 2:17

- What does this suggest about the spiritual condition of the Pharisees?

What about us?

- Are there people we exclude from our gospel ministry, our prayers and our compassion? What is our response to bullies, addicts, smokers, prostitutes, the LGBTQI community, asylum seekers, people in nursing homes, atheists, the homeless, people with mental illness, socially awkward, people from other religions or other Christian denominations, etc.? Is it all possible that there is a little Pharisee in our own practice?

- How might Jesus' teaching here, help us avoid the narrowing of our spiritual vision?

3. Mark 2:18-22 continues the theme of Jesus' clash with the narrow Judaism of the day. Who does Jesus claim to be and how does Jesus' teaching demonstrate that he is bringing something new, not a rehash of the old?

What about us?

- Does our spiritual life reflect the radical newness of the gospel or could it be true that we're trying to put the gospel into a life which still clings to our old life without Christ?

Note: Two additional clashes between Jesus and the Jewish religious establishment follow (Mark 2:23-3:6). After these it is clear the writing is on the wall as to the destiny of Jesus, at least from a human point of view (Mark 3:6).

4. How does Jesus explain his actions in allowing his disciples to break the Pharisees' Jewish tradition of working on the Sabbath by picking take away food? Mark 2:25-28

What about us?

- What might be some of the human religious traditions we have created, which have now become an integral part of our accepted Christian practice?

- Given Jesus' response to the Pharisees, how should we be assessing our practice of the Christian faith?

5. What does the final incident with the Pharisees and Jesus reveal about the condition of their hearts?

a. Jesus – 3:5

b. The Pharisees – 3:1-2, 5-6

Note: Pharisees and Herodians were unlikely associates as they were normally unfriendly towards one another. But they both saw Jesus as a threat to their agendas religious (Pharisees) and political (Herodians), so Jesus must go!

What about us?

- Where do we find ourselves protecting our turf rather than exercising compassion?

Close in Prayer: [Don't forget to pray for our contacts who need Jesus.]

Study 4 – Mark 3:7-35 ‘The People of the Gospel’

Structure:

Mark 3:7-12	Jesus’ Popularity Expands
Mark 3:13-19	Jesus Chooses His Team
Mark 3:20-35	Jesus Divides People & Defines the People of God

Getting Inside the Text:

Read the passage through, looking for connections between each paragraph. Try to ignore the existing headings in your Bibles, as these are not part of the inspired text and can be unhelpful.

1. What is emerging about Jesus’ strategy with regard to the inner circle of disciples and the growing diverse crowds? Mark 3:7-12

2. It’s clear the impure spirits know his true identity (3:11). Why do you think Jesus is still not willing to have this truth, spoken on the lips of liars, announced? [Hint: Note the response of the crowds to Jesus]

What about us?

- Where might we find ourselves torn between following God’s course for us and following the popular ways of the crowds?

2. What was to be the role of the Twelve? Mark 3:14-15 (compare Mark 1:16-20, where following and fishing are brought together.)

What about us?

- How might we as disciples of Jesus be ‘with Jesus’ (3:14) in order to then engage in gospel ministry? See Mark 1:35; John 15:1-17

3. Read through Mark 3:20-35 and fill in the responses the various groups had towards Jesus. Also fill in what Jesus' response was to them?

Crowd		
Evil Spirits		
Family		
Teachers of the Law		

4. How does Jesus' teaching explain that his powers can't be from Satan? Jesus is the 'stronger man' who ties up the strong man. What does he do? Mark 3:23-27

What about us?

- In what ways do you encounter the influence of Satan in the world?

- Given that we are confronted with Satan's influence daily, what encouragement can we draw from Mark 3:23-27?

5. Since Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:9-13) what is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is referring to? Mark 3:22, 30

6. What makes blaspheming the Holy Spirit an eternal sin (Mark 3:29)?
[Hint: Literally the text reads '*whoever keeps blaspheming*'.]

What about us?

- Can you think of any areas of life where we might commit this sin?

7. How does Jesus describe or define his true family? Mark 3:34-35 also see 1 Timothy 5:1-2.

What about us?

