

WHO

is

Jesus

&

why does

it

matter

?

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Who is Jesus and why does it matter?

This series of studies accompanies the teaching series at Trinity Mount Barker in July and August 2013.

These studies are intended to be done before the sermon on the same passage, although of course, you can do them any way that is helpful to you!

Leaders' Notes are included at the beginning of each study. If you're working through the studies on your own or 1:1, you may find it helpful to read through these notes at some point.

If you're using these studies in a Bible Study Group, try to make sure you've read the passage and done some preparation before you meet. This will be of great benefit not only to you, but also to the other members of your group.

If you're a Bible Study Group Leader please don't feel that you need to work your way through each question in every study. With such a wide variety of ages and personalities in our church, we have included a number of different types of questions, including some which reflect on the same points, just from a slightly different perspective. Please choose the questions most appropriate for your group.

If you're doing these studies individually, why not let someone know you are doing so, and arrange a time to meet with them when you've finished (or even before) to let them know how your life is being changed by God's Word.

Always surround your time looking into God's Word with prayer, asking God to change your heart and life so that you – with God's people – might become more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recommended Reading:

Mark - Tyndale NT Commentary

The Servant King - Reading Mark Today

Mark - The Bible Speaks Today

R Alan Cole

Paul Barnett

Donald English

Leaders' Notes

Introduction

Mark is the shortest of the four gospels, and is generally considered to earliest of the the gospel accounts. It is thought to have been written by John Mark, who we meet in Acts (ie 12:12, 13:5, etc). From the earliest days of the church this gospel was thought to be the Apostle Peter's account of Jesus' life and ministry, organised and written down by Mark, who was not himself an eyewitness of all of Jesus' ministry. The book appears to have been written between around 60 and 70 AD (prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD).

Mark writes with a particular concern for Gentile (non-Jewish) readers. He repeatedly explains Jewish words and religious customs with which Gentile readers would have been unfamiliar and he is much less frequent in his quoting from the Old Testament than the other gospel authors (although he does still use the OT).

There is an urgency about the book, with events being recounted in a straightforward style and frequent use of the Greek word "euthus" meaning "immediately" linking events. There is no birth account or infancy narrative, Mark opens his gospel with the declaration that his readers are holding in their hands "the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1).

Mark's gospel can be thought of as falling into three parts, progressively narrowing the focus to Jesus redemptive death on the cross that opens wide the gates of the Kingdom of God. In the first section, Mark records Jesus' public ministry with many miracles. The second section focuses on Jesus' ministry to his disciples and the teaching that he gives to them. The third section deals with Jesus' last week in Jerusalem and his death and resurrection, but accounts for a third of the length of the book.

Mark's purposes in writing seem to be:

- 1) To share the good news of Jesus as God's anointed king with people who weren't Jews and therefore unfamiliar with the concept of the Messiah and God's plans and purposes for his world.
- 2) To show that the cross of Christ is the centrepiece of God's plans and the only way for people to be welcomed to God.
- 3) To encourage Christian people facing persecution. Mark was mostly likely writing from Rome and possibly right at the time when Christians were being persecuted in the wake of the Great Fire of 64 AD.

All of these purposes are served just as well today by this part of God's Word to us!

Leaders' Notes

Who is Jesus?

Mark 1 & 2

Key Verses

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

Mark 1:14 - 15 Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Mark 2:10 - 11 I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Key Themes

The Kingdom of God - God's rule is being ushered in through a completely new way. John stands as the last of the OT prophets who foretold this great coming. God's kingdom was now at hand. A message that Jesus himself preaches at the beginning of his ministry.

Notes

1:1 Mark establishes the entire premise of his book; to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (see 15:39).

The "good news" began a long time ago. Mark quotes Isaiah and Malachi to demonstrate the truth of this.

Hear the echoes of Genesis 1 "The beginning" in Mark 1:1 as Mark sets out to demonstrate that God is creating something new, beginning a new creative work.

It is the claim that Jesus is the "Son of God" that sees him condemned to death by the Jewish ruling authorities in 14:61 - 63.

