

THE GOSPEL OF  
**MARK**

HOW JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING



## Introduction

The significance and identity of Jesus remains a contentious issue. But who was he really? If we want to know the truth about Jesus, we must turn the Gospels, the only reliable and comprehensive accounts we have about his life. The Gospel of Mark is likely to be the earliest of the four gospels. Mark introduces his account as 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. He is writing for those living after the time of Jesus – to explain how the Christian message originated, what Jesus did, who he was. For Mark, Jesus was nothing less than the promised 'Christ/Messiah', and the 'Son of God'. This is no ordinary story, but concerns the King and Saviour of all the world.

## Things you should know about Mark's Gospel

Mark's Gospel has a few notable features that make it different to the other Gospels:

1. Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the 4 Gospel accounts we have of the life of Jesus. (Luke: 19,482, Matthew: 18,346, John: 15,634 & Mark: 11,304)
2. Only 3% of Mark's Gospel is unique to Mark. The other 97% can be found in the other Gospels, especially Matthew & Mark. 35% of Luke's Gospel is unique and 20% Matthew's is unique to his Gospel. And it would appear that Matthew and Luke borrowed heavily from Mark.
3. While Mark's may be the shortest of the Gospels, he includes more miracles than Matthew & Luke (18 in all).
4. Mark's Gospel is "action packed". Mark uses the word "immediately" 40 times in his Gospel. He also focuses more on the actions of Jesus than the teaching of Jesus.

5. Mark seems to have been written for non-Jewish readers (or at least having them in mind). You can see it in things like:
- **There's no genealogy** - It's Jewish readers would place significance on Jesus's ancestry. Roman readers aren't going to care as much.
  - **Mark adopts Roman time (6:48, 13:35)** - Jews and Romans marked time differently. For the Jew, the day began at dawn and ended at sundown. We've adopted the Roman method of beginning the day at midnight and dividing it in twelve hour intervals.
  - **Mark interprets Hebrew and Aramaic terms (6:27; 12:15,42; 15:16,39)** - Mark doesn't take for granted that his readers are familiar with language that would be common in the Palestinian region. When he uses an Aramaic term, he typically explains it.
6. Mark's Gospel finishes at Mark 16:8. The section from verse 9 to 20 is seen as a later addition and really should be put down in a footnote. The best and most reliable ancient manuscripts of Mark's gospel do not have vs 9-20.
7. One of the real surprises with Mark's Gospel is that we don't get to see or hear from the risen Jesus. Mark's Gospel finishes with these words about the women going to the tomb and finding it empty:
- Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. (Mark 16:8)*
- No sightings of the risen Jesus. No meeting between Jesus and the disciples. Just an empty tomb and terrified followers who don't say anything to anyone. Seems a little strange, but I think Mark had a purpose.

## Study 1 – The Hope of a Nation – Mark 1

*Throughout history we've seen the hopes of a nation rest on one leader (Dr Martin Luther King Jnr, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, etc). People seem to know things are not right with the world ... that they could be better.*

What would people say was the biggest problem in our world today? What would they say was the solution?

While Mark seems to have written a “Gentile friendly” gospel he still opens with 2 quotes Old Testament: Malachi 3:1 & Isaiah 40:3. How would you sum up the quotes? What statement is Mark wanting to make by opening the Gospel this way?

Mark tells us what John is wearing. Reading 2 Kings 1:7-8 & Malachi 4:5-6 helps us understand the point.

It seems that lots of people were responding to John the Baptist's preaching. What might that tell us about the mood in Israel at the time? What would they be hoping for?

Why do you think that Jesus was baptised?

Jesus says ““The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). Are we still living in that “time”?

What do you make of the calling of the disciples (Mark 1:16-20)?  
What do you think it tells us about Jesus?

As Christians we are often tempted to just look at the New Testament and feel the Old Testament is irrelevant to us. What do you think Mark would say about the importance of the Old Testament?

When you look around the world, what is it that most clearly tells you that we desperately need the Kingdom that Jesus has brought in? How do people today see Jesus? How is Mark’s description different?

## Study 2 – The Problem with Religion – Mark 2-3

*Perhaps the strongest opposition Jesus faced came from the entrenched religious authorities in Israel ... and their commitment to their own religious traditions that seemed to leave no place for this 'Messiah' or his message of grace.*

In 2:1 – 3:34 Mark gives us six stories where Jesus meets with opposition and criticism:

- healing the paralysed man (2 v 1-12)
- bad associations (2 v 13-17)
- questions about fasting (2 v 18-22)
- 'working' on the Sabbath (2 v 23-28)
- healing on the Sabbath (3 v 1-6)
- driving out demonic spirits (3 v 20-30)

Discuss each story (briefly).

What is Jesus accused of/criticised for, and how does Jesus respond (if he does)?

In summary - what do these encounters reveal to us about who Jesus is and what he'd come to do?

What was Jesus offering people if they listened and followed him?

What criticism or warnings does Jesus direct at the religious leaders (and perhaps to all of those listening)?

Have you come across similar tensions in a church context between the 'gospel of grace' and what you might call religious respectability or entrenched religious traditions?

