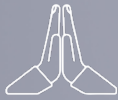


Term 3 2024

The gospel of
MARK



This study owes several helpful insights to *Mark For You* by Jason Meyer, *The Gospel of Mark* by William L. Lane, and *The Message of Mark* by Donald English, as well as the studies *Mark: Follow Me* (James Hoover: Life Guide) and *News of the Hour* (Tony Payne: Matthias Media).

All scriptural references are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

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SERIES OVERVIEW

The Gospel of Mark is probably the earliest of the four Gospels, written between thirty and forty years after Jesus' crucifixion. It was written while many of those who were involved in the events (as participants or eyewitnesses) were still alive.

Jesus is the uncontested subject of the Gospel of Mark. Above all, Mark's portrayal of Jesus is characterised by three factors: his divine authority, his mission as the suffering Servant of God, and his divine Sonship.

AUTHOR

John Mark (or Mark as he is commonly referred to) is not identified as the author within the Gospel itself, but it was widely accepted that Mark was the author by the early 2nd century A.D. Mark accompanied Barnabas and Saul on the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:4). The last we know of, Mark was working with Peter in Rome (1 Pet 5:13). Although Mark himself was not an apostle, he was a faithful interpreter of the apostle Peter's testimony.

THEMES

There are two distinctive themes that stand out in Mark: *discipleship* and *faith*.

Discipleship

There is a causal relationship between the ministry of Jesus and that of his disciples: as the Son of Man serves in humility without regard to self and even in suffering, so too must his disciples (8:34). Ironically, however, when one loses one's life *for* Christ, one finds it *in* Christ (8:35). Discipleship in Mark is repeatedly defined by *simple proximity to Jesus*: sitting around him (3:34; 4:10) and hearing him (4:1-20). The simple act of hearing and following Jesus is more



important than the disciples' complete understanding of him (8:22-26), which can only come from the vantage point of the cross.

Faith

For Mark, discipleship and faith have no meaning apart from following the suffering Son of God. Faith isn't a magical formula; it depends on repeated hearing of his word and participation in his mission. Mark shows two different faith responses to Jesus. On the one hand, a number of individuals display insights and acts of faith that are remarkable for their accuracy. Ironically, these individuals as a rule come from outside Jesus' immediate circle of followers and are often women or Gentiles. On the other hand, those who would seem to have a faith advantage – Jesus' family (3:31-35), his hometown (6:1-6) or the religious experts (3:22-30) – are, ironically, the least understanding and more resistant. Even the faith response of Jesus' inner circle, and particularly the Twelve, is halting and incomplete. For this group, faith comes slowly, even laboriously, by repeatedly hearing, receiving and finally bearing fruit (4:10-20).

STRUCTURE

The first half of Mark focusses on Jesus as the one who has brought God's kingdom 'near'. There are glimpses of his true identity, climaxing in Jesus' revelation of what it means for him to be the Messiah (i.e. glory and hope through suffering, death and resurrection) and the wonder of the transfiguration (8-9).

The second half highlights how the Kingdom of God that Jesus brings means an inherent clash with human kingdoms, be they religious, social, or political. This clash ultimately leads to Jesus' death (at the hands of human rulers) and resurrection.

This study covers the *beginning of the second half (9:14-12:44)*. Our hope is that you will hear Jesus' call to follow him in every aspect of your life, and that you will join Jesus in His mission to see the kingdom of God proclaimed and repentance and the forgiveness of sins preached to the very ends of the earth.



BELIEF AND BLESSING

Mark 9:14–32

1. How do you understand the concept of 'belief' (in general)? What's involved in it?

READ Mark 9:14–29

2. These events pick up immediately after Jesus returns from the mountain with Peter, James and John after the spectacular experience of Jesus' transfiguration.

How does Mark describe the scene to which Jesus returns (note Jesus' question in v.16)?

3. In response to Jesus' question, a man from the crowd comes forward and explains that this argument is the result of his bringing his son to Jesus/his disciples. According to the father:

(a) what is his son's condition?

(b) what has/hasn't been done about it?