- What might be some of the implications of Jesus' teaching about who are the family of God?

Close in Prayer: [Don't forget to pray for our contacts who need Jesus.]

Study 5 – Mark 4:1-34

‘The Teaching of the Gospel’

Structure:

Mark 4:1-20

The Parable that Explains All Parables

Mark 4:21-34

Parables of the Kingdom

Getting Inside the Text:

This is the only extended slab of teaching Mark provides so it's clearly significant. Interestingly, this section of teaching about the kingdom of God is immediately followed by Jesus, the King, doing four powerful miracles. So we see Jesus teaching with authority followed by his exercising divine authority over the fallen world's threats. God's Kingdom truth and Kingdom power are present in Jesus the King.

1. In Mark 4:1-20 Jesus, in a simple yet profound story, explains the nature of his proclamation ministry. What are the four responses to his word ministry?

In the Parable: 4:3-9	In the Explanation: 4:14-20

What about us?

- Do you find yourself still vulnerable to the first three responses to the Word of God? Share the response you most find in yourself, explaining why you think it is a particular problem for you. Help each other work out strategies to overcome the problems that have surfaced.

- What does this parable teach about authentic disciples? Mark 4:8, 20
Compare Mark 3:34-35

2. Why do you think it is only those who remain with Jesus (the twelve and other disciples) who have the parables explained to them? Mark 4:10-11; compare 4:24-25 and 4:34.

3. Why does Jesus use parables? Mark 4:12-13

[Hint: Isaiah 6:9-10 is quoted here and is found in the context where the prophet's ministry is to bring judgement on a hard hearted Israel.]

4. What do you think Jesus means when he says "*Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear*"? Mark 4:9, 23,

What about us?

- Where are you exposing yourself to the Word of God? Are you growing in the word (Bible)? What habits are helping you do that? How, as a small group, could you encourage each other in reading and living out the Word of God?

5. What warning does Mark 4:21-23 contain for those who choose not to live in the light of God's revealed truth?

6. The final two parables tell us in various ways '*what the kingdom of God is like.*' (4:26, 30). What do they tell us about the kingdom of God which Jesus has already taught has drawn near in his ministry (1:15)?

a. The Growing Seed – Mark 4:26-29

b. The Mustard Seed – Mark 4:30-32

What about us?

- Are we engaged in daily ministry, conscious that Jesus as the farmer is both overseeing what he has sown and will in his good time come to reap a harvest (see Mark 13:26-27)? How can we remain mindful of these truths?

- Knowing the kingdom will experience spectacular growth, in what ways could this encourage us in Christian ministry?

Close in Prayer:

[Don't forget to pray for our contacts who need Jesus, but in the light of Mark 4 let us also pray for boldness and receptive hearts as we endeavour to sow the good news of God into our family and friends lives.]

Study 6 – Mark 4:35-5:43

‘The Champion of the Gospel’

Structure:

Mark 4:35-41	Jesus the Champion of Nature
Mark 5:1-20	Jesus the Champion of Evil
Mark 5:21-34	Jesus the Champion of Sickness
Mark 5:21-43	Jesus the Champion of Death

Getting Inside the Text:

Jesus has just taught about the Kingdom and now he demonstrates that he is the King of God’s Kingdom, with the power to overthrow and conquer all that brings fear and threatens human existence.

What about us?

- Before reading the passage discuss the sorts of things people fear and try to put them into categories.

1. Read the whole text, noting down any common themes.

2. How does Mark show in each case that the situation was beyond people’s capacity to handle?

Mark 4:35-41	
Mark 5:1-17	
Mark 5:25-34	
Mark 5:21-43	

3. How does Mark show that people are in desperate need?

Mark 4:37-38	
Mark 5:1-5	
Mark 5:26-28	
Mark 5:23, 36	

What about us?

- When have you felt out of your depth and how did you respond?

4. How does Jesus respond to the fearful or needy one/s in each encounter and what does this reveal about this powerful King?

