

The Gospel of Mark

Schedule

Participants are encouraged to read the chapters covered prior to the session.

Saturday, January 9

Introduction
& overview

Saturday, January 30

The Way of Discipleship
Mark 7 - 10

Saturday, January 16

The Good News Proclaimed
Mark 1 - 3

Saturday, February 6

Ministry in Jerusalem
Mark 11 - 13

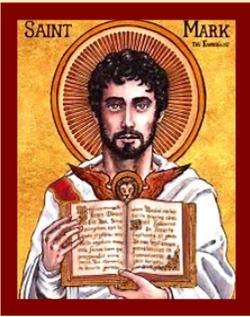
Saturday, January 23

The Christ Revealed
Mark 4 - 6

Saturday, February 13

Passion, Death & Resurrection
Mark 14 - 16

These materials © 2021 Ronald L. Ryan, D. Min.
Please do not reproduce by any means without permission of the author.



An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Scholars regard the Gospel of Mark as the earliest of the four canonical gospels. Written about 70 AD, it preserves a record of the early Christian community's struggle to understand the person of Jesus and the significance of his words, actions, death and resurrection. It also provides us with an idea of the difficulties which the infant church faced as it strove to survive in a world filled with tensions of its own.

There is nothing within the text itself that identifies the author, but ancient tradition has given him the name *Mark*. The evangelist is sometimes identified with John Mark (cf. Acts of the Apostles 12:12) who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey, until the two had a bitter falling out (Acts 15:39). They later reconciled, and John Mark remained close to Paul during his final imprisonment in Rome. John Mark is also referred to in 1 Peter 5:13 as "my son." Non-scriptural writings from the second century describe the author of the Gospel of Mark as a close associate of Peter, the one who would interpret the apostle's preaching from Aramaic into the common Greek.

There is likewise nothing within the gospel which specifies the location from which it was written or to whom it was addressed. However, many scholars speculate that it was composed in Rome some years after the deaths of Peter and Paul during the persecution of Nero (c. 64 AD). In this case the gospel would have been put down into writing in an effort to preserve the apostles' oral teaching, and to encourage the local church to persevere in the midst of continuing oppression.

Eventually, copies of the gospel were circulated to other communities throughout the Mediterranean. It is evident that the Gospel of Mark was used as a major source for the writing of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, composed a decade after Mark. The many parallels between these three Gospels give rise to their being called the *synoptics*—"through the same eyes."

In addition to being the earliest written gospel, Mark is also the briefest. The writer's style is concise and terse. However, beneath the brevity and straightforward approach is an intricate story full of drama and hidden meaning. The author uses a variety of literary devices to weave a complex narrative with numerous levels of meaning. One of the main elements in the narrative is irony, which is used to underscore the conflict between faith and disbelief. This is evident in the attempts of the apostles to understand who Jesus is. While the reader is aware of Jesus' identity from the very first verse, the apostles and others in the gospel story struggle to recognize that Jesus is more than a teacher, healer or prophet. They grapple with what it means for Jesus to be the Christ—and what it means to be his disciples.

Using the titles "Christ", "Son of Man" and "Son of God," the evangelist challenges the reader's own understanding of Jesus' identity and of discipleship. The author shows how Jesus refused to take upon himself people's expectations, and invited them to see him as he really was. He demanded that those who wished to be his disciples follow in his footsteps.

The Gospel of Mark invites readers today to evaluate our understanding of Jesus and of discipleship. Our preconceived ideas of Jesus as the "Christ" and the "Son of God" frequently blind us to the more challenging aspects of his words and actions. We, too, are challenged to "follow Jesus along the way" (Mk. 10:52), understanding that true discipleship involves following Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross. Only then do we come to a fuller understanding of who Jesus is, and of what it means to be his disciple.

The Structure of the Gospel of Mark

The structure of the Gospel of Mark can be seen as two books preceded by a brief prologue and followed by a brief epilogue. Mark uses the titles of Jesus as a framework for these books. The first recounts how Jesus attempts to draw people to recognize him as the Christ; in the second he seeks to clarify their belief by showing that the Christ must also be the Son of Man, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

While using the story of Jesus' life and ministry as the basis of his Gospel, Mark also tells the story of the early church and its struggle to understand Jesus' identity and its implications for their personal and community life. In the struggles of the Twelve, Mark mirrors the early Christian community's struggle to let go of preconceived ideas, traditions and cultural baggage, to live out the gospel message and its universal mission.

