

Mark Bible Study

Study 2 (week of Sept. 22nd - 24th)

Background to the Gospel of Mark

Mark is the John Mark mentioned in Acts (12:12, 25, 13:13). He belonged to a founding family of the Christian Church. In Acts 12 we are told that the church gathered in the house of Mark's mother to pray for Peter. The house was an important centre in the life of the early church for Peter went straight there when he was miraculously released from prison, assuming he would find the church gathered there.

Mark's family must have been wealthy to afford a large house with servants (Rhoda, who left Peter at the doorstep). Mark's cousin Barnabas, was a property owner (Acts 4:37). We do not know how much of Jesus' ministry Mark witnessed first hand, much of what is recorded in his gospel was passed on to him through Peter, but he must have witnessed Jesus' final days before his crucifixion. The significance of Jesus' crucifixion obviously impacted Mark. Half of his gospel, chapter 8 verse 31 to chapter 16 point to Jerusalem and Jesus' death there.

Mark was close to Peter and church tradition tells us that he was in Rome at the time of Peter's martyrdom under Emperor Nero (AD 65). Mark likely wrote this gospel as Peter related his experiences with Jesus to Mark. Peter's life was about to end and it was important that firsthand witnesses record the sayings of Jesus for future generations.

Unique characteristics of Mark's Gospel:

Many of the events of the gospel centre around Peter, which would be natural if it was Peter who relayed the information on to Mark.

- 1:29-32, 2:1-11 take place at Peter's house
- 1:35-49 'Simon and those with him'
- 4:13 Peter and the others are rebuked by Jesus
- 16:7 'Go and tell his disciples and Peter'

The gospel is very honest in recording the failures of Peter and the other disciples. The disciples are shown to be wrong, afraid, and slow in their understanding.

- 4:40 the disciples are rebuked
- 7:18 'are you all so dull'
- 9:5-6 Peter looks very foolish

Mark's gospel moves quickly in comparison to the other gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry. Mark uses the Greek word *euthus* 41 times. It is translated as 'immediately', 'just then', 'straightaway', 'without delay', 'at once'. Mark records Jesus' Aramaic words (5:41). Aramaic was one of the languages spoken in Palestine in the early first century and most likely the language of Jesus and his disciples. This fact points to Mark as being a Palestinian Jew

The gospel reaches its climax in 8:29 at Peter's confession to Jesus' question: 'Who do you say I am,' 'You are the Messiah' The first 8 chapters have led the reader to this point: Jesus heals, calms the storm, forgives sin. Who is he? The next 8 chapters explain what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah (8:31 ff).

An important characteristic in the gospel is the 'Messianic Secret'. Jesus reveals himself and yet hides himself. In order for Jesus to move around freely in a very politically volatile region he had to be careful that his true identity not be known too soon. He was the King of the Jews, the promised Messiah, God incarnate, but he had come as a servant to die on a cross as a common criminal, not to lead a revolution against Israel's earthly enemies.

Jesus' need to hide his identity then must not be misunderstood now as a reason for our not identifying with Him publicly or failing to tell others about him.

Emphases in Mark's gospel :

- 1) The cross (12:12, 14:1-2, 8-10)
- 2) The cost of discipleship (8:34-9:1; 9:35-10:31; 10:42)
- 3) The teachings of Jesus
- 4) The Messianic Secret (1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36...)
- 5) Son of God (Man and God; 3:5; 6:6; 1:1; 11...)
- 6) Miracles

Brief outline of the gospel

1. Prologue to the gospel (1:1-13)
We are introduced to Jesus. Jesus begins his ministry after his baptism.
2. Jesus rises in popularity (1:14-45)
3. Opposition against Jesus begins (2:1-3:6)
Jesus goes against Jewish tradition - Sabbath questions.
4. Jesus reveals himself as God (4:35-5:43)
5. Jesus leaves Galilee - more teachings (6:53-8:27)
6. The climax (8:27-29)
Who am I? The Messiah, but not the kind of messiah you imagined.
From this point onwards Jesus prepares the disciples for his death. The gospels point towards Jerusalem and suffering.

7. To Jerusalem (8:34)
8. 11+ Final weeks of Jesus' life.

Mark wrote while he was in Rome, during Emperor Nero's reign. Nero was a cruel leader. Nero blamed Christians for the fire of Rome, which many at the time blamed on Nero himself. Roman soldiers were reported to have prevented people from putting out the flames that eventually burned the city to the ground. Nero was then free to build his lavish palace and gardens right in the centre of Rome. It is likely that Peter was martyred during the persecution that followed. Mark wrote to Christians in Rome who were likely experiencing tremendous persecution. He helped new Christian disciples identify with their Saviour who also had suffered much.

Mark 1:1-28 The Beginning Of Jesus' Ministry

Leader's Preparation

To prepare to lead this study read the passage over at least three times, noting what you feel might be the main points of the passage. Using your UCM Leader's Guide (pp. 22-23 or pp. 27-33), ask observation and interpretation questions of the passage.

