



MARK

MARK'S GOSPEL

Real Jesus, Real Life

Group Discussion Guide

Mark 1:1-8

September 21, 2008

Where we start . . .

What is the best "good news" you ever heard? What made it such good news?

What we read . . .

Mark starts his account of Jesus' life by telling us that what he is writing is "good news." That's what the word "Gospel" means. So let's start reading his good news by looking at Mark 1:1-8.

When you think about the good news about Jesus, where do you think this good news begins? What's the first piece of this good news?

Where does Mark anchor the good news about Jesus he is going to share with us?

What does Mark have in view in the quotes he draws from the Old Testament and the introduction of John? What is he underscoring?

Why this matters . . .

It can be easy to think that the Gospel begins with Jesus' coming on the scene; but Mark tells us that it includes much more. What difference does it make to understand that the Gospel has Old Testament roots?

When you look back at those Old Testament roots of the Gospel (as underscored by Mark), how does it shape the way you think about your life? What difference does the "LORD'S" arrival in the world make to you?



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Diving in . . .

Mark quickly introduces us to the subject of his work: the “Gospel” of Jesus. Gospel means “good news.” It was the word that was used, in Mark’s day, to speak about the announcement of a military victory or some other report of importance to the general public. Even many non-churched people have thoughts about what the “Gospel” is; most people recognize that it has something to do with Jesus.

We want to press beyond just a vague sense of what “Gospel” means and set the stage to think well about what Mark is going to share with us in the weeks and months to come. We want our people to understand that the “Gospel” is *news about God breaking into our world in a decisive way.*

Discussing . . .

The opening section of the discussion guide (“Where we start . . .”) is intended to prime the pump with regard to the subject of the discussion. We invite you to explore, with your group, the idea of “good news” in general. Talk about what makes “good news” good! In the course of the discussion, try and highlight a few of these components:

Good news *is* good news because:

- It is the report of something that happened; it’s more than wishful thinking.
- It tells of something that has bearing on the hearer’s life; it touches us personally.
- It really is *good*! We don’t pretend when it comes to good news.

Those three ideas flavor how we think about the Gospel. It *is* Good News! Like the military reports of old, the Gospel is a report of something marvelously good that has happened (or is happening) that has bearing on our lives. And Mark is going to fill in the picture of that good news for us.

As you turn to read the passage under review (Mark 1:1-8), it will be clear that there is more here than you will be able to exhaustively discuss in one time together. So, we want to focus on a few particulars. As you will be able to tell from the questions (“What we read . . .”) we want to call attention to the Old Testament passages that Mark cites.

When most people think of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the tendency is to anchor this good news in the birth of Jesus or the beginning of His ministry. But Mark has other ideas. Mark is telling us that the good news about Jesus has Old Testament roots. This is what we want to highlight in the first question under the “What we read . . .” heading. Contrary to how we often think about it, the good news is rooted in the Old Testament, not simply the New Testament.

The quotes are from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Malachi 3:1-4. Why does Mark quote two

passages but only refer to Isaiah? Well, he is not being deceptive. He is simply following the common practice of the day. Rabbis and teachers would often draw together a few passages when they were speaking on a subject (a practice referred to as “conflating” the texts) and then only mention the primary text or starting point. Kind of like an “Isaiah . . . and others . . . have said” approach only leaving out the “and others;” that others were included would have been assumed.

As you read what Mark cites, you will want to encourage your group to read what Mark is saying *as if they don’t already know where the story is going.* The reason? Because when we think we know where things are going, we can easily make assumptions about what Mark is saying.

And here’s the biggest example of that assumption-making. Most churched people, when reading Mark 1:2-3, read “the Lord” (in verse 3) as if it specifically refers to Jesus. While it is true that Mark will ultimately make that identification, the Old Testament passages he cites do not have Jesus personally in view; the passages specifically refer to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

You might want to take your group back to those Old Testament passages (noted above) and read the quotes in context. When you come across the word “LORD” (all in capitals in most English translations) in those passages, point out that that particular form of “lord” actually stands in the place of the personal name of God (often understood to be pronounced Yahweh). What both Isaiah and Malachi are talking about is how the Covenant God of Israel is planning on making a personal appearance in the world in a decisive way to set things right for the nation (and for the world!). And, that is a huge thought . . . one we don’t often see as the real root of the “good news.” (Just think back through your Old Testament stories a bit to get a grasp on what it might mean for Yahweh to show up on the scene . . . things like the ten plagues, Mt. Sinai, or Isaiah’s vision of God in Isaiah 6! A bit of a different “sense” for things than we typically get if we only read Mark 1:2-3 casually.)

After wrestling a bit with these Old Testament ideas, it comes time to think through what difference Mark’s beginning makes to us (the “Why this matters . . .” section of the discussion guide). The two questions that wrap up the discussion guide highlight two related ideas that might have some impact on the way we understand the Gospel and how the Gospel could well shape the way we do life.

In the first place, it is important to realize that Jesus’ entrance into the world is not a “plan B” for God. What Mark is about to tell us—about Jesus’ life and ministry—is not some addendum to what God has been up to. In fact, Jesus’ coming into the world is part and parcel of God’s plan all along, and this idea is underscored by rooting the good news in not only the New Testament but by rooting it in the Old Testament.

When most people think of Jesus’ “coming,” it often seems that the picture that comes to mind is one of a peasant-looking, soft-spoken kind of nondescript Jewish guy. Now He may well have looked something like that, but what Mark is telling us is that this one who is coming into the world is none other than Yahweh, the Covenant God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

To grasp the magnitude of that could really enliven our understanding of what the Good News is about. This is life-altering, cosmic-dimension kind of stuff. Mark opens his Gospel with an assertion that—if we took it to heart and really paid attention—would force us to conclude that life on planet earth is going to be revolutionized by the personal presence of the Creator Himself. And *that* is what he will unfold for us in his Gospel.