

Mark's Gospel

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Author

Mark's gospel was written by John Mark. John was his Jewish name (meaning *God is gracious*) and Mark his Roman name. John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. His mother's name was Mary. Acts 12:12.

Mark may have been the young man who fled naked when Jesus was betrayed in Gethsemane. Mark 14:51,52. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas as they went to Jerusalem to provide famine relief, Acts 12:25, and was their 'helper' as they set off on the first missionary journey. Acts 13:5. When they reached Perga Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Acts 13:13. Paul considered that Mark had deserted them. When Barnabas wanted Mark to accompany them on the next missionary journey it resulted in a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Paul chose Silas and went off to the churches he had visited previously, while Barnabas and Mark sailed for Cyprus. Acts 15:36-41.

It says a lot for Paul and Mark that ten years later the rift between them had healed so Paul could include Mark among those who brought him comfort. Colossians 4:10. Paul called Mark a *fellow-worker* Philemon 24, and asked Timothy to bring Mark to him because *he is helpful to me in my ministry*. 2 Timothy 4:11. Mark could have spent his life in regret for breaking up a great missionary team. Instead he re-established good relationships and fulfilled his missionary calling by being a great support for the early Church leaders.

Mark had a close relationship with Peter, and may have interpreted for Peter when he preached, and helped in the writing of his epistles. 1 Peter 5:13. Many consider that Mark received the content of his gospel from Peter's preaching so it may not be a sequential account of Jesus' life (This explains why the order of events is sometimes different from the other gospels). It is a gospel rather than a biography because it is the preaching of Peter recorded, arranged and shaped by Mark.

Tradition says that Mark helped establish Churches in Egypt and that he died in Alexandria. His remains were taken to Venice in the 9th Century and he was finally buried in St Mark's Basilica.

Date

Mark's gospel was written in Rome somewhere between 57 and 63AD. It was probably the first gospel to be written, followed by Matthew, then Luke and then John. Matthew may have based his gospel on Mark's one as he quotes 601 verses out of the 678 verses in Mark.

Purpose

Mark is one of the Synoptic Gospels, along with Matthew and Luke. These Gospels are called synoptic (from the Greek *syn-* together and *opsis* appearance) because they have so much in common. e.g. order of events, stories and parables.

Mark presents Jesus as "the suffering servant". By comparison Matthew presents Jesus as "the King of the Jews"; Luke presents Him as "the son of man" and John as "the Son of God".

Setting

Mark gives details of Jesus ministry in the area around Galilee. Later he describes Jesus' death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

Themes

Jesus' life

Mark gives a concise outline of Jesus' life including His baptism and temptation; His ministry in Galilee, and then His death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

Jesus as teacher

Mark describes Jesus as 'teacher' or 'rabbi' many times, but doesn't give as much detail of Jesus' teaching as the other gospels.

Jesus is the suffering servant

Mark emphasises Jesus' humanity and shows Jesus suffering in a graphic way. e.g. in Gethsemane 14:32-42; after Jesus arrest 14:43-15:20, and at the Cross 15:21-41.

Jesus has a unique relationship with God

Mark highlights the close relationship that Jesus has with the Father e.g. 1:1,11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:1-11; 13:32; 15:39.

Jesus is the Messiah

Mark often records Jesus telling His disciples and others to keep silent about who He is or what He has done. e.g. 1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9. This may have been to prevent Him being mobbed by the crowds or to emphasize that knowledge of Jesus as Messiah could only come by revelation and by faith.

The Kingdom of God

King Jesus rules over an eternal Kingdom: the Kingdom of God (called the Kingdom of heaven in Matthew). Jesus introduced this Kingdom; showed how we can enter it; taught what the Kingdom is like, and will bring it to pass fully when He returns. All those who respond to Jesus by putting their trust in Him and faithfully following Him are God's children, and part of the Kingdom.

The cost of following Jesus

Mark emphasises what it will cost to be a follower of Jesus. 8:34-9:1; 9:35-10:31; 10:42-45. During his life Mark had to put these teachings into practice!

The cross

Mark describes what happened at the cross 15:21-41, and shows that Jesus went to the cross in obedience to the Father's will. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34.

1:1-8 John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus

Mark's focus is on the *gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. 1:1. The word *gospel* means 'good news'. The good news is that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), and that He is God's Son.

John the Baptist prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus in fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3. John's message was one of *repentance* so the people could have *forgiveness of sins*. Many confessed their sins and were baptised. But John pointed forward to Jesus who would not just baptise in water. Rather He would baptise in the Holy Spirit. *After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.* 1:8. The word baptise means 'immerse'. Those who have accepted Jesus as Saviour are saved, and Jesus lives in them by His Holy Spirit. They can be immersed in and filled with the Holy Spirit.

1:9-12 The baptism and temptation of Jesus

When Jesus was about 30 years old He came to John to be baptised. As Jesus came out of the water the Holy Spirit descended on Him and God the Father said *You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased*". 1:11.

Immediately after His baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert and was tempted (or tested) by the devil. Matthew's gospel shows how Jesus resisted all temptations by quoting from God's Word and by turning away from the situation. Jesus was tempted to sin, just like we are, but resisted. Because He understands temptation He can now help us when we are tempted. See Hebrews 2:18, and 4:14-16.



Jesus baptism was the start of His earthly ministry and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all involved. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit empowering Him for the ministry tasks ahead. Jesus baptism also highlights for us the major Christian experiences that Jesus would introduce:

- Repentance leading to forgiveness of sin, and salvation.
- Baptism in water, showing that the old life is over, and a new life has begun.
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit empowering us to live for Jesus.