1:4 John's message, repentance which would lead to "the forgiveness of sins" was just like the message of the prophets of the Old Testament. And John even dressed like one of them! He was the last of the OT era of prophets (see Luke 16:16) whose role was to prepare people for the coming of Jesus.

1:6 Honey was the food of the long-promised Messianic age (see Isaiah 7:15).

1:9 Why did Jesus need to be baptised when he had no need of repentance? In Matthew's (longer!) account Jesus says it is "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), which means to fulfil every command that God expected of his people. No such explanation is given in John. Most likely it's a mark of identification with God's people and especially with the sins of God's people, although he has no sin of his own.

1:10 Some of the early heretics claimed that until this point was purely a man and here he received the Spirit, but the voice from heaven declares Jesus to be God's Son, exactly the same as Mark has already claimed in 1:1.

Notice that the Father and the Spirit both witness to the Son.

Who is Jesus?

Mark 1 & 2

Have you ever read a biography that you particularly enjoyed?
What made it such an enjoyable read?

When have you had to wait a long time for something to happen?
What did you do to prepare for that event?

What are the first thoughts in your mind when you come across a
“street preacher”?

Read Mark 1

The word “gospel” simply means “good news”. According to Mark,
where does the “good news” of Jesus begin?

Mark combines words from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 as he
announces the coming of Jesus.

Read those two passages and consider:

- Whose arrival are they speaking of?

- How are they good news in their original contexts?

- What does Mark's use of these passages tell us about what has to happen before God comes to be with his people?

Read 2 Kings 1:7 - 8 & Malachi 4:5 - 6

Why does Mark record for his readers what John the Baptist was wearing?

How would you explain "repentance" to someone with no religious background?

What kind of person do you think the crowds will be expecting in the light of the Old Testament expectation and John's message?

How does Jesus' ministry in Mark 1 defy that popular expectation?

Why do you think Jesus came to be baptised by John?

What is the purpose of the heavenly testimony in verses 10 & 11?

How is Jesus' ministry similar to John's in their descriptions here?

What are the differences between Jesus' ministry and John's?

What questions might your non-Christian friends have about Jesus after having read Mark 1?

In 8:29 Jesus asks the all-important question, "Who do you say I am?" What have we learnt in chapter 1 that helps us answer that question?

Leaders' Notes

Why Did Jesus Come?

Mark 2:1 - 28

Key Verses

Mark 2:9 - 11 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Mark 2:27 - 28 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath

Key Themes

Jesus has authority to forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins, as the teachers of the law correctly assert!

Notes

2:1 Notice that although Jesus is becoming a popular figure and people are coming to him for healing, he understands that his primary ministry is that of teaching people God's Word.

2:4 The house would have had a flat roof with access from the outside.

2:5 This healing and forgiveness is in response to faith. No doubt the faith of the men who brought their paralysed friend, but probably also of the man himself. They recognise that Jesus is someone who can do something about their friend's need. As a matter of fact, Jesus would deal with the obvious need (healing) and the even greater need (forgiveness for offence against God).

In the Old Testament, God's prophets might say, "The Lord has taken away your sin" (ie Nathan to David in 2 Samuel 12:13), and any believer today could say the same to any other believer, but here Jesus claims to be able to forgive sins himself.

2:7 The teachers of the Law are entirely correct in their assertion "Only God can forgive sins." And yes, Jesus did think he was God. They didn't accept his divinity, but their subjective assessment of Jesus didn't change the reality of who he is.

Since sin, at its most basic, is an offence against God, it is true that only God can forgive sins. The things that we do that are hurtful to others are a symptom of our rebellion against God; the way we have thrown off his lordship over us and rejected his pattern for life.

2:10 It's impossible to tell if someone who claims to be able to forgive sins is in fact able to, so Jesus makes a claim that is instantly verifiable; the claim to heal instantly. Since the claim that can be verified is shown to be truthful, the witnesses have every reason to trust that the claim that can't be verified is also trustworthy. Of course, at the most basic level, it's harder to (truthfully) say "your sins are forgiven" since only God can forgive sins.

2:18 Weekly fasting wasn't commanded by the Old Testament law, but had come to be considered by the religious leaders to be just as essential as the requirements of the law.

