

The Gospel of Mark – D-Group

Content for Fall 2021

Session #2 (For September 15)
Mark 1:1-2:12



A Look Ahead

As we launch into Mark's Gospel, here's a basic preview. In the last session, we began with Jesus' Parable of the Seed and Soils (Mark 4:1:20). It was a good text to serve as a launching pad into this broader journey – considering how we are going to respond to the Word. For the next 10 weeks, we will be working our way throughout the story of Jesus' life as Mark relays it. During this time, we will make our way through all 16 chapters. These guides will have two basic sections:

- (1) **A look at the broader text/section we are covering from Mark's Gospel** (in this guide's case, 1:1-2:12) ... within this basic portion, we'll generally use the same basic questions to help us consider the text's message from one guide to the next.
- (2) **A focus on key scenes from the broader text that are worth a closer look** ... while we want to get the big picture, we also want to focus in on certain parts of the text. Sometimes, it might be a single scene that receives all the focus in this portion; other times, we'll consider 2-3. The point of this is to dig a little deeper into these scenes to consider the message the text is communicating.

All in all, the point of these guides is to help us navigate our way through this gospel as we come to see Jesus more clearly through the portrait Mark offers.

The Broader Section – Mark 1:1-2:12

Especially when it comes to the reflection questions in this section, these are far more for your benefit if you find it helpful to jot such things down as you're reading. What matters most here in this part is actually reading the text itself.

READ Mark 1:1-2:12

Some quick notes on this section:

The opening words of Mark point to "the Good News" and Jesus' identity (a contrast to the way Matthew and Luke start with the birth narratives).

There are a couple of preparatory scenes: (1) John the Baptist in general preparing the way for Jesus and (2) Jesus' baptism and temptation (much briefer scenes in Mark). There is a significant focus on Jesus' identity in these parts.

Notice the emphasis on the Good News in 1:14-15 (more on this below). At the outset of Jesus' ministry, Mark is providing a basic summary of what He is bringing about: the Kingdom of God is breaking into this world and life as we have known it – GOOD NEWS indeed!

As Jesus begins his ministry, He calls these disciples to join Him. We see at the outset of His ministry His authority that amazed the crowds as He casts out evil spirits, heals and preaches. Overall, the emphasis with miracles is on (1) Jesus' power/authority, (2) what it shows about His identity, (3) His compassion toward people (e.g. 1:40ff) and (4) the general response of amazement from the crowds.

Within this portion of Mark's Gospel, we see what's called the "Messianic Secret" as Jesus expresses a desire for His identity to be kept quiet (i.e. with the evil spirit in vv. 24 and 34 as well as with the leper who was healed in vv. 44ff). It's not a question of whether or not they were accurate in their understanding of who Jesus is (they were!); it seems to be more a matter of timing (when it is the right time for His identity to be clear) and clarity (He's not the kind of Messiah most were expecting). Mark is certainly not keeping Jesus' identity secret from his readers. After all, it's announced from the very first verse! In this way, we get some insider information as we read.

More on 2:1ff below – once again, we see the emphasis on the same miracle-related themes identified above. Jesus comes bringing the reign of God's Kingdom to earth. No wonder the crowds were impressed (2:12); they should have been!

In general, what questions and/or observations do you have from reading this text?

What does this section teach us about Jesus and His identity?

APPLICATION-Centered ... what does this overall section teach us about following Jesus? For example, what are some of the instructions or commands we should live out (note if these are specific to an individual or more broadly for any follower of Jesus)? What are the Christ-like attitudes and actions this text highlights as appropriate for us to model as His followers?

Key Scene #1 from Mark 1:14-15

This is less of a “scene” than it is summary statement for the entire Gospel of Mark ... and, for that matter, for the basic reality of what Jesus has brought about. Typically, when we think of the Good News, our first thought goes to the eternal life/salvation that we receive through Jesus. That, of course, is not a bad thing for our minds to go toward when we hear the word Gospel or Good News. As the Gospel writers tell the story, though, it’s not quite so limited: most broadly, it’s the declaration (an announcement or proclamation, even) of what God is bringing about through Jesus.