1:14-19; 2:13-17; 3:13-19; 6:6-12. Jesus calls, equips and sends out His disciples

Jesus lived in Capernaum (on the shores of the Sea of Galilee) and most of His ministry took place in the Galilee region. His initial message was a proclamation of the gospel (good news): *The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!* 1:15.

The first disciples (literally *learners*) that Jesus called were fishermen: Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John. Jesus said to them *“Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men”*. 1:17.

He then called Levi (also called Matthew) to *follow Me*. Immediately Matthew, a tax collector, *got up and followed Him*. The Pharisees were disgusted that Jesus would associate with *sinners and tax collectors* but Jesus said *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*. Jesus loves everyone and will welcome all who repent and follow Him. Nobody is too sinful for Him! 2:13-17.

Jesus then chose the twelve apostles *that they might be with Him*. 3:14. The twelve were: Peter, James the son of Zebedee, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. Jesus *sent them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons*. 3:13-19. The appointment of the 12 apostles enables Jesus to extend His ministry greatly. *They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them*. 6:7-13. The apostles also ensured that Jesus ministry carried on after His death.

The apostles had a lot to learn, though, but Jesus was a wonderful teacher!

1:21-9:29. Jesus’ ministry

In the next 9 chapters Mark describes a series of incidents in the life of Jesus, centred around Capernaum in Galilee. He shows Jesus as a healer, teacher, mentor, and critic of the Pharisees. As His ministry developed Jesus became more focused on explaining why He came and what was going to happen at the end of His period on earth: His death and resurrection.



1:21-28. Driving out an evil spirit.

When Jesus taught in the *synagogue the people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law*. Jesus reputation was enhanced when He cast an evil spirit out of a man and *news about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee*. When Jesus told the evil spirit to come out of the man it *came out with a shriek*, showing Jesus’ authority over all such spirits.

1:29-34. Healing many.

Jesus left the synagogue and went to Peter and Andrew’s house nearby. There Jesus healed Peter’s mother in law, while many others who were sick and demon possessed gathered outside. Jesus *healed many who had various diseases and also drove out many demons*.

1:35-39. Praying in a solitary place.

Jesus went off to a solitary place where He prayed. With so many demands on Him Jesus needed regular times of prayer, peace and refreshment, and so do we! He was very focused on achieving His preaching mission *for that is why I have come* and travelled all throughout Galilee *preaching and driving out demons*.

1:40-45. Healing a man with leprosy.

People with leprosy were considered to be *unclean* and were shunned by everyone. When Jesus came upon a *man with leprosy* He was *filled with compassion*. He reached out, touched the man, and made him clean. Jesus' love and compassion are for all. He told the man not to tell anyone about his healing, other than to show himself to the priest and offer the sacrifices required for cleansing. The man couldn't help telling others and *began to talk freely, spreading the news*. As a result Jesus could no longer enter a town openly and had to *stay outside in lonely places*. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere.



2:1-12. Healing a paralytic.

Back in Capernaum Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic. When the teachers of the law heard this they said He was blaspheming but Jesus, *knowing their thoughts*, showed that He did have authority on earth to forgive sins by healing the man. The crowd who saw this was *filled with awe* and *praised God, who had given such authority to men*.

2:18-22. Fasting.

People asked Jesus why His disciples weren't fasting (like John's disciples and the Pharisees). He replied that had no need to fast while He was still with them, but *the time will come* when He would be *taken away from them*. That's when they would fast.

The new Christian way that Jesus was introducing was not to be just an adjustment of the old way (Judaism). No, this *new wine* needed to be in *new wineskins*. In the rest of Jesus' ministry, and in later New Testament epistles the new wineskin is described. It is all about salvation, eternal life, being led by the Holy Spirit to do God's will, and fulfilment of the Kingdom of God.

2:23-3:6. Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus now confronts one of the most legalistic practices of the Pharisees: Sabbath-keeping. Jesus shows that He is Lord even of the Sabbath, and that there is something greater than rigid adherence to the Law. (The Law was just a temporary measure to show us that we can't be righteous on our own. Righteousness can only be found through faith in Christ. See Romans Chapter 2).

- The disciples were hungry and picked ears of corn on the Sabbath. Jesus showed that King David and the Priests did likewise. 1 Samuel 21:6; Leviticus 24:5,9; Numbers 28:9,10.
- Jesus healed a man with a shrivelled hand on the Sabbath. When the Pharisees got angry about this, Jesus said *Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or kill?* The Pharisees could not answer this but began to plot ways of killing Him.

Both of these graphically demonstrated that the *Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*. Sabbath-keeping is just one of many aspects of Old Testament law that is no longer relevant for Christians. We now have freedom in Christ rather than legalism of the Law. See Hebrews 4.

3:7-12. Crowds.

Jesus withdrew to the lake but a *large crowd from Galilee followed* Him. He healed many of them and evil spirits bowed down to Him and cried out *You are the Son of God*. See Philippians 2:9-11.

3:20-30. Beelzebub.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had cast out a demon and that the people were wondering if He was the *Son of David* (in other words, the Messiah), they said He did it by Beelzebub (the 'lord of the flies'; the prince of demons). Jesus explained that *every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and every city of household divided against itself will not stand*. Satan cannot cast out satan. If Jesus cast out demons it must have been *by the Spirit of God* and that means the *kingdom of God had come upon you*.

