

MARK'S GOSPEL

*"the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the
Son of God..."*

Mark 1:1

GROWTH GROUPS – TERM 1 2017

Growth Group is more than just a Bible Study – we also want to pray, and share our lives together. However, it's time spent studying the Bible that ought to shape everything else that we do. In our Bible Study time during Growth Group for this term, we'll be looking at Mark's Gospel.

Why Study Mark's Gospel?

It's the shortest of the four gospels – so that's a good reason. No seriously, it's a good idea to get our head around a whole gospel because then we can appreciate all that it has to say in its proper context.

Looking at a gospel is a great way to be reminded of the basic truths we believe – and to be motivated to share the truth with others.

These Bible studies **will not cover every chapter and verse**, but what we miss in Growth Group will likely be covered in sermons at Church.

Read the whole of Mark's Gospel

Here's a challenge. How about reading two chapters a week – in detail. And how about reading the whole of Mark in one go – two times. Why not do it with a piece of paper beside you to note down thoughts you have.

Read Mark's Gospel with a friend

Why not ask someone to read Mark with you over four - six sittings? Just explain we are looking at it at Church and in Bible Study and you would like to be able to read it with them too. What have you got to lose?

AN INTRODUCTION TO MARK'S GOSPEL

Prayer

Pray for the things you have discussed since arriving. Also pray for:

- new-comers to church
- people on a couple of pages of the church directory
- other Growth Groups

Read Mark 1:1-15

1. What does this short introduction reveal about:
 - the Gospel of Mark
 - Jesus

The Unique Style of Mark

Mark, the human author of this gospel, has a unique style of writing.¹ Appreciating the way he writes will help us hear *what* is written, and therefore what God wants us to hear.

What follows is less of a Bible study and more of an introduction to Mark's Gospel, and the way it is put together.

The Bible is divine & human

We believe the Bible is **God's** word and God used **humans** to write it. So we use every human means to comprehend it, but it is God who speaks to our hearts.

As we study Mark's Gospel you will notice that Mark has **his own distinctive style**.

Why did Mark write?

Mark tells us what he is writing in Mark 1:1. Compare this with two of the other gospels.

| Mark 1:1 | Luke 1:1-4 | John 20:31 |
|----------|------------|------------|
| | | |

2. How do you think the gospel writer's purpose may influence the way in which they have written?

¹ Mark does not identify himself as the author of this gospel however it is widely accepted that John Mark, mentioned in Acts (12:12,25 etc), is the author.

How does Mark write?

Mark's Gospel has some noticeable characteristics.

Mark uses patterns

Mark uses **sets of three**. For example:

- 2:18ff, 23ff, 3:1ff – three incidents regarding the law
- 4:35ff, 5:1ff, 5:21ff – three 'impossible' situations

Mark has a habit of making '**sandwiches**'. That is, he starts recounting an incident then changes to another, then comes back to the first.

Why does he use this technique? Maybe to show how the incidents are related. Maybe to show how one explains the other or? Most likely to draw our attention to 'the bit in the middle'. Here's some examples:

- 5:21-43 – Jairus' daughter and the sick woman
- 11:11-21 – the fig-tree and the condemning of the temple

There are examples of a more 'complex' structure which have been called a **chiasm**. A chiasm is like a Big-Mac instead of a sandwich. There's a recognisable pattern or symmetry. For a sandwich it goes a – b – a. For a chiasm it's more like a – b – c – d – c – b – a.

Chapter four is an example:

- 4:1-9 parable about **seed**
- 4:10-12 teaching on parables & **hearing**
- 4:13-20 **explanation** of the parable about seed
- 4:21-25 more teaching on parables & **hearing**
- 4:26-34 more parables about **seed**

What is the point in noticing patterns?

They show Mark has ordered the retelling of events. He is not necessarily giving a chronological account. Secondly, they can help us understand. For example with a chiasm it appears that Mark is emphasising the middle section, as well as building to a climax at the end.