What "discomforts" will Christians need to put up with if a church is to be more like a hospital for the sick (2:17) than an exclusive, religious club?

How do you think you could be more like Jesus in your attitude to those who need to experience the mercy of God?

## Study 3 – The Kingdom of God is ... – Mark 4-5

*The Gospel writers were careful in the way they arranged the material in their Gospels. And in this section of Mark, we see something that doesn't appear in any of the other Gospels.*

What is the main point of each of the 4 parables Jesus tell:

Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20)

Parable of the Lampstand (Mark 4:21-25)

Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)

Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)

Is there an overall theme in these 4 parables? If so, what is it? What encouragement would Mark (and Jesus) want his original readers to get from these parables.

How would you say the miracles of Jesus were viewed today?



After telling 4 Parables, Mark gives us the account of 4 Miracles. What are the miracles and what power do we see from Jesus?

1.

2.

3.

4.

How did people respond to each of the miracles? How does Mark contrast fear and faith in each episode? And how would you summarize the purpose or point Mark is wanting to make with these 4 miracles? *(NB this is the only place in any of the Gospels the writer gives us 4 miracles in a row.)*

What role did the miracles play in the life & ministry of Jesus?

Do Jesus' miracles mean that Christians now can expect a life free of troubles such as sickness? Why/why not?

## Study 4 – A Prophet Without Honour or The Cost of Following Jesus - Mark 6

*It soon becomes obvious that there is a cost in following Jesus. The chapter begins with Jesus returning to Nazareth where he receives a less than enthusiastic response. Will Israel recognise and welcome their long-promised Messiah?*

**Read Mark 6:1-6.**

Do you find it surprising that Jesus receives such a poor reception from his hometown?

In this section 6:14-56 Mark describes two very different kind of banquets, hosted by two very different kings. What do the nature of these parties reveal to us about their hosts. What would you say is the difference between the authority/leadership of King Herod and that of King Jesus?

Verse 34 is a reference to Ezekiel 34. Read Ezekiel 34:1-11. The leaders of Israel are described as shepherds. What is God's case against them.

## **Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20**

Thinking about this passage and the one from Ezekiel, how is Jesus presented to us as the ideal king in contrast to Israel's leaders?

What makes Jesus a leader worth following? How should we, as His followers, imitate Him?

Can you think of ways in which churches (even ours?) can show an unhealthy concern for status, wealth, reputation?

How should the example of Jesus (particularly in how he exercised leadership) shape how a church community should operate?

## Study 5 – The Traditions of Men – Mark 7:1-23

*One of the sad things we see in all the Gospels is that the greatest opposition to Jesus was from the very people who were hoping and praying for the Messiah to come: The Pharisees & religious leaders.*

If Jesus were to come today, what reception would he receive from today's church leaders? Why?

When can traditions be a good thing and when can they become unhelpful or evil?

The religious leaders first confront Jesus for the way his disciples are acting. What is their issue and how does Jesus' answer them? (Look up Isaiah 29:13-16 and read it)

### **What is "Corban"?**

*The 10 Commandments said God's people should "honour their father and mother" (Ex 20:12), but the Pharisees negated that command by teaching you could give money to the temple in lieu of helping their parents in need. Whatever money might have been used to provide for aging parents could be dedicated to the temple treasury instead. Saying, "It is Corban" would exempt a person from his responsibility to his parents. In other words, the Pharisees took a legitimate Corban offering and used it in an illegitimate and devious way to defraud their parents (and enrich themselves). Thus, the Law of God was nullified.*

In verse 8 Jesus gives the religious leaders a stinging rebuke. Do you think that is a danger we need to look out for? Can you think of how that mistake like this might happen for Christians today?

In vs.15 Jesus makes a very bold statement declaring all food clean. Summarise what he says and what it would mean for Jewish people.

Go back to the Isaiah passage Jesus quoted. What is the main point Isaiah is making? And how might that apply for us today?

Why do people like traditions and rituals? What is Jesus saying is central to a relationship with God?

How would you respond to your neighbour who said that they were a Christian because they had been baptised and they go to church from time to time? What does your witness show to your neighbours about what it means to be a Christian?

## Study 6 – "Who do you say that I am?" – Mark 8

*This is a significant turning point in the book of Mark, the point when it starts to click for the disciples who Jesus really is. The story, and Jesus' mission, is increasingly directed towards Jerusalem, as Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that his kingdom can only be established through the greatest of costs.*

### Read Mark 8:1-26

Given the previous 'feeding' event in chapter 6, what is surprising about the disciples reaction in verse 1-6?

What is unusual about the healing of the blind man in v22-26? Thinking about this and the healing at the end of chapter 7 (that of the deaf and mute man), what do you think Mark is trying to show us about the

disciples? (Notice how Jesus describes them in verse 17-18).

*[So the disciples do not yet fully understand who Jesus is, they do not yet truly 'hear' or 'see'. They need someone to 'open' these for them...]*

### Read Mark 8:27-9:1

What does Peter now see (and declare)? (v29)

What does he not yet see? (v31-33)

What does Jesus understand about what his future holds? How might this help us understand his strong rebuke of Peter?