3:31-34. Family.

Jesus mother and His brothers wanted to speak with Him. Jesus extended His family to all those who were His followers by *pointing to His disciples* and saying *Here are My mother and brothers*. *For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"* Doing this didn't exclude or diminish His relationship with His natural family. Rather it extended it so all who are born again and do God's will are part of God's family. See John 3:1-21.

4:1-20. The parable of the sower.

Jesus often taught in parables. The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole* which means a *placing beside, comparison*. So a parable is a story built around a well-known activity.

When someone hears *the word* a number of things can happen depending on the state of their heart:

- Satan can snatch it away.
- The word can be received *with joy* but if it doesn't have any root it will be lost when *trouble or persecution* come along
- It can be choked out by the *worries of this life* and the *deceitfulness of wealth*.

All of these mean that the word of God will not be fruitful in their life. But when the word is received and understood it brings fruit. Everyone is different. For some this *is thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown*. The key thing is that the word of God is received and that He is at work in and through your life so you are bringing forth His fruit.

This is one of the *secrets of the Kingdom of God*. Whatever God initiates He blesses. Our part is to be obedient to the Lord and do what He wants in and through our lives.



4:21-33. Parables of the kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is pervasive. When Jesus is Lord it spreads out and grows to affect all aspects of your life (if you will let Him!). The more you let Him be your King the more effective your life will be.

- Don't hide your lamp *under a bowl or a bed*. Let your light shine out because it is meant to be *brought out into the open*. Give to others for *with the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more*. *Those who have will be given more; as for those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them*.
- The kingdom of God is like a seed scattered on the ground. It sprouts and grows and leads to a great harvest. We don't know how this happens because God causes it to grow, but if God is in it, there will certainly be a great harvest.
- The kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which when planted grows into a great tree.



Here we have another 'secret' of the Kingdom. God is the source of life and fruitfulness. Whatever He plants grows and prospers. *Whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world*. 1 John 5:4. If we want to be fruitful we must not be self-seeking. Rather we must be involved in planting and nurturing things that He initiates, and be generous in sharing them with others. What we give is multiplied; what we try to hold onto we lose.

4:35-41. Calming the storm.

Jesus rebuked the storm and it went *completely calm*. Jesus was surprised that, even after being with Him for so long, the disciples still had *no faith*. They were terrified when He calmed the storm, saying *Who is this? Even the winds and waves obey Him*. When we go through life's storms we can either trust Jesus (and let Him deal with the storms), or stay in fear. Trusting Jesus is best!



5:1-20. Healing the demoniac.

Jesus then cast the demons out of *a man with an evil spirit*. The man recognised that Jesus was *the Son of the Most High God*. Jesus asked the spirits to name themselves and they were called *legion* for *we are many*. Jesus sent the demons into a herd of pigs which rushed into the lake. When the owners of the pigs reported this to the townspeople *they were afraid* and pleaded with Jesus to *leave their region*. The man was instantly delivered, *dressed and in his right mind*. Nothing is too difficult for Jesus!

Jesus told the man to *go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you*.

When God does wonderful things for us it is always good to thank and praise Him and to tell others so God gets greater glory.



5:21-43. Raising a dead girl and healing a sick woman.

Jesus was asked to heal the daughter of Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers, who was very sick. On the way to do this a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years touched His cloak. Jesus recognised her faith and that power has gone out from Him. In healing her He said *Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.*

Jesus was then informed that Jairus' daughter had died, but ignoring this said to him *Don't be afraid. Just believe.* When they reached the place where the child was there was much grief, but Jesus said *The child is not dead but asleep.* He raised the girl to life and *immediately she stood up and walked around.*

This time Jesus gave *strict orders not to let anyone know about this.* This could have been to prevent Him being mobbed by the crowds.

6:1-6 A prophet without honour

When Jesus was in His home town He taught in the synagogue and those who heard Him were amazed. They remembered Him as *Mary's son* and the *brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon.* They took offence at Him and Jesus could not do any miracles there except for a few healings. He was amazed at their *lack of faith* and explained that *in his own house is a prophet without honour.*

God moves in powerful ways when we believe Him.

If we don't believe little or nothing will happen.

6:14-29 John the Baptist beheaded.

King Herod heard about Jesus' miracles and was nervous because some said they were being done by John the Baptist who had been *raised from the dead.* Earlier, Herod had given orders for John to be beheaded because he *nursed a grudge* against him. Herod had divorced his wife to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother, Philip. John the Baptist had denounced this as sinful, and Herod had him imprisoned. Herodias pleased Herod by dancing at a party and was promised *whatever she asked.* She asked for the head of John the Baptist and Herod, although *greatly distressed,* had John executed..

The behaviour of Herod and Herodias are warnings to us about the need to deal with our sin. If we sin we will feel guilty and may compound our sin to try and get rid of the guilt. This never works! God's way is to confess our sins, ask for forgiveness and keep a clear conscience before Him. Much more healthy!

6:30-44 Feeding the five thousand.

Jesus withdrew to a *solitary place,* to *get some rest* but a crowd of about five thousand men, plus women and children followed Him. *He had compassion on them because they were like a sheep without a shepherd.* Late in the day Jesus was sensitive to the physical needs of the crowd and told His disciples to give them food, but they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus gave thanks for this food then multiplied it so that there was plenty and *all ate and were satisfied.* Afterwards there were *twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish* left over. When we give something to Jesus He can easily multiply it!