2:19 Jesus speaks of himself as "the bridegroom." In the Old Testament this was language used for the covenant God of Israel (Isaiah 62:5, etc).

2:21 – 23 The patch and wineskin imagery is to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus, is not just something that can be added on to the old covenant way of relating to God, providing for sin, etc., but a new way of knowing God and relating to him.

Why Did Jesus Come?

Mark 2:1 - 28

What is the biggest crowd that you've ever been a part of?

What behaviour on someone else's part is guaranteed to make you indignant?

Think about some different definitions people might give for the word "sin." Under each definition, how would the problem of sin need to be dealt with?

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Read Mark 2:1 - 12

Why do the teachers of the religious law get so upset at Jesus?

In verses 8 - 10, why does Jesus answer the objections of the teachers of the law in the manner that he does?

We're not told about other people in the gospels who were forgiven by Jesus. Do you think that they received "less" from Jesus than this man who was healed and forgiven?

A friend says to you "I can forgive you if you wrong me, so how can these religious teachers say 'Who can forgive sins but God alone'?"

What has Mark added to our understanding of who Jesus is in this section?

Read Mark 2:13 - 28

What is so new and different about the means of knowing God and relating to God that Jesus inaugurates through his life and ministry, that he can use these graphic images of patching clothes and pouring wine into wineskins?

In what ways was the Sabbath "made for man" (v 27)?

What does it mean for Jesus to be “Lord even of the Sababth”?

What misunderstandings about who Jesus is have we encountered in this chapter?

In what ways do we see these misunderstandings held today?

What information about Jesus does Mark present that corrects these misunderstandings?

What do Jesus’ teaching and actions here tell us about the problem of sin and its solution?

What sort of event or occurrence makes you stop and praise and glorify God (v 12)?

Leaders' Notes

Who Do You Say I Am?

Mark 8:1 - 38

Key Verses

8:29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Key Themes

Kingship is a theme throughout the whole gospel, from 1:15 "the kingdom of God is near," to 15:26 as Jesus dies as "King of the Jews." This section includes Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed king.

"Seeing" is a key theme here. Eight different Greek words are used for the nine instances of "seeing" in verses 23 - 25!

Seeing Jesus as he really is involves a process of revelation, not usually an instant event!

Notes

8:11 - Jesus has already performed many, many signs, and yet the Pharisees ask for another! Simply seeing a miraculous sign is not enough to create real, genuine faith in people.

8:24 - 25 This two-stage healing, the only one of its kind recorded in the gospels, has inspired much discussion! However there is no suggestion that Jesus was unable to heal the man in a single attempt, or that this healing was more difficult than others. Neither is its primary purpose in the gospel account to inspire us to pray continually for healing if at first we see only a partial answer to our prayers. At its most basic, this healing serves as a symbol of the gradual, progressive "seeing" of who Jesus is. Coming to see who Jesus is a process of revelation, as Peter and the disciples are about to find out!

8:27 Throughout the book so far Mark has been laying out the evidence in answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?". Here we get Peter's answer to that question. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed king.

This is a question to which every person, even today, must arrive at an answer.

8:30 It seems that the disciples didn't understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah, or what would be required of him, so Jesus tells the disciples not to speak of who he is, which would only create further misunderstanding among others. In addition, to know Jesus as Messiah requires not just knowledge, but a work of God for each person, as Jesus makes clear in Matthew's account of this event (Matthew 16:17).

8:31 Jesus begins to explain exactly what it will look like for him to be Messiah.

8:33 Notice the very strong language from Jesus! 'In speaking as he did, Peter was voicing, not the mind of God revealed by his Spirit, but that 'natural' mind which is the mind of the enemy: and so Peter could be addressed by Jesus directly as Satan .' - Alan Cole, Tyndale NT Commentary.

Anything that would seek to see Jesus turn aside from his path to the cross, however reasonable or appealing they may seem, are not the work of God, but the work of Satan.

Who Do You Say I Am?

Mark 8:1 - 38

Describe the best meal you've ever had.

How would your non-Christian friends describe Jesus?

What is something that you have found surprising or unexpected about Jesus, his ministry and the relationship he offers you?

Read Mark 8:1 - 38

What does Jesus demonstrate about himself in feeding the 4000 people?