Mark 4:39-40	
Mark 5:8, 19	
Mark 5:30-34	
Mark 5: 24, 36	

4. How does Jesus work the miracle and what does this indicate about his identity?

Mark 4:39	
Mark 5:8, 13	
Mark 5:27-29	
Mark 5:24, 41	

5. What responses to Jesus do we observe in these four crisis situations?

[Hint: There is more than one response in each incident.

[Note: Where will you put the response of the demons?]

Negative	Positive

What about us?

- How do you respond to Jesus as he is presented in these four spectacular miracles?

- Look back at the list of fears noted at the beginning. Does this series of four miracles by Jesus address any or all of the fears listed?

- Mark 5:19 has to be one of the best descriptions or definitions of a personal testimony in the Scriptures. Take some time to bullet point your own story focusing on '*How much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.*'

Note: It is incredibly significant to note the contrast of the people's response in the Decapolis (Ten Cities) in Mark 5:16-17 and their later response when Jesus returns in 7:31-8:1. The only thing to account for this is the witness of the restored demon-possessed man in Mark 5:20. We should never underestimate the power of our own gospel stories.

Close in Prayer:

[Don't forget to pray for our contacts, who need Jesus, but in the light of Mark 5:18-20 let us also pray for boldness to share our personal faith stories with our family, friends and contacts.]

Study 7 – Mark 6:1-56 ‘The Challenge of the Gospel’

Structure:

Mark 6:1-6	Jesus Met with Unbelief in Nazareth
Mark 6:7-13	Jesus Sends the Twelve on Mission
Mark 6:14-29	A Test Case in Listening to the Word: Herod’s Folly
Mark 6:30-44	Jesus Feeds the People in the Wilderness
Mark 6:45-56	Jesus the Great ‘I Am’ Walks on Sea and Land

Getting Inside the Text:

After Jesus’ spectacular display of power in last week’s four miracles and the speed of the bush telegraph (already noted in Mark 2:2, 3:8) we might have anticipated Jesus would be riding on the crest of a wave, but Mark reminds us that gospel ministry is filled with challenges. Yet we observe that opposition to the gospel is doomed to failure for the Lord of glory and compassion is on the march.

1. Mark comments that both the people of Nazareth and Jesus were amazed (6:2 and 6:6). What caused the amazement in both cases?
 - a. The people’s amazement - Mark 6:2
 - b. Jesus’ amazement – Mark 6:6

What about us?

- Have you ever experienced Mark 6:4 and if so how did it make you feel?
2. What does Mark record is Jesus’ response to the lack of faith shown in Nazareth? Mark 6:6b-7
 3. What do Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve teach about gospel mission? Mark 6:8-11

What about us?

- It seems reasonably clear that in Mark's Gospel mission involves both preaching and ministries of compassion. What might that look like today?

- How do we feel about sharing the gospel message the Twelve shared? Refer to Mark 6:11-12. Why might we shrink from saying and doing what they were told to do and what would this do to the gospel message?

4. The episode with Herod and John the Baptist recorded in Mark 6:14-29 flows from Herod's misunderstanding about Jesus' identity, no doubt sourced from his guilt. At first reading it seems an odd story to include in the shortest Gospel. Yet the context of Jesus and the Twelve exercising teaching and preaching ministries provides clues as to Mark's purposes.

What can we learn about Herod's spirituality from this story? Mark 6:16, 19-20

5. Herod finds himself caught between the World and the Word, represented by the pleasure of Herodias and the pleasure of John the Baptist's message. What happens and why?

What about us?

- What lessons can people learn from the story of Herod? Who are we listening to? The World or the Word?

- Can you work out how you could use the story of Herod and John the Baptist as an evangelism tool when sharing your faith?

6. In our next scene Mark records a feast provided by the true King and teacher of Israel which stands in stark contrast to the drunken feast of the would-be-King Herod.

Read Mark 6:30-44 recording everything you can learn about Jesus' person and how he exercises his ministry.

What about us?

- In Mark 6:34 there is an interesting link between compassion and teaching which flows from Jesus' observation that the people '*were like sheep without a shepherd*'. Certainly, as we have just seen, Herod was a useless shepherd. To what degree do we look at our pleasure-seeking, often godless Australian society and see them as 'Shepherdless Sheep'?