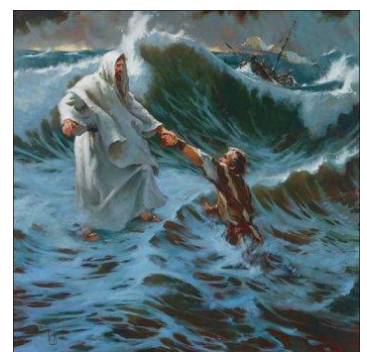
These are more examples of Jesus healing people in great need. The essential elements leading to miraculous healings are:

- The needy person asked Jesus to help.
- The needy person put their trust in Jesus and believed that He could heal them.
- Jesus had the power to heal.
- It was God's will to heal them at that particular time.
- Jesus responded to the needy person in love, healing them in accordance with God's will.
- The needy person responded by praising and thanking God, and, if necessary, repenting of sin and making restitution, and sometimes, testifying to others of what God has done.

6:45-56. Jesus walks on water.

Jesus went up into the mountains to pray alone. At the same time the disciples were in a boat on the Galilee in a storm. Jesus came to them *walking on the lake.* They were scared but Jesus said *Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.* This was straight after the feeding of the 5000 and the disciples had still not learnt Jesus' capabilities or to fully put their trust in Him. This was because their hearts were hardened.

If Jesus bids us to do something and we obey and keep our eyes on Him, wonderful things happen. If we doubt Him and turn our eyes from Him that's when we will sink!



Back in Gennesaret needy people flocked to Jesus in faith, and *all who touched Him were healed*. What a contrast to Jesus' home town, Capernaum, where the people had little or no faith and few were healed!

7:1-23. Jesus and the Pharisees.

Jesus again confronts the legalism of the Pharisees. This time it is over ceremonial washing of hands. By their pettiness the Pharisees had let go of the commands of God and were holding on to human traditions. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13: *These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.*

Jesus then gave some examples of how the Pharisees were doing this: dishonouring their parents and declaring some foods unclean. In doing so they were nullifying the word of God by their traditions.

God is more interested in what is in our hearts; rather than in what we say or do; because our actions and words are expressions of our hearts. If your heart is evil all sorts of evil thoughts and actions will come out and make you unclean. Religious acts like eating with unwashed hands don't make you unclean.

The issue Jesus confronts in these verses is not just restricted to the Pharisees. It can easily happen in our day too. Traditions and religious practices can become so important that they take on a power and authority of their own and 'must' be obeyed. Yet they may not be God's Word and may even nullify it!

It's worth checking regularly that the things that happen in our personal Christian lives and in our churches are the things that God has told us to do.

7:24-30. A woman's faith.

A Greek woman born in Syro-Phoenicia came to Jesus begging Jesus to drive a demon out of her daughter. The Jews were not supposed to interact with other races and the woman recognised this. She said that dogs under the table were *allowed to eat the children's crumbs*. ('Dogs' was an abusive term Jews used for Gentiles). Jesus saw that the woman's faith and cast the demon out of the woman's daughter. This is an early indication that Jesus came not just for the salvation of the Jews, but as Saviour of all.

7:31-37. Healing a deaf and mute man.

Back in Galilee a deaf and mute man was brought to Jesus. Jesus spat and touched the man's ears and tongue saying *Be opened. At this the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly*. The man was told not to tell anyone about his healing but the people recognised that Jesus had *done all things well*.

8:1-10. Feeding the four thousand.

A large crowd had been following Jesus for some days. He *had compassion on them* because they had *nothing to eat*. The disciples only had seven loaves and a few small fish. After Jesus gave thanks for this food, and *the people ate and were satisfied*. Afterwards there were *seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over*. The number fed was *four thousand men* plus women and children. Jesus is the great provider!

8:11-21. Warnings about the Pharisees.

The Pharisees wanted Jesus to do a sign from heaven to prove who He was. In Matthew Jesus said that there would only be one sign: His death and resurrection. (See Matthew 12:38-42).

Jesus then gave a warning about the Pharisees: *Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod*. The disciples thought this might refer to their lack of bread, but Jesus made it clear that He was referring to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, as compared to his way; the way of faith. Jesus' way leads to blessing and fruitfulness, as was demonstrated at the feeding of the 5000, and the 4000. There were basketfuls left over after Jesus had met the needs of these crowds!



8:22-26. Healing a blind man.

In Bethsaida a blind man *begged Jesus to touch him*. Jesus spat on the man's eyes and he was able to see. *His sight was restored and he saw everything clearly*. No matter what your need is you can come to Jesus for help. Keep pressing in to Him!

8:27-30. Peter's confession

Jesus asked His disciples *Who do people say I am?* Some said He could have been John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets and Jesus asked *But what about you?" Who do you say I am?*

This is a key question; and the answer we give to it determines our eternal destiny!

Peter answered *You are the Christ.* He was acknowledging that Jesus was the Messiah; the Anointed of God, and that He was God's Son. He was God!

We also need to know and acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God! This is an essential part of being saved.

8:31-9:1. Jesus predicts His death.

Jesus then told the disciples what was going to happen to Him. He was very specific, describing how He would be *rejected by the chief priests and teachers of the law*; then *killed and after three days rise again.* Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him but Jesus showed him that he did *not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*



God's purposes are always much higher than ours. He sees the beginning and the end, and He knows what He is doing! We are to lay down our lives in conformance with His will. That's the way to find meaning, purpose and reality in life. *Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it.*

We can easily invest our lives in things that will perish. Ultimately these things will be lost, and we will be ashamed of them when Jesus returns. How much better to invest our lives in doing what God wants, and receive His commendation when His Kingdom fully comes *with power.*

9:2-13. The transfiguration of Jesus.

Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain and was *transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white.* Moses and Elijah then appeared and talked with Him and they were all enveloped in a cloud. God spoke through the cloud saying. *"This is my Son whom I love. Listen to Him!"*

When the disciples looked up, they saw no-one except Jesus and didn't reveal this till after Jesus rose from the dead.

Having seen Elijah they asked *"Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"* (i.e. before the Messiah). Jesus replied that Elijah had already come but they didn't recognise him. In Matthew's gospel Jesus explained that this was John the Baptist who had come to prepare the way for Jesus. Matthew 3:1-12.



The special revelation that Peter, James and John received must have been extremely valuable for them as they all, later, became leaders of the early Church.

9:14-29. Healing a boy with an evil spirit.

When a crowd gathered a man brought his son to Jesus. The boy was *possessed by a spirit* that robbed him of speech, and regularly threw him into convulsions. The man said *If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.* Jesus responded *Everything is possible for those who believe.* And the man said *I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.* Not very strong in faith but a healthy attitude! Jesus commanded the spirit to leave the boy and it did so in a violent way. Jesus commanded it to *never enter him again.*

Later, the disciples asked Jesus privately *Why couldn't we drive it out?* Jesus replied *This kind can come out only by prayer (and fasting in some manuscripts).*

9:30-10:52 The cost of following Jesus

The focus in this next section is less on Jesus' ministry, and more on how Jesus wants us to be His followers. Jesus shows us that to follow Him is not easy. It has a cost, but the benefits are enormous!

9:33-37. Being a servant.

The disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest. Jesus explained that greatness in the Kingdom comes from being a servant. *Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and servant of all. Taking a child in His arms Jesus said to them Whoever welcomes one of these little children in My name welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the One who sent Me.*

Jesus had a servant heart, and we must too!



9:38-40. Being for Jesus.

John tried to stop someone who was not one of Jesus' party from casting out demons. Jesus said not to stop him for *whoever is not against us is for us*. Even if we do something simple like giving someone a cup of water in Jesus' name we will be blessed.

9:42-50. Causing others to sin.

Causing someone else to stumble or sin is serious and we must be always careful about this. If our hands or eyes hurt someone else it would be better to cut them off rather than going to hell where *the fire never goes out*. It is better to enter the Kingdom of God without your hands and eyes than to be thrown into hell. That's because everything that we do will be tested *by fire*.

Our lives are to be like salt which improves the taste of food. We are to bring positive benefits to others, not negative. *Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other*. The consequences of causing harm to others are severe!

10:1-12. Divorce.

Once again the Pharisees tried to test Jesus. This time it was about divorce. When asked if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife Jesus referred them back to the Law where Moses permitted divorce because their *hearts were hard*. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Jesus then showed that God's standards are higher than ours by describing His design for marriage from Genesis 1:27. In marriage man and woman are *no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no-one separate*.

Jesus sets a much higher standard than our accepted human standards or even the standards of the old Jewish law!

10:13-16. Blessing children.

When children were brought to Jesus for prayer the disciples tried to stop it. Jesus said *Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*.

Jesus loves children! *He put His hands on them and blessed them*. The way to enter His kingdom is with childlike openness, trust and faith.



10:17-31. The rich young ruler.

A rich man asked Jesus *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* This isn't a valid question because the way to inherit eternal life is to believe in Jesus, not by trying to do good.

Jesus checked whether the man was following the commandments, especially the six about moral behaviours. The man kept all of these but Jesus then identified the key aspect of the man's life he had to lay down if Jesus was to be first in his life: his wealth. *Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me*. The rich man couldn't do this and *went away sad*.

It is hard for rich people *to enter the kingdom of God*.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. That's because the kingdom is all about trusting in Jesus (not riches) and putting Jesus first in your life. With human beings this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.

At the last judgment everyone who has left worldly things behind for Jesus' sake will be rewarded with a hundred times what they have *in this present age*. They will inherit *eternal life*. *But many who are first will be last, and many who the last first.*

Does Jesus have first place in your life?



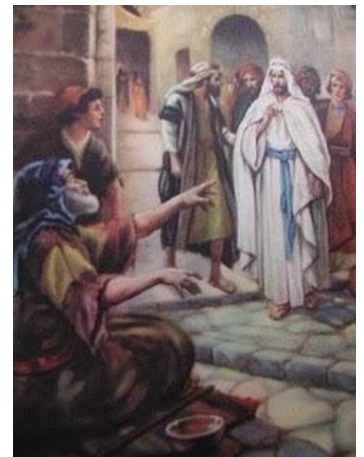
10:32-34. Jesus predicts His death.

Jesus then explained to His disciples that He must go *up to Jerusalem*. There He would be *betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law, They will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the gentiles, who will mock Him and spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. Three days later He will rise.*

Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to Him at the cross. Partly because this was because it had been prophesied beforehand and partly because He had come to die in accordance with the Father's will.

10:35-45. Being a servant.

James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on either side of Him in His kingdom. Jesus explained that they didn't know what they were asking. They would be sharing His cup of suffering, but the place in the kingdom was for *those for whom they have been prepared*. The disciples were indignant when they heard about the request so Jesus called them all together and taught them that the way to greatness in the kingdom is through being a servant. *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all*. Jesus Himself was the best example of this kind of servant leadership. *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*



10:46-52. Bartimaeus receives his sight.