Title: "The beginning of the Gospel..." (1:1) Prologue: Baptism of Jesus (1:2 – 13)

Book I: Jesus the Christ (1:14 – 8:21)

Focus: *universality of Jesus' mission and mission of church*

Key images:

*sea (boat, shore, nets, fishermen, etc.)
bread (breaking bread, fragments, etc.)*

Section 1: Proclamation (1:14 – 3:6)

*Jesus invites disciples to follow him;
proclaims Kingdom of God to disciples and crowds*

Section 2: The Disciples (3:7 – 6:6a)

*Jesus begins to form "church" and to reveal the full extent
of his mission and that of the church*

Section 3: Mission of Jesus & Twelve (6:6b – 8:21)

*Jesus challenges Twelve to embrace implications of his identity
and of its implications for the mission of the church*

Book II: Jesus the Son of Man (8:22 – 13:37)

Focus: *depth of commitment required for mission*

Key images:

*the way (road, journey, following, etc.)
the cup (drinking, wine, etc.)*

Section 1: The way of Jesus (8:22 – 10:52)

*Jesus gives Twelve "sight" so they can "see" who he is
and what it means to "follow him along the way"*

Section 2: Jerusalem (11:1 – 13:37)

*Jesus, as "Son of David", transforms messianic expectations
regarding the "kingdom of David" to "kingdom of God"*

Section 3: The Passion (14:1 – 15:47)

*Jesus' passion and death reveal him not only as Christ
and Son of Man, but as Son of God*

Epilogue: The Resurrection (16:1 – 8)

Disciples are sent to continue what was begun in the Gospel's story - the mission of Jesus and the church

adapted from Eugene LaVerdiere, The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark

Questions for reflection

- What similarities do you see between the community to whom the Gospel of Mark was first written and our world today? What issues do we still face today as individuals? As a church? As a society?
- What does the call to “repent and believe the Good News” (1:15) mean to you?
- The first disciples left everything to follow Jesus. What have you “left behind” in order to live as a follower of Jesus?
- What does your “vision” of the Kingdom include? What are your hopes and dreams for your self and for the world? What would you have to “leave behind” for that to become a reality?
- What are the “old wineskins” (2:22) in your life? What are the “new wineskins” and the “new wine”?
- Jesus sent the healed Gerasene back to his family and friends to tell them what God had done for him (5:19). If Jesus gave you these instructions, what would you say to your family and friends?
- When the disciples make Jesus aware of the hunger of the large crowd, Jesus challenges the disciples to feed them themselves (6:37). What are people “hungry” for today? How might the church respond? What do you personally have to contribute to help “feed” the community?
- How would you answer Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” (8:29) How has your understanding of Jesus changed over the course of your life? How has your understanding of what it means to be his follower changed?
- When have you felt like the man who said to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (9:25)?
- Each time Jesus predicts his passion and death, the disciples misunderstand (8:31, 9:32, 10:35). Why was it difficult for them to understand Jesus as a “suffering messiah”? How does this message challenge your understanding of “power,” “success,” or “leadership”?
- If Jesus were to come to our “temple” today, where would he go? What would he find there, and how would he react?
- Have you, like Peter, ever found it difficult to admit you are one of Jesus’ followers? What identifies you to others as a Christian?

Recommended Resources

An Introduction to the New Testament

Raymond E. Brown

Chapter 6: The Gospels in General; the Synoptic Gospels in Particular

Chapter 7: The Gospel According to Mark

Doubleday

The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark, Vol. 1 & 2

Eugene LaVerdiere, SSS

Liturgical Press

The Gospel of Mark

Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 2, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., Editor

John R. Donahue, S.J. & Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.

Michael Glazier Press

Mark: Good News for Hard Times

George T. Montague, S.M.

Franciscan University Press

A Companion to the Gospel of Mark

Michael B. Raschko

Twenty-Third Publications

A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark

Brendan Byrne, SJ

Michael Glazier Press

The New Jerome Bible Handbook

The Gospel According to Mark

Liturgical Press

Reading the New Testament

PHEME PERKINS

Chapter 10: Mark: Jesus, Hidden and Suffering Messiah

Paulist Press

The Human Authors of the New Testament, Vol. 1 & 2

Warren Dicarry

Liturgical Press

The Beginnings of the Church

Frederick Cwiekowski, SSS

Paulist Press