- How might we follow Jesus and exercise teaching compassion to them?

7. Read Mark 6:45-52. In what sense do we see both the humanity and divinity of Jesus?

Note: In this section Mark also notes what will become a recurring theme: Despite all the acts of power the Twelve had observed they had yet to grasp the divine identity of Jesus (6:51b-52). They appear to be locked into a very human view of Jesus as a prophet or earthly Messiah like King David, men who exercise divine power, but aren't divine.

What about us?

- As Christians we know that Jesus was God incarnate, both God and man. How does this truth currently impact how you live your faith out in daily life? How else could it make an impact or difference? For example refer Hebrews 4:14-16.

Close in Prayer:

[Don't forget to pray for our contacts, who are, spiritually at least, 'shepherdless' and need to come to know the Good Shepherd Jesus.]

Study 8 – Mark 7:1-37 ‘The Heart of the Gospel’

Structure:

Mark 7:1-13	Jesus Gets Tough with Jerusalem Jewish Leaders
Mark 7:14-23	Jesus Identifies the Heart of the Human Problem
Mark 7:24-30	Jesus Shows that The Gospel is for all with Faith
Mark 7:31-37	A Healing that Represents Jesus’ Heart’s Desire

Getting Inside the Text:

While Jesus’ ministry continues to flourish among the everyday Jews and social outcasts (6:53-56), the tensions with the official Jewish religious establishment continue unabated. Mark 7 shows Jesus engaging with some Jewish Jerusalem heavies and a Gentile woman; their contrasting responses to Jesus couldn’t be any different. But always percolating through the narrative is the pressing question of the true identity of Jesus.

What about us?

- What are the sources of people’s values and behaviours? How do particular behaviours become important to some and not to others?

- What are some possible problems and dangers of the fact we draw on different sources for our values and behaviours?

1. In Mark 7:1-13 Jesus and the Jerusalem Jewish delegate engage in debate. What do they each use as their basic source material for their arguments?

a. The Jerusalem Jewish Delegate – 7:3-5

b. Jesus – 7:6-13

2. Despite the fact that many cultural traditions may be morally neutral, what does Jesus show can be the danger of human traditions?

What about us?

- How might we avoid falling into the trap of letting our personal human traditions and preferences be the cause of conflict within the Christian community? For help refer to Romans 14:1-15:6

3. In Mark 7:14-23 Jesus puts his finger on the heart of the human problem. What is it?

4. What sort of things does Jesus include in his list of behaviours that come out of the corrupt human heart? Mark 7:20-23

What about us?

- How do we feel about Jesus putting greed, envy and arrogance in the same list as sexual immorality, theft and murder? What does this tell us about human values and God's?

5. Mark now records Jesus going to the extremities of Jewish territory where he is confronted by a persistent Gentile woman (Mark 7:24-30). What was Jesus wanting to do and how does he initially respond to the woman's interruption?

6. We have seen Jesus show consistent compassion to all people in need, so how can we account for his apparently harsh words to the woman? Mark 7:27. What do you think he is seeking to discover from this Gentile woman? [Hint: Note her response in 7:28 and Jesus' subsequent response in 7:29-30.]

What about us?

- Are there any lessons to be drawn from Jesus' response to the woman when we encounter people on the outside of the church, who request Christian ministry, e.g. Baptism, weddings, funerals, financial aid, etc?

Note: Mark from time to time in his narrative, strategically places miracles, which almost function like acted parables, teaching truths through actions. We encounter one of these in Mark 7:31-37 and there is another in next week's passage in Mark 8:22-26.

7. What is the significance of a deaf-mute being healed in Gentile territories, while the Jewish authorities and even the Twelve are spiritually tongue-tied and blind (Mark 3:6, 6:52, 7:5, 8:11, 8:17-18)?

What about us?

- It has been said that traditional and cultural church attenders are harder to reach with the gospel of Christ than complete outsiders. Do you think this is true? Why do you agree or disagree?