In other words, understanding the shape of what is written changes where we place significance as well as conclusions we draw and application we make.

Mark uses characteristic words and expressions

As well as structural patterns there are '**markan**' expressions - like the way he uses the word *immediately*.

Have a read of chapter 1 in the English Standard Version (ESV) or New American Standard Version (NASB), and you'll see it more clearly. It seems like Mark uses the word 'immediately' to keep the narrative chugging along – and then he'll pause (not use it) for emphasis, and then start off again.

Mark expects us to notice things for ourselves

Mark expects us remember what we have read and to 'notice' things without him actually spelling it out.

For example, in the first verse Mark says he is writing the "gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." He declares up-front, that Jesus is the Christ and the son of God. However, as we get into the narrative others do not know who Jesus is. The demons seem to recognise him, but nobody else does.

It's not until chapter 8 that Peter finally says - "you are the Christ". However, Peter didn't even understand the implications.

The irony of the last few chapters is that Jesus is crucified for claiming to be the Christ 14:61-62 – when that is who he IS. Mark rams the irony home by showing that even the godless Gentile soldier at the foot of the cross recognised who Jesus is (15:39). While the Jews, who should know better, continue in ignorance.

If we are not able to hold the whole book together, then we fail to appreciate the impact of what Mark is telling us.

Take care as you read Mark's Gospel

There's more that could be said about the style of Mark's Gospel, but that's more than enough for now. As we read Mark, let's appreciate the way in which it's written in order not to miss the content of what is written.

What is Mark and what's not!

The earliest manuscripts do not include Mark 16:9 and following. So there's been all manner of arguments over where Mark's Gospel actually ends.

How reliable is the Bible?

Confusion over where Mark ends and questions over textual variation can make us question the reliability of what we know to be the Bible. However, what is encouraging is that there is so much evidence for those who really want to know. We can chase down which manuscripts say what, where the manuscripts were found and so on. There is just so much out there and Christians are not trying to hide it. For example, if you get a hold of a Greek new testament and have a look at the footnotes at the bottom of the page it records for you which manuscripts say what, and why the compilers have chosen the version they have.

To stop at Mark 16:8 feels so unfinished! It IS unfinished, but it fits Mark's style because it leaves the question hanging - 'how could the women NOT tell anyone?'

Themes in Mark

There are three broad themes. In the form of questions, they are:

- **Who** is Jesus?
- **Why** did Jesus come?
- How ought we **respond** to Jesus?

You can read Mark's Gospel 'evangelistically' with a friend. Write those three questions on a piece of paper, and start reading. Along the way, note down what you discover under each question. Talk about the implications of your answers to the third question in particular.

The structure of Mark's Gospel

Mark's gospel has two halves. The first asks the question 'Who is Jesus?' and climaxes in Peter's confession - Jesus is the Christ. The second asks the question 'Why did Jesus come?' and climaxes in the confession of the Roman centurion - Jesus must be Son of God.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1:1-16 Preface | 1:14-8:29 Who is Jesus | 8:29-15:39 Why Jesus came | 15:39-16:8 Epilogue |
| Gospel Christ Son of God | | Christ | Son of God |

Start reading

We're looking at Mark's gospel over about eight weeks - so here's a challenge. How about reading **two chapters a week - in detail?** And how about **reading the whole of Mark in one go - two times?** Why not do it with a piece of paper beside you to note down thoughts you have?

Prayer

Pray that we would each benefit from time spent reading and discussing Mark's Gospel.

STUDY 2 - RESPONDING TO JESUS?

MARK 2:18-3:35

Prayer

Pray for the things you have discussed since arriving. Also pray for:

- Morning Church and NightChurch
- people on a couple of pages of the church directory
- The Saunders and Gympie Presbyterian Church

It's said Queenslanders are parochial, particularly when it comes to accepting people from the southern states. If that's true, we should be able to appreciate how many people felt as Jesus started to move around Galilee. Jesus sure was *different*. While he attracted a huge crowd of people, he didn't really fit-in as a 'normal' Galilean. He was not a hit with everyone. In fact, he faced significant opposition. In Mark 2:18-3:35 we see many people responding to Jesus.