As they were leaving Jericho a blind man, Bartimaeus, cried out to Jesus that He would *have mercy on me*. Even though *many rebuked him* Bartimaeus continued to ask Jesus to heal him and Jesus did so. *Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road*. Don't give up when your first prayers are not answered. Keep pressing in to Jesus!

11:1-14:72. Preparation for the death of Jesus

11:1-11. The triumphal entry.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem for the final few days of His life on earth He sent two of His disciples to fetch a donkey *which no one has ever ridden*. This was so He could fulfil Zechariah 9:9. When He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey the crowds cried out *Hosanna*. *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David"*. Psalm 118:25, 26. At this stage many in the crowd were acknowledging that Jesus was the Saviour. (Hosanna means *Save, Lord*). Later, of course, the crowds were turned against Jesus by the religious leaders.



11:12-25. Jesus at the Temple.

Next day on His way to Jerusalem from Bethany Jesus was hungry and saw a fig tree that had no figs on it *because it was not the season for figs*. He said to the tree *“May no-one ever eat fruit from you again”*.

Many consider the fig tree stands for Israel. The religious leaders had not accepted that Jesus had come to Israel as her Messiah. In rejecting Jesus they were departing from God’s purposes, had *no fruit* and have *withered* ever since, spiritually. Through the Cross, Jesus’ salvation is now available to all peoples (including Israel), and one of God’s great works in the end times will be to draw Israel back to Himself so they acknowledge Jesus as Messiah.

When He reached Jerusalem Jesus went to the Temple and *began driving out those who were buying and selling there*. Jews had to change their money at the Temple so they could buy the animals needed for their sacrifices. The money-changers were robbing the people and Jesus overturned their tables saying *My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers*. Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11.

The chief priests and teachers of the law *feared Jesus* and then sought a way to kill Him.



11:27-33. Jesus authority.

Next morning they saw that *the fig tree* Jesus had *cursed* had *withered*. The disciples were amazed at this and Jesus explained that if they had faith and did not doubt, they could do that kind of thing too. *Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if you say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea’, and do not doubt in your heart but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. But if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins.*



Here Jesus gives us the secret to effectiveness in prayer. If we hear from God what He wants us to pray; believe it, and act in obedience we will see wonderful things happen. It’s not about us! It’s about us acting in faith on what God has said!

The Jewish leaders asked Jesus by *what authority* He was doing these things. With great wisdom Jesus asked them a question back: *John’s baptism – was it from heaven, or of human origin?* If they said *From heaven* Jesus could say *“Why didn’t you believe Him?* And they couldn’t say *of human origin* because they *feared the people*. They replied *We don’t know*, so Jesus said *Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.*

This was another example of Jesus’ genuine authority which came from the Father, compared to the Jewish leader’s perceived authority.

12:1-12. The parable of the tenants.

In this parable a landowner rented out his vineyard. When he sent servants to collect his returns the tenant killed them. Finally the landowner sent his son thinking *They will respect my son*. The tenants determined to kill him also. This related to the Jews rejection of Jesus, and the desire of their leaders to kill Him.

Jesus said that the landlord *would give the vineyard to others* (i.e. all who accept Jesus; not just the Jews). This was in fulfillment of Psalm 118:22,23. The Jewish leaders knew Jesus had *spoken the parable against them* and wanted to arrest Him, *but they were afraid of the crowd.*

12:13-17. Paying taxes to Caesar.

Later the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus by asking if they should pay taxes to Caesar or not. Jesus *knew their hypocrisy* and asked them to show whose inscription was on a coin. It was Caesar's and Jesus said *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's*. Our obligations to God don't preclude our obligations to human authorities.



12:18-27. Marriage in the resurrection.

Next some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) told a story about a woman who married a series of seven brothers in accordance with Deuteronomy 25:5,6. They asked *whose wife will she be at the resurrection?* Jesus explained that they didn't know *either the Scriptures or the power of God*. We will be *like the angels* when we are in heaven, and there won't be any marriage. He then showed that there will be a resurrection by quoting from Exodus 3:6.

12:28-34. The greatest commandment.

A teacher of the law asked Jesus *Of all the commandments, which is the most important?* Jesus quoted the first two commandments and said that *there is no commandment greater than these*. The man responded by quoting from Deuteronomy 4:35 and 39 showing that love is *more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices*. This tied in with Jesus' teaching elsewhere that love is the fulfilment of the law, and He commended the man as being *not far from the Kingdom of God*. We are no longer under the old Jewish Law; rather we are under a new commandment, to love as Jesus loved us. Matthew 7:12, John 13:34,35.

12:35-40. Jesus, Son of God.

Jesus then commented on how the Christ (Messiah) could be the son of David. He quoted from Psalm 101:1 where David called Messiah 'Lord'. *If David himself calls him 'Lord', how then can he be his son?* Jesus, as the Messiah, was indeed David's 'son', because He was in the lineage of David.

No matter how the Jewish leaders tried to trap Jesus, they couldn't because He knew the Word of God, and He knew their hearts. He told the people to *watch out* for the *teachers of the law*, because they always sought places of honour, at the expense of others. *These men will be punished severely*.

12:41-44. The widow's offering.

Jesus watched people putting their offerings into the Temple treasury. *Rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins*. Jesus observed that the rich *gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on*. This reminds us that God wants us our whole hearts to be given over to Him in humble service and adoration. We can't buy God's love!