Close in Prayer:

[Don't forget to pray for our contacts, who are *'deaf and mute'* when it comes to understanding Jesus and his gospel.]

Study 9 – Mark 8:1-26 ‘The Vision of the Gospel’

Structure:

Mark 8:1-10	Jesus Shows Compassion to a Mixed-Race Crowd
Mark 8:11-21	Jesus Warns About Following Any but Himself
Mark 8:22-26	Another Acted Parable Showing Jesus Desire
Mark 8:27-30	Finally the Twelve’s Eyes Start to Open

Getting Inside the Text:

Geography can be important as we read the text and so it’s important to remember as we read the text that from Mark 7:24-8:10 Jesus is largely ministering in regions where both Jews and Gentiles lived side by side. Paul Barnett writes, *‘The gathering of the four thousand in the Decapolis... (8:1-10) probably represents the climax of an extensive ministry in these Gentile regions, just as the feeding of the five thousand represents the climax of his ministry to the Galileans.’* Already it’s becoming clear that the gospel of God may have come via the Jewish race but it was for all races.

1. What prompts Jesus to feed the 4,000 mixed-race crowd and what is the result of the feeding? Mark 8:2-3, 8

2. Given the ministry and experience the disciples have had following Jesus, what does the disciple’s question in Mark 8:4 suggest about their understanding? Also see Mark 8:17-21.

What about us?

• We tend to be critical of the disciples for their lack of understanding of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. Yet knowing what we know about Jesus, his cross, resurrection and ascension, can we honestly say that we are living out our faith in the world as the radical disciples he calls us to be? What areas of life do you struggle with? Witnessing? Generosity? Prayer?

Note: Mark won't let us forget that Jesus' mortal enemies (3:6) are always nipping at his heels. Once again the Pharisees come to test him, asking for a dramatic, probably cosmic sign of the Messiah's arrival (8:11), which was in accord with the expectations in their Jewish traditions.

3. How does Jesus respond to them and what does this indicate about Jesus' feelings towards them? Mark 8:12-13

What about us?

- Do we grieve or grumble when faced with the persistent opposition of those who reject our Lord and faith? What does our response suggest about our heart condition?

4. The appearance of opposition leads Jesus to warn his disciples about what? Mark 8:15.

Note: The yeast of the Pharisees in this context is most likely their making their trust in him dependent on signs (8:11). In the light of Mark 6:17-29 Herod's yeast may refer to the dangers of not bringing one's life into line with the Word of God, listening but not getting and therefore obeying. Interestingly this is what we immediately discover the disciples are doing (8:16-21).

What about us?

- Is there any sense in which we demand signs for our faith to be maintained? What sort of signs do we look for?

- What sort of things can keep us from understanding and living out the teachings of Jesus?

Note: Given the disciple's lack of understanding (8:21) Mark cleverly records Jesus' own acted parable (8:22-26). We know Jesus could have healed him immediately but this two-stage healing of a blind man is designed to teach that the disciples understanding of Jesus is also coming in two stages, the first of which is about to take place when they finally identify him as the Messiah (8:27-30). The second stage will not be completed until after the resurrection and the Spirit is given.

5. Why does Jesus tell the blind man to go straight home and not even go into the local village? Mark 8:26 [Hint: 8:17-18, 21, 31-32]

What about us?

- What are some of the wrong ideas about Jesus that exist in our Australian multi-cultural society?

- How might we address these with those who hold them?

Concluding Comment:

Mark 8 is the turning point in Mark climaxing with the Twelve finally having their eyes opened to Jesus' true identity (8:29). Mark 1-8 has focused on Jesus' identity as God's anointed Son, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Mark 9-16 will see the shadow of the cross loom with increasing clarity as the narrative moves forward. This will be the last study in this current series, but we'll return to finish studies on the second half of Mark's Gospel in early 2014.

Close in Prayer:

[Don't forget to pray for our contacts and also those who have joined our society from overseas and other religious backgrounds, who may have very skewed ideas about Jesus our Messiah.]

Notes and Questions



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