Why do you think that Jesus not only fed the crowd of 4000 but also involved his disciples in the act of feeding?

What has Mark already told us about Jesus that gives reason to think he can manage this situation?

Even after Jesus has performed miracles and healed people prior to this point in his ministry, why do you think his disciples struggle to believe that Jesus can feed this crowd?

Considering all the miracles that Jesus has already performed, why do you think Mark records the Pharisees request for a sign from Jesus in verse 11?

What is Jesus' response to the Pharisees' question?

How is the disciples' apparent lack of trust in Jesus different from the Pharisees' lack of trust in Jesus?

In the light of other events in this chapter, why does Mark record that Jesus healed the blind man in two stages?

Why would people think that Jesus was John or Elijah (v 28)?

Why does Jesus warn his disciples not to tell anyone about who he is?

Why does Peter react to Jesus' teaching about his death the way that he does?

In what ways is Peter like the blind man healed by Jesus?

In the light of this chapter, what does it mean for a disciple of Jesus to "deny themselves and take up their cross" (v 34)?

How do you tend to respond when someone says to you, "If God performed a miracle in front of me, I'd believe in him."?

How might your response change as a result of reading Mark 8?

What further information has Mark added to our picture of who Jesus is?

What does it mean to be a disciple of this Jesus?

Leaders' Notes

The King of the Jews

Mark 15:1 - 47

Key Verses

15:39 When the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Key Themes

The Kingship of Jesus - Jesus' kingship is explicitly treated in verses 2, 9, 12, 18, 26 & 32 and is the basis for the mockery by the Roman soldiers in 16 - 20. However much those present misunderstand Jesus' kingship, it is through this "enthronement" on the cross, that Jesus enters his kingdom.

Previously in Mark, it has been God as king especially on view. In chapter 15, the emphasis changes to Jesus' kingship.

Notes

15:1 Jesus faces the Roman governor, Pilate. This interaction would have been especially noteworthy for Mark's apparent audience, Christians in Rome in the 1st Century AD.

15:34 Notice Mark provides a translation of Jesus' words in Aramaic, for the benefit of his Gentile readers.

Jesus quotes from Psalm 22, not because he doesn't understand why these things are happening to him, but because he is the righteous one who suffers innocently, as in the Psalm. The early Christians used Psalm 22 to help them make sense of the cross, and Jesus' innocent suffering, no doubt because Jesus applied it to himself here.

15:38 There were two curtains in the temple, most likely Mark refers here to the one that hung in front of the Most Holy Place, the place that was the symbolic dwelling place of God, and which acted as a barrier between God's presence and the people.

15:39 The centurion realises what many people even today do not; that Jesus takes the curse of sin upon himself, fulfilling God's plan to save his people himself.

The King of the Jews

Mark 15:1 - 47

Do you tend to think of Easter or Christmas as the more significant date in the Christian calendar?

As a child, did you ever do something bad and either escape punishment or see someone else punished for your crime? How did you feel? What did you learn?

Is there a particular element in the gospel accounts of Jesus' death that you find especially comforting, confronting or challenging?

Read Mark 15:1 - 47

Why does Jesus accept the title "king of the Jews" at this point, when he has avoided being publicly identified with such titles throughout his ministry?

What is the likely cause of the "self-interest" that Pilate perceives in the chief priests (v 10)?

What gets in the way of Pilate doing what is right?

Why do you think Mark records the detail of Barabbas' release?

Read Jeremiah 23:1 - 6

What does this promise from God tell us about “the king of the Jews”?

Read Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

How do these words from the 8th Century BC help us make sense of what happens in Mark 15?

What do we learn about God's plan of salvation, particularly in Isaiah 52 & 53?

What irony do you see in the charges, accusations and mockery directed at Jesus in his trial and execution?

Why do you think Jesus cries out the words from Psalm 22 (v 34)?

What is the reason for Jesus abandonment by his Father?

What is signified by the tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom?

How are the words of the centurion a climax of Mark's account of Jesus' life?

What has Mark added to our picture of Jesus in this section?