13:1-37. Signs of the end of the age

Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be overthrown and its buildings destroyed. This was fulfilled about 37 years later in AD 70, when the Romans ransacked Jerusalem. The disciples asked *"When will these things? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"*

Jesus' reply in Mark 13 (and the equivalent passages in Matthew 24 and 25, and Luke 21) gives a clear account of what will happen before He returns, and what will happen at the end of the age. It is better to build an understanding of the end times based around these verses, than from the Book of Revelation which is apocryphal and so contains much imagery. (But recognise that there are many theories for what will happen in the end times and we will only know which one is correct when Jesus actually comes again!).

Here are the main events associated with the Second Coming listed in Mark's Gospel. They are not necessarily in the order that they will occur!

- False Messiahs will arise, claiming *I am he*. They *will deceive many*.
- There will be a period of tribulation, with wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution of Christians, wickedness and hatred.
- The Gospel will be preached *to all nations*.



- The Holy Spirit will enable Christians to speak out God's truth.
- There will be family breakdowns with betrayals and rebellion.
- Christians will be hated *but those who stand to the end will be saved*.
- The Antichrist will be revealed and will *cause the abomination of desolation* (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11) which will *be a time of distress unequalled from the beginning when God created the world*. Ultimately the Antichrist will be defeated by the Lord.
- *False Christs and false prophets* will do miracles and try to deceive God's people.
- There will be signs in the heavens.
- Jesus will return from heaven *with great power and glory*. *He will send His angels and gather His elect* from throughout earth and heaven.

Jesus emphasises that these things will certainly happen. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

Only God knows when Jesus will return. *No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* We must *keep watch* because we *do not know* on what day our Lord will come.

14:1-11. Jesus anointed at Bethany.

It was just two days before the Passover and Jesus was at Simon the leper's house in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. A woman anointed Jesus *with very expensive perfume*. Some were indignant because the perfume was costly *and could have been sold for a year's wages and money given to the poor*. But Jesus accepted the anointing by the woman because she had *done a beautiful thing*. She did it to *prepare for my burial*.

Judas Iscariot then went to the Chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

14:12-26. The last supper.

On the *first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread* it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb. Jesus sent His disciples into Jerusalem to find a specific room where He could eat *the Passover with His disciples*.

As they sat at the table Jesus said that one of the disciples would betray Him, *one who dips bread into the bowl with me*. This was Judas Iscariot who had already organised to betray Jesus, perhaps so he could get money.

Jesus *took bread, gave thanks and broke it*. He explained that the bread was His body, which was about to be broken for them (on the Cross). He then *took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them*. *The cup was the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*.

In shedding His blood on the Cross Jesus was fulfilling the Old Covenant (which required the blood of a lamb to be shed for to make atonement for the sins of the people), and bringing in the New Covenant whereby His blood was shed once for all so we can have full and complete salvation. See Hebrews 9:11-28.



14:27-31. Jesus predicts Peter's denial.

Jesus predicted that the disciples would *all fall away* (in fulfilment of Zechariah 13:7). Peter said he would never fall away but Jesus said he would deny Him three times that very night, *before the cock crows*. Peter said he would die with Jesus rather than disown Him and *all the others said the same*.

14:32-41. The garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus then went to the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples. He asked Peter, James and John to be with Him as He prayed. Jesus offered two main prayers:

- *My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. Perhaps this was indicating that Jesus was feeling the great burden of sin that He was about to carry, and how this would separate Him from the Father.



- *Father, take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.* Jesus knew that He was about to undergo the greatest suffering the world has ever known. In His humanity He wanted the Father to take this from Him, but He submitted Himself to the Father's will because He loved us and wanted to save us. Amazing love!

The disciples fell asleep and Jesus asked them *to watch and pray* so they would *not fall into temptation*. He recognised that *the spirit is willing but the body is weak*. This happened three times and Jesus finally said *Enough! The hour has come. The Son of Man* was about to be *betrayed into the hands of sinners*.

14:43-51. Jesus arrested.

Judas arrived with a crowd, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders. He had arranged to betray Jesus with a kiss. Jesus was arrested and there must have been some fighting because someone cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus healed the man and explained that He had not come to bring about rebellion. Rather He allowed Himself to be arrested so that *the Scriptures must be fulfilled*.

Everyone *deserted Jesus and fled*. A young man was following Jesus. When they *seized Him he fled naked, leaving his garment behind*. This was probably Mark. The incident is not mentioned in the other Gospels. If it was Mark he would have remembered what happened with some embarrassment!

14:53-65. Jesus before the Sanhedrin.

Jesus was taken before the high priest, chief priests, elders and teachers of the law. They were *looking for evidence against Jesus so they could put Him to death, but they did not find any*. They even got witnesses to testify *falsely against Him, but their statements did not agree*.

Finally the high priest asked Jesus directly if He *was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One*. *Jesus said I am*. This was considered the ultimate blasphemy because Jesus had equated Himself with Yahweh, the *I am*. So they *all condemned Him as worthy of death*. Some spat on Jesus and others beat Him.

14:66-72. Peter's denial of Jesus.

Later that night Peter denied Jesus three times and then the cock crowed, just as Jesus had predicted. Peter was distressed when he realised what he had done and he *broke down and wept*.

15:1 – 16:14. The death and resurrection of Jesus

Mark was there when Jesus was crucified so is able to describe the events accurately and explain in some detail how different people were involved.