Here are the specific emphases about the Good News we see in this summary:

- **It’s the FULFILLMENT of God’s plan** (“the time has come” means that there is a climax to what Jesus is bringing about). We know from our perspective that there is still more to come. Yet, it is Jesus’ arrival – and all that He accomplished through His life, ministry, death and resurrection – that initiates all of God’s promises coming to completion. Even the opening quotations from the OT point in this direction.
- **It’s the “coming near” of God’s KINGDOM.** In the Gospels, the Kingdom of God is not *just* a future reality, but rather a recognition of this basic fact: the presence of the King means the presence of the Kingdom. Wherever God reigns, His Kingdom is breaking into this world (as is shown by the defeat of evil spirits, diseases, etc. – the broken parts of our world are being set right by Jesus). We think of a kingdom in the sense of a geographical location as did the first century Jews in Palestine. They missed Jesus because of the way He didn’t fit their expectations for the Messianic Kingdom. Yet, it’s good to think of His Kingdom as being a reality *wherever His reign is present*. (As a side note, this seems to be the emphasis of Jesus’ line in the Lord’s prayer as well; see Matthew 6:10.) While it is Good News that His Kingdom is breaking into our world, it requires a certain kind of response as well: to embrace His reign.
- **That’s the basic point of the RESPONSE called for: “REPENT and BELIEVE!”** It’s far more than just feeling sorry for our sin (though a rejection of sin’s reign is certainly part of it); it’s a whole re-orientation of our allegiance around Jesus and His Kingdom. We embrace this message of what God is doing through Jesus. We live our lives under His reign instead of whatever standard we might have lived under before. For sure, that includes embracing the blessings and goodness of this GOOD NEWS of the Kingdom. It also means responding to Jesus with obedient discipleship – a response we see on display in the story of Mark.

Without a doubt, there’s a lot loaded in this simple summary!

How does this shift your perspective about the Gospel/Good News? Why is it good for us to see it as more than just the benefits we receive because of Jesus’ death and resurrection?

When we put Jesus’ miracles in this context, what reassures you about the Kingdom reign of Jesus when put in contrast with the brokenness of our world in its present condition?

Practically speaking, what does it look like for each of us to respond properly to this Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom? It's both an announcement to believe and a reality in which we participate.

Key Scene #2 from Mark 2:1-12

There are many directions we can go with *any* miracle story. We can highlight Jesus' compassion which is definitely a good feature for us to notice. We can be amazed by His ability – again, a very appropriate thing to see. We can even get devotional about the details (*e.g. being the kind of friend who helps bring someone else to Jesus ... that's certainly a better takeaway than to be the kind of friend who will cut a hole in a roof for another ☺*). In the end, though, all miracle stories have a pretty common goal: to give us a clearer glimpse of Jesus' identity. Sure, there are unique nuances to *every* miracle story. Yet, at the very core, such stories are told to cause readers to recognize something about who Jesus is. In that way, the miracle itself is less the end focus and more of a means to the true end of seeing Him more clearly!

Within the story, which does Mark point to as more impressive: Jesus' ability to heal a man who had long been paralyzed or Jesus authority to heal sin? (Notice what Jesus' first words are about and the way the miracle provides evidence of Jesus' broader claim.)

What are the main emphases about Jesus' identity in this story?

This text highlights the greater priority Jesus puts on the “spiritual” (the forgiveness of this man's sins) vs. the “physical” (the healing). Both matter to Him; it's just that one matters more. This is a common theme in Jesus' ministry. ***How can we care about both as we represent Jesus while still making sure the main thing remains the main thing?***

In light of who Jesus is shown to be in this scene, what does it indicate about the type of response that He deserves from us?