Read Mark 2:18-3:6 and quickly complete this table.

| <i>Passage</i> | <i>Incident</i> | <i>Question/Challenge</i> | <i>Response</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 2:18-22 | | | A B |
| 2:23-28 | | | |
| 3:1-6 | | | |

1. How would you summarise what we learn about Jesus?
2. How is Jesus different to the Pharisees in particular?

The Pharisees reaction against Jesus could not have been stronger – 3:6 says they started plotting with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. They would otherwise not have a lot in common with the Herodians. The Teachers of the Law also get in on the action. Jump ahead, and **Read 3:22-30**. Notice how Jesus turns their 'attack' on its head.

3. What does Jesus mean in v29?

Go back and read Mark 3:7-19

Everyone does not oppose Jesus. Many follow him.

Now Read Mark 3:20-21 and 3:31-35

4. How did Jesus' family treat him?
5. What did Jesus mean by saying 'here are my mother and my brothers?'
6. Coming back to the unforgivable sin. Is there anyone in chapter 3 committing it?
7. In this part of Mark's Gospel we've seen hundreds of people respond to Jesus. Have a go at fitting some of them on sliding-scale, from outright rejection to full acceptance.

Reject

Accept

8. Have a think back over the passage – what do you think Jesus offers those who follow him?
9. On the next page, add what you can under each 'theme' question. We'll return to this page at the end of subsequent studies.

Prayer

Pray about our own response to Jesus. Pray to for family and friends, and their response to Jesus.

Son of Man...

.. is the way Jesus chooses to refer to himself. Mark is particular in recording this for us.

Along the way through Mark you find yourself wondering if anyone actually knows what Jesus meant. Like most things in Mark's gospel... it gets clearer the further you read.

Mark 14:61-62 is a clincher. The high priest asks a direct question "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus responds "I am, and you will see the **Son of Man** sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." **Jesus is recalling Daniel 7:13-14.**

Daniel 7 reveals that Daniel had a dream. He saw one who looked like a son of man – in contrast to the beasts. This son of man was given authority that would never pass away. He was given God's Kingdom. In contrast to feeble and fleeting kings, Daniel was looking forward to this eternal king.

Remember Jesus' message from the beginning "the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (1:1:15).

The Son of Man, the King, is here.

THEME QUESTIONS IN MARK

| <i>Who is Jesus?</i> | <i>Why did Jesus come?</i> | <i>How do people respond to Jesus?</i> |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--|
| | | |

STUDY 3: FAITH OR FLIGHT

MARK 4:35-5:20

Prayer

Pray for the things you have discussed since arriving. Also pray for:

- the Djamaludins in Thailand
- friends who need to know Jesus
- people on a couple of pages of the church directory

For general discussion...

We can get pretty good at predicting the behaviour of others. Can you recall a time when you could say to someone – “I knew you were going to do that?”

Think about this. If you just happened to be one of Jesus’ disciples and you saw Jesus do the things he has done so far in Mark – and if you had heard his teaching. Then:

- who might you have thought he was?
- how powerful would you think he was?
- if you were with Jesus on a boat in a storm would you:
 - panic
 - ask Jesus to calm the storm
 - just wait and see what Jesus would do
 - ask for forgiveness
 - get out and walk to shore
 - all of the above... and scream

Read Mark 4:35-41 and see what the disciples actually did.

1. How does the disciple’s question in verse 41 answer Jesus’ two questions in vs40?

If nothing else, we know that Jesus doesn’t want people to drown! But in the next passage we meet demons who *do* want drownings. This next incident raises questions. How many evil spirits did the man have - it sounds like one but then there’s lots? Should we recall the accusation Jesus is the prince of demons (3:22)? Is Jesus giving an example of ‘binding the strong man’?