You will also find it very helpful to read the parallel passages in the other 3 gospels. By reading all three gospels we have a fuller picture of what happened and what was said. Similarly, when there is a car accident several witness accounts are brought together to complete the picture of what happened, each witness providing a detail that the other may have missed.

- For Mk. 1:2-11 read Mt. 3:1-17; Lk. 3:2-22
- for Mk. 1:12,13 read Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-3
- for Mk. 1:16-20 read Mt. 4:18-22; Lk. 5:2-11; Jn. 1:35-42
- for Mk. 1:21-28 read Lk. 31-37

For more information on this passage refer to a good commentary: William Lane, N.T. Wright.

Observation:

Ask the who, why, what, where questions.

Who are the main characters in these verses?

What is going on in these verses?

Key words or phrases: Are there any words you don't understand that may be important to the overall understanding of the passage?

Why does Mark write that this is the BEGINNING of the gospel rather than simply the gospel or the good news about Jesus Christ?

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the "beginning" while the apostolic preaching in Acts is the continuation of the gospel message. Like John, Mark begins his gospel following the first line of the book of Genesis, 'In the Beginning.' Jesus' coming brings a new beginning to the world.

What does the phrase 'Son of God' mean?

Jesus is no ordinary man. He is the unique son of God.

Verses 2 and 3 are a quote from Isaiah. Why did Mark use it here?

Mark links what was foretold in the Old Testament to what is now fulfilled by Jesus' coming, and later by his teaching and his miracles. What Isaiah said about God applies to Jesus.

Why did Jesus command the evil spirit in verse 24 to be quiet when it had spoken truth about who Jesus was? *This verse is an example of the 'Messianic secret'.*

What is meant by the phrase, 'The Kingdom of God'? (verse 15)

-kingdom of heaven in Matthew, kingdom of God in Mark and Luke.

-the idea of God's kingdom is central to Jesus' teaching

-it meant the time of God, the 'day of the Lord'

-both a future time and a time when the world would end.

-A day of judgment on Israel. God would judge the sin of His people. A day of righteousness.

-But, also a day of celebration. The oppressed could rejoice in freedom from the oppression.

-God would rule and His will alone would be done on Earth.

-all injustice/evil/wrongs would stop.

-The world would come to an end and God would bring a new era..

The present Age:

characterized by

-Satan's rule

-evil people prosper, good suffer

-sickness, disease

The Age to come:

characterized by

-God's rule

-healing of sicknesses

-brought in by God's Messiah

Question: Where is the KOG?

It is not a geographical place. It is a time. A time when God rules.

But how can God's rule be now? We still experience sin, sickness. The evil still prosper, Satan still roams this world.

The KOG is both present (now) and future

-the KOG was present in Jesus Christ (Luke 16:16; 11:20)

-and the KOG will come in its fullness at a future day (2nd coming of Jesus)

-The fact that demons were cast out by Jesus proved that God had come and was binding the devil.

Interpretation

Because we are looking at such a large passage that contains a couple of stories, the best interpretation we can give is a summary of what has happened so far.

Jesus began his public ministry after his baptism and temptation in the dessert. He taught that the Kingdom of God (God's reign upon the earth) was near, indeed had come in Jesus himself, and invited people to repent of their sin and believe this good news. Jesus called people to follow him. He taught, had power over evil spirits, and healed many people who had various diseases. News about Jesus quickly spread over the whole region of Galilee.

INTRODUCTION

Invite the members of your Core to talk about why they think Jesus came to earth and taught what he taught and did what he did? (Note to leader: The answer to this question is very obvious, but we need to begin with the obvious to be sure we understand why Mark wrote this gospel in the first place).

AND/OR

What are some of the views held by your friends at UBC concerning who Jesus Christ is/was?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After reading Mark 1:1-28 how would you answer someone who asked you the question, 'Who is Jesus?'
2. In the first century Christians were persecuted during the reign of Emperor Nero by being fed to wild animals in the coliseum. How do you think verse 13 could have encouraged these early martyrs when they knew this might be the cost of their identifying with Jesus? How might we encourage fellow Christians at UBC who feel put down by others for being a Christian and following the Bible?
3. Jesus began his public ministry with the words, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" What does this message mean? A) What does 'the time has come' mean? B) What did the Kingdom of God mean to those who heard Jesus' words? C) What does it mean to repent and believe the good news? - How can repentance be good news?
4. Why did Jesus command an evil spirit to be quiet once it had clearly declared who Jesus was? (look at the notes concerning the Messianic secret).

APPLICATION QUESTION

Summarize the Study . You may want to set aside time in the following Core to answer any remaining questions people may have.

5. Jesus preached, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent (turn around) and believe the good news!" How do these words of Jesus affect how you live now, as a student at UBC in September 2008?