

Reading the Bible Together 2017

Mark 1 - 8

Mark 1:1-20

The 'good news is about Jesus and who he is. (1)

Notice the three "voices" that confirm his identity (2&3, 7&8, 11)

Having been baptised, Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness. It is a place of conflict and testing as it was for Israel during their 40 year journey. It's a reminder that the Messiah mission will be resisted

John conveys an urgent message. The King is coming and people are not ready. He urges them to confess their sin and express their repentance by means of baptism. Baptism or a ceremony of cleansing would normally be restricted to Gentiles wishing to convert to Judaism. By calling on Jews to respond in this way he emphasises the universal need we all face.

Jesus echoes John's urgent message. (15)

Those who have repented and believed the good news about Jesus reveal that by following him (16-20)

- Are you sure about who Jesus is?
- Is repentance (turning around from sin to follow Jesus) a regular part of your life? What was the last thing you repented of?

Mark 1:21-45

Mark's gospel is short and compressed. 1:21-39 describes about 24 hours in Jesus life. We are intended to regard this as typical of the way Jesus lived.

He is in the Capernaum synagogue on a Sabbath day. People are amazed by the authority he displays as he handles the bible. His authority is further emphasised by his exorcism of the impure spirit. Note the spirit knows both who he is and why he has come. (24) God is keeping his promise made way back at the beginning to crush Satan's head. (Gen 3:15)

Notice the authority by which he speaks (1:25, 1:41, 4:39)

The day ends with Jesus healing a large crowd of people. The next day begins with Jesus being pursued (36,37) to continue the work of the night before. He makes clear that he has been sent first and foremost to preach not heal.

When Jesus heals the man with leprosy he sent him away with a strong warning to tell no one. (44) The instruction is ignored. Consequently Jesus preaching ministry is hindered (45). Strangely he has swapped places with the excluded leper which is exactly what his mission will require him to do.

- Where will you be on Sunday?(21) How will you begin your days this week? (35)
- How seriously do you take Jesus strong warnings?

Mark 2:1-17

Four men bring their friend to Jesus. (1-5) *When Jesus saw their faith...* They revealed their faith by their perseverance. (see 1 Thess.1:3)

Son your sins are forgiven. Jesus emphasises his need of forgiveness over his need of mobility.

The teachers of the law correctly state that only God can forgive sin. Jesus demonstrates his divine authority by disclosing to them what they are thinking (8) and by the miracle of the healing. (10,11)

- How determined are we to bring our friends to Jesus? Does our faith reveal itself in action?
- Have we told ourselves we just need that 'one thing' to be happy? (Marriage, children, work, mobility) Jesus would invite us to go deeper. The problem is a matter of our heart and our need is forgiveness.
- Although Jesus was the sinless Son of God sinners were attracted to him. (15) This though is less a group of 'mates' eating and chatting together as a doctors surgery where the sick and injured come. (17) Is there anything attractive about the life of our church family? Pray that those who are not yet Christians would want to come.
- Who gets to eat at our table? See Levi's example. (14)

Mark 2:18-3:6

Jesus had not come merely to renovate Judaism. His mission was not to repair the old structures but to provide something thoroughly new. The new wine of the gospel needed new wineskins. (see Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezek 36:25-27)

Everything now centred on him. He was the long awaited Bridegroom (19) In place of religious timetables (eg. Thursday is fast day) was his presence or absence.

Note the level of scrutiny Jesus is under. (2:6, 16, 24) Yet at his trial (14:55) they have no evidence to present against him.

The religious authorities had turned the Sabbath into a heavy yoke that oppressed people. They were prepared to see people go hungry and remain sick. Jesus rescues the Sabbath from these crushing regulations. Its given to us for our good. It's a day for relieving need and doing good.

- Give thanks for being able to share in the new covenant blessings.
- Could there be a time with it would be right to fast?
- How do you plan to use this Sunday?