Read on and see what happens.

Read Mark 5:1-20.

2. Compare 5:4 and 13 again. Who is really in charge here?
3. What does this incident reveal about the nature of the evil spirits, and their true intent?

OK, here's an idea for a framework in which to think about Mark 3:7-10:45. What do you think of it?

In 3:6 the 'Old Israel' reject Jesus. Then through these chapters Jesus concentrates on teaching the 'New Israel' - Jesus' disciples'. Kind of like the way 'the sermon on the mount' functions in Matthew's Gospel.

If that's a valid observation, then Jesus could be teaching his disciples just how cruel (and set on evil) Satan really is – he'll drown anything. Meanwhile, in contrast, Jesus does not want his followers to drown (remember he calmed the storm).

Or another idea. Reading through Mark to we've seen Jesus tell people NOT to say who he is. But now, on the other side of the lake, in *Gentile territory* he instructs this man to GO AND TELL everyone (v.19). Was letting the demons kill the pigs simply another way to get everyone to come out and see Jesus?

Here's something else the passage makes us ponder. If you are made aware of how powerful Jesus really is – would you trust him, or run the other way? Would you want to follow him, or would you ask him to leave? Have another look at vs 15-17.

Why does Jesus heal?

If Jesus came to preach, as he says (1:38). And if he came to call sinners, as he says (2:17). Then *why* does he heal so many people and drive out so many demons?

Doing miracles gathers a crowd of people around Jesus – so that he's continually forced to move (e.g. 1:45, 2:2...), and it aggravates opposition. So why does Jesus go on healing and driving out demons?

Yes, miracles tend to highlight who Jesus is. But he could have stuck to calming storms in private and things that would not be so likely to gather a crowd.

Yes, it would seem that the miracles give a taste of the kingdom that Jesus is coming. But if Jesus was such a powerful teacher – then did he have to use *so many* demonstrations? One or two would have done the trick.

I think Jesus is driven by deep compassion for people. Check out these verses 1:41, 6:34, 8:2...

But at the same time – Jesus knew that physical healing was not the answer to our problems! (c.f. 2:9 plus the fact that he was prepared to die for our sins !!!)

4. How might you explain the people's actions?
5. Do you think people today react in a similar way to Jesus – discuss?

Understandably the healed man wants to come with Jesus. However Jesus tells him to go and tell his family what has happened to him (v19). Given the people's response in vs 15-17, this man was probably going to meet resistance! Remember Jesus' question of his disciples in 4:40.

6. Who do you think has more faith – this man, or the other disciples?

Think about it

7. How does this passage (4:35-5:20) help us understand what it means to trust Jesus? What costs may be associated with having faith in Jesus?
8. Go back to the table on page 10 – and have a go at filling in some more of our thematic discoveries.

Prayer

Pray that we would be willing to trust Jesus, whatever the cost.

STUDY 4: TRUST: EVEN WHEN THERE'S NO HOPE!

MARK 5:21-43

Prayer

Pray for the things you have discussed since arriving. Also pray for:

- KPC Kids, KPC Youth, and the children in our church family.
- Family members who are not living for Jesus
- people on a couple of pages of the church directory

Jim has an urgent project that needs to be finished right now. So he calls in a contractor. The contractor listens carefully to Jim's instructions – says 'no worries' and then goes away. Jim gets busy with his other work. After a while he has heard nothing from the contractor and he begins to worry. Is the project done? Has the contractor forgotten? Can he trust the guy? Should he have given the job to someone else!

I'm sure you know how Jim feels. We've all been in similar situations. In Mark 5 we see Jairus' trust in Jesus tested in a similar way. But Jairus has no-one else he could give the job to.

Have a read of Mark 5:21-43.

The crowd is there again – making Jesus take *forever* to reach Jairus' daughter. And then Jesus stops to talk to the sick woman.

