

The Gospel According to Mark

Background:

The Gospel according to Mark is written during a turbulent time for Christians who are suffering for their faith. The temptation to give up on Christ is strong and Mark encourages them with the reality of Jesus' own journey of suffering, a journey of unwavering faithfulness towards us. A journey that ended in new life!

Mark wasn't one of the 12 disciples who Jesus calls to journey with him. Despite not being one of the 12, many believe that Mark is present in the story of the gospel that he writes. In Mark 14 we find a character not found in any of the other gospels. As Jesus is being betrayed and arrested Mark tells us that a young man has been following Jesus wearing only his underwear, which is quite a funny detail to add! As Jesus is arrested, he, like the disciples, runs away and abandons Jesus. As he flees someone tries to grab him, only gets the underwear and the young man runs away completely naked. Many believe that his young man is Mark himself. He was there, he did see Jesus but he portrays himself with honesty: he was young, he was ashamed of Jesus, he ran away in the moment of trial.

Mark appears in other parts of the Bible too.

In Acts 12:12 we find that it is at Mark's (also known as John or John-Mark) mother's house that the early believers meet to pray. His home is one of faith and prayer.

Mark then embarks on some amazing adventures, going on journeys with the great apostles Paul and Barnabas bringing the name of Christ to the world.

But something goes wrong and in Acts 15:36 Mark leaves Paul. In fact Mark does something that causes such an issue that Paul decides he can't work with him anymore. Barnabas, who went with Paul on their first journey, even goes a different direction from Paul because of Mark.

But things don't stay this way forever with Mark.

In Colossians 4:10 Paul encourages the church to greet Mark if he comes to them. In 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul even asks for Mark to come because he is so valuable to him in his ministry, despite Paul being imprisoned. Somehow reconciliation happened and Paul and Mark worked together again.

Through Mark's journey he ends up in Rome with Peter, one of the closest three disciples to Jesus. Peter even refers to Mark as "my son" in 1 Peter 5:13. He takes Mark under his wing and as Mark listens to the preachings, teachings and stories that Peter tells about Jesus, Mark, the man who has run away many times, stops running. He faces the suffering ahead of him and his fellow believers, and sees that the encouragement his brothers and sisters need is the good news of Jesus Christ. So he writes this powerful Gospel, sharing the truths about the story of Jesus, drawing from what he hears from Peter, and shows this young church that Jesus is worth holding onto.

Mark Week 1 - A Lightning Start

Welcome (10mins)

Have you ever been in a running race? Tell us about it, how did you do? Did you enjoy it? What did you need to do to start the race well?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AvEaQl3BdA&ab_channel=Bryan%26KatieTorwalt

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 1:1-3:35

Mark begins his account with some bold statements about Jesus. He claims that what he about to write is "good news", this is what the word gospel means.

Gospel was a word normally used for the announcement of a new Roman Caesar, a new god like king had risen to power. But the true good news, Mark says, is Jesus!

Mark also calls Jesus the Christ and the Son of God. These two phrases tell us that not only is Jesus the King but also that he is equal to God himself and is the anointed deliverer that God has been promising to his people for so long. Even since the days of the great prophet Isaiah, who Mark quotes from, has God been leading his people to *this* moment

Jesus then arrives into the story as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are together present at Jesus' baptism.

Jesus' first words in the Gospel are " "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) His Kingdom is here, turn and follow, for this is truly good news.

Just like the beginning of a race, this is an action packed, breathless start to the gospel. Jesus is baptised, preaches, calls his disciples, heals many, and casts out demons all before the end of chapter 1! The Kingdom of God has begun and it meets mixed responses.

For discussion:

- What is the "good news" that Mark tells?
- Why do you think Mark includes John's arrest very early in the book?
- How is Jesus' Kingdom received by those he meets?
- How do you feel by the reaction of people towards Jesus after his healings?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us

Witness (20 mins)

- How can we proclaim the good news of Jesus to the world?
- Are we prepared for the world to react badly to the truth of Jesus?

Mark Week 2: A Lightning Start

Welcome (10 mins)

How comfortable are you asking questions when you don't understand something?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3unpvYQJic&ab_channel=AndrewPeterson-Topic

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 4:1-34

Jesus often used parables to teach people, Mark doesn't include too many in his book but here he chooses to include some of them. He begins the parable of the sower, a farming visual to demonstrate the different ways in which people respond to the word of God. For the crowd that gathered the parable is not immediately interpreted, Jesus simply speaks of different seeds that fall on different soil and the ways in which those seeds either flourished and produced a harvest, or didn't.