- What do you make of the scenario in general? Is your instinct to interpret the boy's condition in purely naturalistic terms (e.g. epilepsy or the like)? Why/ why not?



4. What is Jesus' response? To whom do you think he is referring?

- What do you make of Jesus' response – is it fair? Or harsh?

When the boy is brought to Jesus, what the father described happens: the spirit, recognising Jesus, 'immediately' convulses the boy, throwing him to the ground and rolling him around 'foaming at the mouth' (v.20).

5. What is the father's request to Jesus (v.22)? What does it indicate about the father's belief in Jesus (consider the phrase, 'if you can do anything')?

- Does this resonate with you? Which do you struggle with more: that Jesus *can* or *wants* to answer your prayers?

6. What is Jesus' reply – and the father's subsequent (and final) response in v.24?

7. How does this exchange help us to think about belief, and its connection to our receiving healing/blessing?

- How does this dialogue help you when you feel weak in faith?



After the father's confession of faith, and with the crowd growing, Jesus 'rebukes' the unclean spirit and orders it out of the boy – which it does so, 'shrieking and convulsing him violently'. The effect is so dramatic the boy appears as dead, but Jesus 'raises him' (not unlike with the little girl in 5:41–42). The father's belief in Jesus, though 'weak', was well-founded.

8. Afterwards the disciples ask why they were unable to do what they'd done many times before. What is Jesus' answer? In what way does it critique the disciples?
- How do we come to Jesus and ask for his help today?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

9. How does this passage help you to consider your own belief – what it is and what it isn't?
10. Consider the place of prayer as an expression of belief:
- Does pride/self-reliance ever keep you from prayer?
 - For what things might this passage encourage you to pray more?
 - What might you ask Jesus for as a result of reading this passage?



THE FIRST AND THE LAST

Mark 9:33–50

1. How would you define success? In what sense would you say you or others have achieved it?

READ Mark 9:33–37

2. What were the disciples arguing about? Why do you think they 'were silent' about this when asked?
3. What is Jesus' response?
4. Jesus uses a child to reinforce this lesson (vv.36–37). How does this illustrate his point?
5. What do you think is the significance of welcoming them (or anyone) 'in [Jesus'] name'? How does it connect with welcoming God?



- This 'first must be last' and 'welcome children' teaching would have been radical at the time. How is it still radical today?
- What do you find challenging about this call? What are some instances where we might be called to live this out?

READ Mark 9:38–41

6. What is John's reason for the disciples stopping the man casting out demons in Jesus' name? What is revealing about this?
7. What is Jesus' response? How is it a rebuke to the disciples (note Jesus' redefinition of 'us' in v.40)?
 - What individuals or groups are we tempted to silence because they're not 'one of us'?
 - Does this mean we shouldn't oppose *anyone*? Or does Jesus give limits?

READ Mark 9:42–50



8. What is Jesus saying about sin here? How does it connect to his teaching so far?

9. Consider Jesus' words in vv.43–47. Is he being *literal* here? Why is cutting off a hand or a foot or plucking out an eye not radical enough a way to deal with sin?
 - What do you find difficult about Jesus' teaching here? How does it change or challenge your perception of hell?

10. The word 'For' logically connects vv.42–48 and vv.49–50. What is the connection? How does it relate to judgement and 'peace with one another'?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

11. How can you personally grow to be a disciple who welcomes other disciples?

12. What can we do as Minchinbury Anglican to be a more welcoming, big-hearted, open-armed church?



MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Mark 10:1-12

1. Think of a time when *reality* failed to 'live up' to an *ideal* you hold/held (e.g. in work, school, sport, relationships). How did you deal with it? Did it affect the way you viewed the ideal?

READ Mark 10:1-12

2. What question do the Pharisees ask Jesus (v.2b)?
3. What are we told about the Pharisees' motives (v.2a)? Does this change the way you view the question they ask? Why/why not?

Some Context

First, the cultural consensus of the time was that, based on Deuteronomy 24:1, divorce was allowable if the husband found 'some indecency in his wife'. However, the rabbis of Jesus' day debated the meaning of 'indecency'. One school of thought took it literally – that is, the husband discovers his wife is committing adultery. The other school of thought said that 'indecency' could be *anything* that upsets the husband. This second interpretation dominated and had led to a significant 'no fault' divorce



culture. By posing this question to Jesus the Pharisees are trying to force him to pick a side and so alienate the other.