1. What do you think would have been going through Jairus' mind?
2. What about when the servants arrive in vs35?
3. Do you really think Jesus expected Jairus to take his advice in vs36?
4. There were a few 'insiders' who were included in the group who witnessed Jesus bring Jairus' daughter back to life (vs 40-43). What do you think they made of all this? Have they realised who Jesus is?

What about the sick woman who touched Jesus' clothes. We don't even know her name.

5. Did she really think she would be healed if she touched Jesus' clothes – or do you think she simply had nothing to lose?

6. Jump ahead and read 6:56. It doesn't sound like Jesus stopped *those* people and brought attention to *their* situation? Why might he have singled out the sick woman back in chapter 5?

Mark says that the woman told Jesus the whole truth (v33). I wonder how long that took - and in the meantime Jairus would be jumping up and down saying 'what about my daughter?' Or would he?

Think about it

7. What did the woman have that she could trust in?
8. What about Jairus – what did he have that he could trust in?

We've got the gist of the passage. But did you notice that the two miracles are 'sandwiched' together – making us compare and contrast them. Have a go at listing the similarities and differences between the two miracles.

| <i>Similarities</i> | <i>Differences</i> |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| | |

9. What do you think is the main thing these two miracles have in common?
10. One commentator suggests Jesus' "surprising delay was to teach faith in the word to insiders". What do you reckon?
11. Who else can you think of in the Bible that is/are called on to have the same faith as Jesus told Jairus to - faith that seems to be 'hopeless'?
12. How should Mark 5:21-43 inform our faith?
13. Have a go at filling in some more of our thematic discoveries (pg 10)

Prayer

Pray that we would grow to trust God – no matter what our situation.

STUDY 5: SEEING, BUT NOT *REALLY* SEEING

MARK 8:22-9:1

Prayer

Pray for the things you have discussed since arriving. Also pray for:

- AFES, particularly for the Browns and Leisters, and pray for Mid-Year Camp.
- people on a couple of pages of the church directory
- your neighbours

Let's start by getting a feel for the whole passage that we are looking at.

Read Mark 8:22-26

1. What makes this healing miracle 'stand-out' from Mark's account of Jesus' other miracles?
2. Do you have any theories on why this miracle is different?

Now read Mark 8:27-9:1

3. What does Peter (if not the other disciples as well) finally see?
4. What does Peter NOT see?
5. How similar is the near future for both Jesus and the disciples (compare verse 31 with verses 34-38)?
6. What do you think 9:1 means?

Back in Mark 1:1, Mark told us that he is writing the 'gospel' of Jesus Christ the Son of God. So from the very beginning Mark has revealed to us, his readers, that Jesus is God's King. However, along the way through the gospel you would have noticed that it's only really the demons who say who Jesus is. Everyone else is either impressed by his power and his teaching, or infuriated by it, or they just want Jesus to go away.

In today's passage Peter is the first to actually say 'You are the Christ'. Just like the blind man – Peter sees, but not clearly. Peter doesn't really get it. He doesn't expect the Christ to suffer. In fact, Peter's *take* on who Jesus is, is twisted and basically 'of the devil'! Jesus does not hesitate to clearly say Peter does not have in mind the things of God.

Meanwhile, there's us. We know Jesus is the Christ, and we know Jesus had to die (and rise again of course). We can see the 'whole picture'. The way Mark records events tends to make us get annoyed at the disciples sluggishness – why don't they just get it!

Let's be careful of being too judgemental. **Do we really get it?** Jesus, the Christ, had to suffer. But so do we – if we follow him. Have a slow re-read of 8:34-37.

7. What does it mean for US to lose our lives (v35)?
8. In what ways might we be ashamed of Jesus (the suffering Christ)? (v38)?
9. Do Jesus' words to Peter (v33) echo to us?
10. The question for us from this passage, is how well are we seeing?

In chapters 9-10 Mark goes on to give accounts which demonstrate what following Jesus involves. It's *upside-down* – the first are last and the last are first. It's *inside-out* and *outside-in* – people you'd expect to see in the kingdom aren't and those you wouldn't expect, are.