Mark 3:7-34

Note the response of the authorities to the Sabbath conflict (3:6)

Jesus is pursued by the crowds (7-11) but his priority is not the crowds. (13) He appoints the twelve *that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.* (15,16) He is a preacher. The authorities are determined to kill him. But he is already training and commissioning other 'preachers' to continue the work of proclamation.

Jesus is regarded by his own family as mad (20,21) and by the authorities as evil (22) Their charge is perverse. They choose to regard what is evidently good (healing and exorcising) as evil. They reverse the categories and refer to God's work as Satan's and Satan's as God's. Jesus describes this behaviour as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (29) (see Isaiah 5:20)

When Jesus mother and brothers call to 'take charge of him' (31,32) he uses it as an opportunity to teach that there is something deeper than family relations. (35)

- Before Jesus sent the disciples out to preach he appointed them to be with him. We aren't able to see Jesus face but we can listen to his words. Make time to be '*with him*' this week.
- Will we allow the church family to take precedence over our biological families?

Mark 4:1-20

The parables in chapter 4 provide encouragement to those who will be sent out to preach. The parable of the sower emphasises although there will be considerable waste (path, shallow soil, thorns) there will be a harvest.

The parables act as filters, illuminating truth for some and concealing it from others. Note the way the previous section 3:20-35 reveals people of privilege who are on the outside. (31)

The secret of the kingdom of God (11) centres on Jesus the Messiah and his rescue mission which will amazingly be accomplished at the cross. For Mark all the answers are found in the climactic moment when Jesus dies. It's then the temple curtain is torn and the centurion confesses His true identity (Mark 15:55,56)

Note the way the parable emphasises 'the word' (8 times in 7 verses)

- Which of the various responses best describe you? What could you do to improve things?

Mark 4: 21-34

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God is like bringing a lamp into a room; it makes hidden things (eg a hard heart, hidden sin) apparent. Consequently how we listen to God's word is crucial.

'*Measure*' refers to the attitude with which the word of Jesus is received.

V26-29 ESV study Bible. "Fruit for God's kingdom grows from soil that is hospitable to his word. First the blade and then the ear goes against popular expectation at the time of Jesus that God's kingdom would come suddenly all at once. Jesus teaches that the messianic rule of God commences inconspicuously, grows slowly but steadily in the middle of much adversity and reaches its culmination at the second coming of Jesus. (sickle and harvest = final judgment)"

The third parable emphasises that although the gospel looks unimpressive alongside the ideologies and 'isms' of this world the effect will be out of all proportion to what is sown.

- Am I listening personally to the illuminating word of Jesus? Am I listening submissively ready to make changes to my behaviour?
- Am I confident that the word of Christ has the ability to change people and situations? Do my prayers bear out this conviction?

Mark 4:35 – 5:20

This next section from 4:35 through to 5:43 show the power of Jesus' word over nature, demons and death. Jesus reveals who he is by what he does – and he does the things only God does.

This section also highlights the reactions to Jesus and his powerful word. Notice 2 surprises.

The first concerns the disciples: They fear they are going to drown in the furious squall but they are even more terrified when the storm responds to Jesus' rebuke. (41)

The second concerns the reaction of the Gerasene people.

Presumably Legion the demon possessed man strikes fear into these people. The Bible tells us though it's when they see Legion 'sitting there dressed and in his right mind' (15) that they are afraid. The outcome is (17) that they plead with Jesus to leave their region.

Both of these incidents serve to remind us Jesus is not a benign source of power that we can tap into to do our bidding. He is Almighty God.

The lessons here are about faith. (40) Faith believes that no matter how things look, if we have embarked on a 'journey' at his direction he will take responsibility for us. What counts is the object of our faith and the Christians faith centres in Jesus Christ who rules over all hostile powers.

But faith also recognises Jesus right to call the shots. Legion wants to leave with Jesus. His request is refused and he is told to 'go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you' (19) He obeys.