Jesus ends with the statement "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear"

The disciples, however, don't quite understand, so they ask Jesus what it meant, wondering also what the purpose of

teaching in this way was. Jesus' response seems like he is deliberately teaching in a way that people won't understand.

If this was the end goal then perhaps it is a worthless venture, but right after Jesus says this he goes on to explain, in detail, the parable to those who sought understanding.

The confusion is removed because they asked, they didn't just have knowledge downloaded to them, but participated in relationship with the teacher.

For discussion:

- Do you think Jesus deliberately teaches in this way to invite people to come and seek understanding?
- What are the various soils that Jesus speaks of in the parable?
- How would the parable of the growing seed and mustard seed speak to Mark's audience who are being persecuted and tempted to turn away from Jesus?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us

Witness (20 mins)

- What questions do you want to ask God?
- Are you willing to spend the time it takes to know God and his ways?
- When we share our faith, do we invite people to something that takes a commitment?
- Are there people in our lives who we can identify along with the different seeds Jesus speaks of?
- Can we see ourselves in this parable in these different seeds and soils?

Mark Week 3: Jesus' Power and Healing

Welcome (10 mins)

Where were you and what were you doing 12 years ago?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2SGjX3iHK4&ab_channel=Amorphofalis

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 4:35-5:43

The story of Jesus calming the storm is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke in their Gospels. In each we see Jesus sleeping while a storm, that has seasoned fisherman terrified, rages. In each Jesus will demonstrate his power over creation, that it listens to the voice of the one of who made it! In each the disciples will be left in fear and wonder at this man, trying to figure out who he really is. Mark, however, adds three details that the other gospel writers don't.

1. Jesus is asleep "on a cushion"
2. The disciples say "Don't you care.." When they wake him up.
3. Jesus says to the storm "Peace! Be still!"

We also meet two people, who's contrasting journeys have led both to Jesus, Both stories began 12 years ago. The first a little girl born 12 years ago, 12 years of enjoying their daughter are coming to a tragic end as she is sick and dying. The sec-

ond, a woman who has had an issue with bleeding for the past 12 years. For 12 years she has suffered much and spent everything trying to resolve her bleeding but she has grown worse, not better. She has likely been in some sort of isolation as a result, not wanting to make others unclean by her bleeding. Jairus, the girls' father, and this woman come to Jesus for help. Jesus is on the way to Jairus' house when through the crowd this woman manages to touch his clothes and is healed. It stops Jesus in his tracks as he seeks to find the one who has touched him as he feels power go out of him. After 12 years she is immediately restored and healed. Yet while she is healed, Jairus' daughter dies and news comes to him and Jesus about it. Jesus isn't put off by this and still goes to the house and raises her from the dead!

For discussion:

- Why do you think Mark includes these details in the story of Jesus calming the storm?
- What courage do you think it took for the woman to push through the crowd to touch Jesus' garments?
- Why do you think Jesus makes knowledge of her healing so public?
- What part does faith play in these stories?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us

Witness (20 mins)

- How can we find rest in Christ when we have suffered much?
- Are there things that we need to bring to Jesus to ask for his healing and restoration?

Mark Week 4: Resistance to the Gospel

Welcome (10 mins)

How do you deal with situations when you receive criticism?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0&ab_channel=AudreyAssad

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 6:1-29

Jesus' life, despite the incredible miracles, teaching and the impact he had on those around him, wasn't always easy. In this part of the gospel we see this resistance to him begin to stir. As Jesus ministers in his own town, the people question him and challenge him as to whether he should be doing this. Despite the incredible things that have been happening in other places, he finds resistance and people taking offence at him. His very own don't seem to want him.

He then sends out the 12 disciples and gives them the power to perform miracles and mighty acts, which they do. But Jesus also tells them what to do if they are rejected.

We are seeing hints that there might be a rejection of the gospel by some, perhaps like Jesus taught in the parable of the sower. The resistance takes a significant turn with the story of John's death. Difficult questions or a lack of hospitality to-

wards those bringing good news is one thing, but violence and murder take our narrative somewhere new.

John is not only arrested, but now in a cruel show of power and manipulation is beheaded for calling out the sin of Herod.

For discussion:

- Why does Jesus warn his disciples about being rejected?
- Why does Herod have John killed?
- Why does Mark include the story of John's death?
- What could Mark's reader's, who are facing persecution, learn from this?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us

Witness (20 mins)

- How can we still face rejection today when we follow Jesus?
- How can we pray and encourage those in the world still being killed for their faith in Jesus?