What does Jesus expect from his followers?

What do you think it means to 'lose your life' and 'take up your cross'? (the following verses might be helpful to consider: Romans 15:7, Ephesians 4:32 – 5:2, 1 Peter 4:12-14)

What wonderful promise does Jesus give to those who follow him (v35)?

In what ways do you think we are tempted to be ashamed of Jesus and his words? Pray for the courage to own the name of Jesus before others.

## Study 7 – Following Jesus – Mark 9-10

*The end of chapter 8 is the turning point in Mark's Gospel. From here on in Jesus focuses on teaching the disciples and talking about what discipleship will look like.*

It is one thing to call yourself a Christian, but would you consider yourself to be disciple of Jesus?

Mark 8 finishes with the disciples recognising Jesus is the Messiah ... the saviour God promised to send. How would you sum up the challenge that he makes to the disciples now that they know for certain Jesus is? (Mark 8:34-9:1)

Jesus take Peter, James & John to the top of a mountain and Moses & Elijah appear. Why do you think it is these 2 men and not Abraham & David or Joshua & Daniel?



Jesus seems to be aware that the disciples don't fully understand the plan, so Jesus announces it again (9:30-31). How do you think you would respond if you were one of the disciples ... especially Peter, James or John?

What do these passages teach us about discipleship & leadership?

9:35

9:37

9:38-40

9:42-50

10:17-31

James and John don't seem to grasp the type of leadership that Jesus expects from his disciples. What are James and John thinking with their question? Do we still see that kind of thinking among Christians today?

## Study 8 – Claiming the Crown – Mark 11-12

*Jesus arrives in Jerusalem ... the city of the King ... to claim his crown. But the religious leaders are still questioning his authority. These chapters capture three days of action in Jerusalem, and we discover that going up against Jesus is a risky business. But as we'll see, there is much more at stake here than winning an argument or the heart of the crowds.*

### **Read Mark 11:1-11**

Look up Zechariah 9:9-10. What is the significance of Jesus riding on a donkey?

What do the shouts of the crowd tell us about their expectations of Jesus?

The book of Malachi describes the people of Israel complaining that God does deal with injustice (Malachi 2:17). Malachi says that the Lord will come to His temple, but in judgment “who can endure the day of his coming?” (Malachi 3:1-5). Mark quotes from this passage at the beginning of his Gospel (1:2), and now we see Jesus comes as the Lord to His temple, and he comes in judgement.

## Read Mark 11:11-25

What does Jesus say God's people have forgotten about the purpose of the temple?

How does the fig tree 'episode' (which bookends the temple visit), help us understand why Jesus does what he does in the temple?

*Jesus condemns the existing temple, because it is not being used as God intended. The fig tree, which represents Israel (see Micah 7), has withered (v21). It has been judged and will soon be removed. Jesus' new Kingdom will become what Israel and its temple could not, a place of prayer and forgiveness for all the nations.*

In what ways can the church today fail to fulfil the role of "God's temple"? In what ways do we still have a role in helping people from all nations to find peace with God?

*The third day in Jerusalem brings more conflict and accusation.*

## Read Mark 11:27–12:44.

Try to briefly summarise the interactions between Jesus and;

- a. the teachers of the law and the elders,
- b. Pharisees and Herodians,
- c. the Sadducees.

In amongst all of this, Jesus uses the parable of the tenants to condemn the leaders of Israel, because they will not accept his authority. How does the parable of the tenants assure us about how this story will ultimately end (see verse 9-11)?

What is the warning here for those who reject Jesus?

Pray for someone you know who needs to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

## Study 9 – It's the End of the World as We Know It – Mark 13

*We come now to what many would say was the most complicated part of Mark's Gospel. Many see this as a prediction of what is to come and particularly the end of the world. Jesus uses apocalyptic imagery to describe coming events. Most people would see this passage as a puzzle to solve and that it is talking about events that will happen in our time. But maybe there is a better way to understand what Jesus is saying here.*

What is your first reaction when you read Mark 13?

The passage begins with one of the disciples making an off-hand comment about how impressive the Temple in Jerusalem was. What is the significance of the Temple for the people of Israel? What are the 2 questions the disciples ask? (vs4)

### **Read Mark 13:5-13**

What warning does Jesus give and what does he say they can expect as followers of Jesus?

## **The abomination of desolation**

*The book of Daniel provides background for this passage. The “abomination of desolation” of verse 14 is an allusion to Daniel 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11. When Jesus says, “let the reader understand”, he probably means, “understand that what Daniel spoke of, I am now warning you about”. The emphasis is upon the “abomination” or “horror” or “sacrilege”. Jesus is warning the disciples that something horrendous is coming ... soon.*

Read 13:35-37 - How does the time frame and the reference to sleeping/watching seem to fit with events in the following chapter?

Evening

Midnight

Rooster Crows

Dawn

*(Read 13:16 and 14:51-52. Seems like more than a coincidence!)*

How would you sum up what Mark 13 is about? What is the take-home message that Jesus wants his disciples to have?