Leaders' Notes

The Resurrection

Mark 16:1 - 8

Key Verses

16:7 Go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' ”

Key Themes

The resurrection is good news! It is because Jesus has conquered death that we need have no fear of death and we can be assured of forgiveness. The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus, and the reversal of the human verdict passed against him.

Jesus spoke of his resurrection multiple times, the disciples just had not understood it, i.e. Mark 14:28.

Notes

“The Longer Ending” of Mark

The oldest and most reliable ancient copies of the Bible do not include Mark 16:9 - 20. The language of these verses is slightly different to what we see in the rest of Mark, the detail included closely reflects other passages of the Scriptures, and most early church leaders rejected its inclusion in the gospel account. This all leads scholars to conclude that verses 9 - 20 are probably a later addition, by some other author, likely as a means to 'tidy up' the rather abrupt ending of Mark, either because Mark finished it that abruptly, or because Mark's original ending had been lost.

Note the level of eye-witness detail recorded; very specific time of day, names of those present, what they were talking about, repetition of the day of the week, what the women “saw” (repeated), their fearful, amazed response, etc, etc.

16:1 Usual Jewish practice was to anoint a body at the time of burial. However, the late hour of the day and the intervening Sabbath day meant that the women had not had a chance to properly anoint Jesus' body. Anointing a body was usually the work of women.

The testimony of a woman or women was not sufficient to establish

something as fact under Jewish law and custom. This fact is often used to show the reliability and factual accuracy of the gospel accounts. If Mark (or the other gospel authors) were inventing the story of the resurrection, he would not invent witnesses who would be considered unreliable. See the Jewish Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:8 for examples of the low regard for women and their inability to give testimony (considered equal with gamblers and slaves!)

Notice in 15:47 that Mark preempts the accusation that the women went to the wrong tomb. They saw where the body was laid.

16:4 God has already removed the stone from the tomb. Not so that Jesus could get out, but so the women could get in. There is no human hand in any part of the resurrection. It is entirely the work of God.

16:5 The “young man” here is described in a way that shows he is an angel, ie a heavenly messenger. Luke mentions two angels, Matthew and Mark only one, probably focussing on the one who spoke.

16:6 The NIV and the ESV say of Jesus “He has risen” although the Greek verb is in the passive voice; “he was raised” indicating the resurrection was the work of God in heaven, enacted on Jesus.

‘The empty tomb is only one of several facts attending the resurrection. It is not the empty tomb that proves the resurrection, but the resurrection that makes the empty tomb meaningful.’ - James Edwards, Pillar NT Commentary.

16:7 Perhaps the specific mention of Peter who had failed Jesus is included to encourage those Roman Christians among Mark’s apparent first audience who had faltered in their faith during the persecutions of the first century.

The Resurrection of Jesus

Mark 16:1 - 8

Describe a time when you witnessed something that you would have struggled to believe had you not seen it with your own eyes.

Make a list of 10 occupations or types of people, ordered according to how you would rate their level of trustworthiness.

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1 | 6 |
| 2 | 7 |
| 3 | 8 |
| 4 | 9 |
| 5 | 10 |

Can you recall a situation when everything looked hopeless, but the end result was everything you could have hoped for?

Read Mark 16:1 - 8

What historical details included by Mark do you notice as you read this account?

What do the women's words and actions reveal about their understanding and expectations?

How is the devotion to Jesus of these women as they arrive at the tomb, both similar and different to a Christian person's devotion to Jesus today?

Why do you think the angel reminds the women that Jesus "was crucified" (v 6) when they had witnessed this for themselves (15:40)?

Why is the instruction given to the women primarily about telling others the good news of the resurrection?

Why do you think that Peter gets a special mention in verse 7, in addition to the other disciples?

When God caused the gospel accounts to be written down, why do you think that in each case, we are given not a description of the resurrection (i.e. how Jesus came to life, etc) but an account of Jesus' disciples' response to and discovery of the resurrection?

The second century Greek philosopher Celsus taunted Christians about "the gossip of women about the empty tomb." How do people today dismiss the resurrection of Jesus and therefore refuse to consider its implications?

What would you say is the message communicated by the resurrection?

How does the message of the resurrection fit with what Mark has been saying throughout his gospel account?

What extra information does Mark give us in this section in answer to the question "Who is Jesus?"

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