- Should I be speaking to some 'of my own people' about how much the Lord has done for me?

Mark 5:21-43

This incident concerns a woman with a long standing problem (she had been subject to bleeding for 12 years) and a critically ill girl. Although Jairus pleaded earnestly (23) with Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter Jesus seems to allow himself to be side tracked by this far less serious problem (25-34)

Jesus priorities are different from ours. He takes time over the woman's distorted outlook. She thinks there is something special about touching Jesus clothes. He wants her to see that it is faith in him that counts. He also publicly affirms her healing and restoration to community life (her condition would have rendered her permanently unclean)

On hearing his daughter has died Jairus is instructed "Don't be afraid; just believe." Jesus proceeds to Jairus's house where he addresses the dead child, "*Talitha koum!*" (which means 'little girl I say to you 'get up!') There are a few places in Mark where the original words spoken by Jesus are preserved to emphasise how astonishing they are. He stirs a child from death as easily as we wake someone from sleep.

Imagine the emotions running through Jairus as Jesus deals with the woman. Doesn't he understand my daughter is dying? How long is this going to take? When is he going to get here? Like Jairus we wonder why Jesus is taking so long when there is so much suffering around.

- Are we facing a situation where we need to hear Jesus say, "Don't be afraid, just believe."
- However long the delay are we convinced he will come and restore all things.

Mark 6: 1-29

Mark writes his gospel on two levels. There is public teaching open to all. But there is also private instruction for his disciples. (in v7-12 he sends them out to preach that people should repent) In this section he teaches his disciples what to expect as they proclaim Gods word. The answer is rejection.

This is book ended with 2 incidents concerned with the lot of the prophet. In the first (1-6) Jesus preaches in Nazareth. The congregation refuse to be impressed by this young man who they remind is no more special than any of the rest of them. (3). Familiarity breeds contempt. This is what prophets can expect from their own people. (4)

(When it states v5 'He could not do any miracles except lay his hands on a few people who were ill' its not tying Jesus power to peoples confidence in him. The previous 3 mighty miracles make clear

Jesus power is unhindered by peoples reaction to him. The sense is 'he could not do any miracles that would affect the attitude of the Nazarene's towards him.)

The other incident shows a prophet confronting a king (18) John's courageous witness leads to imprisonment and death. Speaking Gods word may be violently opposed. It is of course what would ultimately happen to Jesus. But Gods word is not silenced, others continue the ministry.

- Can familiarity become a problem for us?
- How should we respond to being rejected?
- In the light of Herod's behaviour, have we made promises we should never keep or are we keeping promises we should never have made.

Mark 6:30-56

You could describe this as 'a bad day at the office' for the disciples. Promised a day off by Jesus they find themselves inundated by the crowds. (31-33)

Jesus proves unwilling to accept their advice on dismissing the crowds and instead challenges them to feed the multitude. (35-37)

They become 'waiters' to this vast assembly (39-41)

After collecting the surplus they are hurriedly sent home alone while Jesus dismisses the crowd. (45)

By the middle of the night they have still not got home but are struggling to make headway against the wind. (48)

The key verse is: *they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.* (52). They had failed to understand what the feeding miracle taught about Jesus power and ability because they were preoccupied with themselves and their 'rights'. Sound familiar?

Yet he prays for them (46) He watches over them (48) He comes to them (48) and he brings them safely to their destination (51-53).

- How can we prevent our hearts becoming resentful when things don't run the way we would choose?

Mark 7:1-23

This section highlights the difference between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. It is a difference over diagnosis. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law aim to keep themselves from being contaminated by the world through ceremonial washing. (1-4). Jesus diagnosis goes much deeper.