Jesus challenges the things we value, and the way we live. Jesus didn't come

The blind see the Christ but are blind to the cross

In Mark 8:22-26 we read about Jesus healing a blind man. It's odd, because it takes two attempts! After the first the blind man can see – but not clearly.

Immediately after this account Mark tells us about Peter's confession - Jesus is the Christ. However, Peter does not see clearly either. He does not understand the implications. He does not understand the Christ must suffer.

Peter's predicament is remarkably similar to that of the half-healed blind-man.

In chapter 10:46 we meet another blind man – Mark tells us his name - Bartimaeus. Already we know more about him than the first. The story of Bartimaeus' healing is more detailed and 'clearer' than the first blind man. In fact, Bartimaeus not only recognises who Jesus is – 'Son of David' – but he also responds appropriately – 'have mercy on me.' As soon as Jesus heals him, Bartimaeus followed Jesus.

Finally, mark has sandwiched a number of stories in between healing of the blind men. Each of these stories have a common theme – seeing clearly the cost of discipleship.

Isn't it amazing how God inspired Mark to write!

to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many (10:45).

11. What is important in this life – is that we see clearly who Jesus is, and that we follow him. How well are you seeing?

12. Go back to page 8 – and have a go at filling in some more of our thematic discoveries.

Prayer

Pray that we would clearly see Jesus for who he is, and be willing to count the cost of following him.

STUDY 6: WHAT, WHEN, HOW?

MARK 13

Prayer

Pray for the things you have discussed since arriving. Also pray for:

- other churches that we have connections with
- people on a couple of pages of the church directory
- friends who are not living with Jesus as their king

Lets face it, Mark chapter 13 is difficult. So as we look at it, please be prepared to leave some questions unanswered.

Read 13:1-4

No doubt life was stressful for Jesus and the disciples since they arrived in Jerusalem. Things were pretty good on the way in, but then there was the clearing of the temple followed by the challenges from the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders, and so on. It could be that the disciple is trying to encourage Jesus in 13:1. Like saying 'cheer up'. After all, the temple was a significant part of what it meant to be Jewish – it was magnificent too.

1. What is Jesus talking about in verse 2? Is he just being grumpy?
2. What do Peter, James, John and Andrew want to know? Is this really a good question in the light of 8:11-13?

The scene is set. Jesus says the temple will be destroyed, and the disciples want to know when. That's the context for what follows. Like with most things, there's the long and the short of it! There's Jesus' short answer to the disciple's question, and then there's the long answer.

3. Have a look at these verses - 13:5-6, 9a, 23, 32, 35-36. What's Jesus' short answer to the disciple's question?
4. Have another look at Mark 13:35-36. Notice the references to time. 'Evening', 'midnight', 'when the cock crows', 'dawn'. And notice the references to time in what follows in Marks' gospel. 14:17, 14:72,15:1.

5. Also, notice what the disciples do 14:37ff. Have they listened to Jesus short answer?

Now let's have a closer look at Jesus' answer to the disciple's question. Christians have debated these verses for ages – basically they have three ideas.

- Firstly, that Jesus is talking about the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD.
- Secondly, that Jesus is speaking about the second coming.
- Thirdly, that Jesus is alluding to his death and resurrection.

Let's see what we think.

6. Read each of these chunks and talk about what you think Jesus is referring to. Is each bit referring to the same events?

- Read 13:5-13.
- **Read 13:14-23** (compare with Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11)
- Read 13:24-31
- Read 13:32-37.

7. It's good to work hard at understanding the Bible. But there's also no surprise when some passages are more difficult than others. We will have unanswered questions. We will have things that we don't agree about. Having said that – what can we definitely take away from Mark 13?

8. Go back to page 10 – and have a final go at filling in some more of our thematic discoveries.

Prayer

Pray that we would continue to struggle with God's word. And pray that we would be ready for Jesus to return, whenever that may be.