Mark Week 5: Jesus Feeds Thousands

Welcome (10 mins)

Have you ever enjoyed doing something so much that you completely forgot about eating?
Can you think of a time when you ate after being very hungry for a long time? What did that meal taste like?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s15nn-4NWwl&ab_channel=GloryToFatherGod

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 6:30-8:26

In the days of Moses, after the Exodus of God's people from Egypt, God had fed a huge number of people in the wilderness for 40 years. Now, through Jesus, once again a large number of people have followed the presence of God into the wilderness and God will again feed them. In Moses' day the people passed through the Red Sea on the dry ground, Jesus doesn't pass through the sea of Galilee on dry ground, instead he walks on top of it!!

He continues to heal the sick, both those from the nation of Israel, and those who are not. In fact Mark tells us that everyone who was brought to Jesus and even touched his clothes were healed.

He interacts with the Pharisees and Scribes who are criticising him and his disciples. Jesus has some choice words for them and even warns his disciples about them.

For discussion:

- What do the two great feedings show us about Jesus?
- Why does Mark show us three times in this passage that people have forgotten to bring bread?
- Why do all the sick want to touch Jesus' cloak?
- How does Jesus challenge the Pharisees and Scribes about their views on their own traditions?
- What stands out about the way in which Jesus heals the deaf and the blind in this passage?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us

Witness (20 mins)

- Do we have our own "traditions" that we do?
- Are there any that we value more highly than scripture?
- Are there times when we "demand" a sign from God?

Mark Week 6: "You are the Christ!"

Welcome (10 mins)

Can you remember a time as a child when you were asked a question and, in front of everyone, got the answer right? How did you feel?
How did it feel when we realised who Jesus was and made our own declaration of belief?

Worship (10 mins)

In Christ Alone

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 8:27-9:50

For much of the first half of Mark's Gospel there is great confusion around who Jesus is, Jesus himself has often asked people not to tell others what he's done. But now he turns to Peter, one of his closest followers and asks him both what others think and also what Peter himself thinks about who Jesus really is. Peter boldly proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the anointed one to redeem, to rescue, to save. It is a real turning point in the Gospel, as confusion over who he is is put to one side, and the true mission of the Messiah is revealed.

For the disciples and others, the true work of Christ seems confusing, and in this passage, and the next, we will see Jesus revealing the work he has come to complete on three sepa-

rate occasions. The disciples, however, will be focussing on something completely different. Jesus is also "transfigured" before them, an amazing demonstration of his completion of the Law and the Prophets, as his glorious majesty is displayed as the voice of God the Father speaks once more.

For discussion:

- How do Peter's answers help to demonstrate the confusion around who Jesus was?
- Jesus will speak two times in this passage about the work of the messiah, what is this work?
- How does Peter's reaction to Jesus' suffering, and the disciples arguments, demonstrate their lack of understanding?
- What is the significance of the Father's words at the transfiguration?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us.

Witness (20 mins)

- How can we share our story of coming to a place for ourselves of declaring that we believe in Jesus?
- How important is it to share about the cross of christ when sharing about him to others?

Mark Week 7: Jesus is the Treasure

Welcome (10 mins)

Do you have any treasured possessions? What makes them special to you?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjRKHNOX78s&ab_channel=musicmeetsheaven

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 10:1-52

Jesus is a great encourager of children and here we see him welcome them to come to him. The disciples are rebuked for trying to stop them, in fact he goes as far as to say that the disciples must receive the Kingdom like children if they want to inherit it.

Jesus then meets a rich man, full of possessions, full of reverence for the law, full of belief that Jesus knows some things, and full of questions.

Jesus, for a third time, tells his disciples that they are heading to Jerusalem and at this time he will fulfil all that he has said, that he will suffer and die, but after three days he will rise again.

James and John think that the aim of their following of Jesus is to triumphantly sit at the right and left hand of God, Jesus

challenges them and demonstrates that his victory will be won not in dictatorship or manipulation, but by becoming a servant, and not only a servant, but a suffering servant. He draws from Isaiah's great servant passages that conclude in Isaiah 53 with the incredible view of the suffering servant. (perhaps have a read of this now starting in Isaiah 52:3-53:12)

For discussion:

- How can we receive the kingdom like a little child?
- The Rich young man desires everlasting life, what treasure does Jesus offer him?
- What does the man's reaction tell us?
- Mark tells us that Jesus look at the man and loved him. How do you think Jesus felt as this man walked away from Jesus, preferring his possessions?
- How does Jesus contrast worldly leadership to the role the disciples will play?
- Why do you think Jesus ask Bartimaeus what he wants?
- Why is Mark 10:45 so important?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us.

Witness (20 mins)

- How can we, as believers in Jesus, be servants in the world?
- What are your own desires from Jesus?