This practice arose from 'the tradition of the elders', religious practices that had become normative. (5)

Jesus exposes their religious practice as part of the problem rather than the solution. (See Matt 23:23,24 for an illustration. Much easier to tithe herbs than show mercy) He describes them excusing themselves from keeping Gods commandments (honour your father and mother) by recourse to their traditions (calling a sum of money Corban excused you from having to support your parents) (9-13)

The issue was not the defilement of the world out there from which we need to protect ourselves but the impurity present at the centre of our being. (6 & 20-22)

No amount of religious ceremony or zealous habits can deal with the defilement described in v20-22. We will need something far more powerful.

- What (cultural) traditions threaten the place of Gods word in our lives?
- What has the teaching we adhere to got to do with Christian worship? (7)
- Do we accept Christ's diagnosis of our hearts?

Mark 7:24 – 8:13

The woman we meet in 7:24-30 is the mirror image of the religious leaders. They are Jews she is a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia. They are privileged she has nothing going for her. They are the people chosen to receive the Messiah she has no claim on him whatsoever.

And yet she reveals herself to be a woman of faith who knows how to approach Jesus. (25) and who refuses to be put off no matter how difficult it seems to become. (27 & 28)

The woman stands in contrast not only with the Pharisees but also the disciples. (see 8:17,21) The simple fact is no matter how many healings we see or feedings I witness unless God opens my eyes I will never realise the significance of what I have seen. That is the significance of 7:31-37. We are not to regard the Syro Phoenician as uniquely insightful but rather someone who has experienced the miracle of sight.

The question this leaves is whether the Gentiles can only expect 'the crumbs under the table'(28) The answer comes through the second feeding miracle (performed among Gentiles) The Gentile crowd don't get a few crumbs, they are provided with a banquet. *The people ate and were satisfied.* (8)

- Am I concerned with those regarded as outsiders?
- Am I clear and does my praying reflect that it takes a miracle to enable someone to see who Jesus is?

Mark 8:14-21

The last passage ended with the Pharisees demanding a sign (11). The first 8 chapters of Mark do not lack evidence but the problem is not a need for further information. Take a look at John 12:37-43. This is John's summary. There is a theological reason for unbelief (John 12:39,40) and a practical reason (John 12:42,43.) Mark has already told us where the problem is located (7:21,22) it's much more about what people want than what they know to be true.

Jesus warns the disciples about the pervasive influence of unbelief and evil (15) They are preoccupied with the visible and practical (16) He is urging them to beware of issues like hypocrisy and the misuse of power. They are thinking about what they are going to have for lunch.

The two feeding miracles ought to have convinced them of his identity (17) and of his ability to provide all they need. The problem remains their 'hearts' (17)

- Are we preoccupied with practical needs to the exclusion of spiritual concerns?
- The slowness of the disciples provides encouragement around those who find it difficult to grasp the truth of the gospel. They will eventually see and understand.
- Are we prepared to persevere with our friends and neighbours as Jesus does with the disciples?

Mark 8:22-38

This represents the end of part 1 and the start of part 2. Part 1 has focussed on Jesus identity. Part 2 will take us into his mission. The 2 stage miracle (22-26) summarises this. The disciples will finally see who Jesus is (27-30) but they don't see everything. In fact when Jesus begins to speak of his forthcoming death Peter will rebuke him (32) He remains blind to his mission.

The disciples have no categories to deal with a suffering Messiah (31) It is as illogical to them as talking about hot ice or bland chillie. They need God to open their eyes.

34-38 represent Jesus call to follow him.

There is not only a cross for him but also one for all those who would follow him. In Marks setting (probably first century Rome) a cross was not a religious symbol or a piece of jewellery but a means of execution. Following Jesus could mean paying the ultimate price.

In considering the cost Jesus invites people to consider the cost of not following him. What value will we set on our eternal soul? (36,37) And can we see the connection between what we do with Christ now and what he will do with us then. (38)

- If we see who Jesus is can we appreciate what a miracle that is?
- What sort of things might be involved in denying ourselves?
- When are we most likely to be ashamed of Jesus and his words?