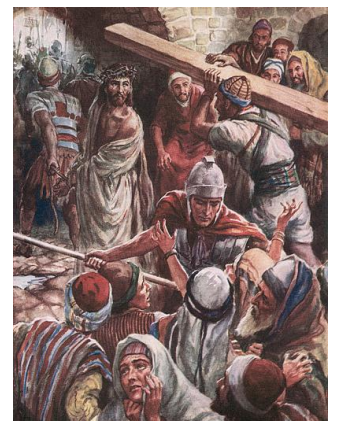
15:1-15. Jesus before Pilate

The High Priest did not have authority to kill Jesus so sent Him to Pilate. Pilate asked directly *Are you the king of the Jews?* and Jesus said *It is as you say*. Pilate was amazed that Jesus would not reply to accusations against Him. He had to release one man and wanted to know whether the crowd wanted Jesus released or Barabbas, a murderer. *The chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas*. The crowd shouted to have Jesus crucified so Pilate *wanting to satisfy the crowd released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed Him over to be crucified*.



15:16-20. The soldiers mock Jesus.

The soldiers put a scarlet robe on Jesus and a crown of thorns on His head to mock Him as a King. They then spat on Him and struck Him. After they had mocked Him *they put His own clothes on Him. Then they led Him out to crucify Him*.



15:33-47. The death and burial of Jesus.

Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross for Jesus as He walked to Golgotha, the place of the skull (the local rubbish dump). The soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh (a pain-killer), but Jesus refused to take it. After they had crucified Him the soldiers divided up Jesus' clothes by casting lots (fulfilling Psalm 22:18). They then placed the charge over His head *The King of the Jews*. As Jesus hung on the cross many passers-by mocked Him, as did the chief priests and teachers of the law.

Jesus was crucified at the third hour of the day (9am) on Nisan 14th, the day of Preparation. Between the 6th and 9th hour (noon till 3pm) there was *darkness over all the land*. This was mankind's darkest hour.



Finally Jesus cried out *My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?* The crowd wondered if He was calling out to Elijah and whether Elijah would answer. Someone offered Jesus a *sponge filled with vinegar* to soothe His pain, but *with a loud cry, Jesus breathed His last.*

At this terrible moment in history a number of things happened:

- The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This showed that now all people could have direct access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. No longer was a priest needed as an intermediary between God and His people.
- The centurion exclaimed *Surely this was the Son of God.*
- Women including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome cared for Jesus' body.
- Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body so he could bury it. He was given permission to do this when Pilate ascertained that Jesus *had already died*. Joseph *took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of the rock*. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.
- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary *saw where He was laid*.

On the cross, in His full humanity Jesus took upon Himself all of the sin of the world and took the punishment that all sinners deserve. God's righteous anger at sin was poured upon Jesus and was then fully satisfied. When Jesus died the wages of sin were paid. On this basis, God could declare us righteous in Christ. Our salvation was won for us by Jesus at the Cross. Hallelujah! See Romans 6:23, Romans 3:25, Romans 5:12-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:1.

16:1-14. The resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus rose from the dead *early on the first day of the week, when the Sabbath was over.*

- *Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome* went to the tomb *very early, with spices to anoint Jesus' body*. They wondered how they would be able to roll away the stone at the entrance of the tomb. The stone was already rolled away and an angel said *Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here*. The women fled in bewilderment and were afraid.
- Jesus *appeared first to Mary Magdalene*. She went and told the others that *Jesus was alive* but initially *they did not believe it*.
- Jesus also appeared *in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country*. They *reported it to the rest but they did not believe them either*.
- Later Jesus *appeared to the Eleven as they were eating* and rebuked them for *not believing those who had seen Him after He had risen*.

The other Gospels record many other appearances that Jesus made after His resurrection. Jesus' resurrection proved that he was God. It also fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies and vindicated Jesus' own predictions that He would rise from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus also shows that Jesus statement *I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except by Me* is true. (John 14:6). There is no other Saviour; no other hope of salvation. Jesus is alive. He has risen from the dead. He alone is worthy of our love, devotion, obedience and praise.

16:15-20. The great commission

Jesus passed His authority on to His disciples and commissioned them to carry on His work. They (and we) are to:

- *Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*
- Signs will *follow those who believe*. They will:
 - drive out demons
 - speak in new tongues
 - pick up snakes and drink deadly poison but not be harmed
 - place hands on sick people and they will get well.

After Jesus had spoken to them He was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God.

The disciples obeyed Jesus and began sharing the Gospel *everywhere*. *And the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it.*

Jesus commissions us to make disciples, not just converts. The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*. It means *a learner; one who follows a teacher*.

Jesus commissions us to share the Gospel so that others will receive Him as Saviour, obey Him as Lord, and continually learn from Him.

When we do this He promises to be with us and help us.

Discussion questions

The word *gospel* means *good news*. Identify the good news contained in Mark's gospel. What makes it good news?

Find out all you can about Mark as a man. Why do you think he was chosen to write one of the gospels? What was the purpose of his gospel? How is Mark's gospel unique? How is it similar to the others?

What are the major themes in Mark's gospel? How are these relevant for Christians today?

One of the most important themes in Mark's gospel is the Kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? What is it like? How can we enter it? How can we live in it? When and how will it be completed?

Jesus is portrayed in Mark's gospel as 'The suffering servant'. Why? What is the significance of this for Christians today?

Identify Jesus' teaching, parables and miracles in Mark's gospel. What is their relevance and importance for us today?

What have you learnt from your study of Mark's gospel? How will you apply this in your life?