Mark Week 8: Jesus in Jerusalem

Welcome (10 mins)

Have you ever won something? What did it feel like to have others celebrate you?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoMoAT8fBvs&ab_channel=ChristianFellowship5

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 11:1-13:37

Jesus enters Jerusalem for the final time as he prepares to lay down his life. He enters Jerusalem with great celebration and excitement for what the so called Messiah of Israel is going to do.

Instead of triumphantly resisting the Roman's, Jesus instead speaks some reality shaking words to his own people, especially about the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the place where God was supposed to be worshipped, where his presence was supposed to dwell, where the people would bring sacrifices to offer praise and repentance. But instead of this, it has become something that is not going to stand as Jesus is challenged and cheated as he ministers in the city. Pharisees and Herodians, with differing views on the Romans ask him questions about taxes to trick him. Pharisees and Sadducees with different views of life after death quiz him about the resurrection.

Jesus then prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem, and even perhaps his own second coming as well, the day when he will return to Earth and we are raised to life in the resurrection with him. He frames the words about the temple around a plant, and gives a serious warning to get out of Jerusalem if these things are seen.

For discussion:

- What significance does the fig tree have in relation to Jesus prophesying the end of the Temple?
- Do you think Mark is deliberate to place the "first commandment" right after the challenges laid at Jesus?
- How does the widow teach Mark's audience?
- Why does Jesus give so many warnings about the destruction of Jerusalem?
- Is it important for us to know when Jesus will return or are we content to not know?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us

Witness (20 mins)

- How can we respond to challenge and suffering with the first commandment?
- How can we give what we have like the widow did?

Mark week 9:

Welcome (10 mins)

What was it that brought you to faith in Jesus?

Worship (10 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOYjMPHgUBg&ab_channel=BethelMusic

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 14:1-15:47

The joy of Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem seem far away now as in the background we learn that some of the religious leaders are plotting to arrest and kill him while he's in Jerusalem to celebrate to passover.

This was a celebration to remember when God set the people free from Egypt through Moses. The passover lamb had been killed and it's blood used to mark the door posts of the houses of those who believed in God. As a result they had been saved and delivered from the death of the firstborn, and the next day Pharaoh, king of Egypt, let them go free. Bread and wine were a part of that meal and so, for the disciples, as they sit with Jesus they were to remember this great deliverance from slavery. To remember the journey of freedom that took them out of the Egypt, to remember the crossing of the red sea on dry land, and the guidance of God through the pillar of cloud and fire that led them.

The climax of the book arrives as Jesus moves from the meal to the garden to pray before he is arrested, falsely tried and

convicted. He is abandoned by those closest to him and condemned to die on a cross. Despite the governor finding no fault in Jesus, the pressure of the crowd leads him to brutally beat Jesus and to hand him over to die. The cross was a brutal form of execution that the romans didn't even inflict on their own citizens, reserving it for the worst of the worst that weren't their own.

Jesus gives his life on the cross, he dies, and is buried.

For discussion:

- Why do you think the religious leaders are trying to have Jesus arrested and killed?
- Why does Jesus chose the Passover to be the meal to initiate communion?
- Jesus many times in this book has told people to keep his identity hidden. Why do you think when he's being questioned by Council and the High Priest does Jesus boldly affirm who he is?
- What can we learn about Jesus from the garden of Gethsemane?
- What do you think led the centurion to make his statement at the cross?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us as we reflect on the death of Jesus on the cross

Witness (20 mins)

- How can the cross still speak today?
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Mark week 10: The Resurrection

Welcome (10 mins)

Worship (10 mins)

Word (30 mins)

Read Mark 16:1-20

After the pain of the events just a few days before, more pain is expected as Mary, Mary and Salome head to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Yet they are met with news like no other.

The stone is rolled away and they meet this young man who declares to them the good news, that Jesus has risen from the dead. They are filled with a mixture of fear and amazement. Some believe that Mark's original book ends at the end of verse 8, if so it ends with no-one actually having seeing Jesus rise from the dead and they leaving full of fear. Perhaps this was Mark's point, perhaps an encouragement to believe without seeing even in a time of fear.

We know from the longer ending of Mark's gospel and the other three gospels that of course people did see the risen Jesus and this led them to believe.

Jesus doesn't just remain, but because of his victory over sin and death he ascends to the seat of power and authority over all creation, to reconcile all things to God, as a man.

For discussion:

- If Mark did end his Gospel originally at the end of verse 8, how would it resonate with his audience?
- Why is the news of Jesus' resurrection met with so much unbelief from those who knew him?
- What does Jesus command his disciples to go and do?
- Why is the ascension of Jesus important?

Wonder

Let us spend some time allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us.

Witness (20 mins)