Second, the question of the lawfulness of divorce and remarriage had been the immediate occasion for John the Baptist's criticism of Herod Antipas and Herodias and had led to John's arrest and violent death (cf. 6:17–29). In Judea Jesus was within Herod's jurisdiction. It's highly likely that the intention behind the question wasn't just to get Jesus offside with certain 'divorce positions', but to compromise Jesus in Herod's eyes, perhaps in the expectation that Herod would seize Jesus as he had John.

Either way there are a couple of hidden landmines in the Pharisees' question that Jesus needs to navigate...

4. How does Jesus respond? (v.3). Why do you think he responds this way?

5. What is the Pharisees' reply (v.4)? In what way is it 'correct'?

6. Jesus' response (vv.5–9) is two-pronged. What is it, and how does it challenge the Pharisees' simplistically 'correct' answer?



7. The disciples, unlike the Pharisees, have genuine follow-up questions. In answering them what significant further statements on divorce does Jesus make (vv.10–12)?

8. Consider the context in which Jesus was questioned. How would his words in vv.11–12 have challenged the prevailing cultural norms?
 - Consider the prevailing norms of our contemporary Western culture. In what ways does Jesus' teaching here challenge them?

All that Jesus says here needs to be understood in its social and cultural context. It's not to say there aren't legitimate reasons for divorce and remarriage (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:15, and Jesus' own words on infidelity in Matthew 19:9), but those are not what Jesus is primarily addressing here. Primarily Jesus is addressing a culture that gave men the right to divorce their wives almost on a whim. The fundamental truth is that a 'no fault' divorce culture is at odds with the biblical view of marriage.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

9. How does Jesus' view of marriage challenge your view of marriage – and your pursuit of it, or your attitude and behaviour within it?



10. What are some practical ways that we – as individual Christians and as a church – can both uphold God’s ideal for marriage and care for those whose marriages have broken down?

The reality of life is that people do make bad choices and break the trust and fundamental ‘oneness’ of marriage, often to the point of permanent deterioration of the union. But as one writer says:

In a fallen world Christians/the church must find a way to hold up, teach, prepare people for, and sustain couples in, the original divine purpose of one man, one woman for life. Yet at the same time we have to find ways of showing the deep compassionate sympathy and understanding of Jesus towards those for whom life has not turned out according to the highest ideal.

Donald English, *The Message of Mark*



EMBRACING ETERNAL LIFE

Mark 10:13–31

1. Think of a time when you had to earn your place. How did the whole experience of having to 'earn you place' make you feel? What was good about it? What was challenging?

READ Mark 10:13–16

2. According to Mark, for what reason were people bringing little children to Jesus? What do you think they meant by it?
3. Jesus' disciples 'rebuke' those bringing the children – that is, they seem to think that it's inappropriate for their busy rabbi to waste time with young children.

What is Jesus' response to his disciples' actions – and, thus, to the little children?

4. What reason does Jesus give for welcoming the little children (v.14)?
 - What does this tell you about how Jesus views, not just children, but the generally 'less important' in society?



5. What conclusion does Jesus draw in v.15? What do you think it means?

- What do you find encouraging about this? What do you find challenging?

READ Mark 10:17–22

The second interaction is between Jesus and a grown man who, we shortly learn, has 'many possessions' (v.22). In Matthew's account we learn that he was a young man (Matt 19:20), and Luke describes him as 'a ruler' (Luke 18:18). The combined picture indicates that this man was from society's elite.

6. What is the man's question? What does it suggest about his view of eternal life/the Kingdom of God?

7. Consider the back and forth between the rich young ruler and Jesus in vv.18–22. How do Jesus' responses *meet* the ruler's expectations? How do they *upend* the ruler's expectations?

- How do Jesus' answers meet or upend your expectations about eternal life and entering the Kingdom of God?

READ Mark 10:23–31



8. Following the man's sad response, what does Jesus say in vv.23–25?
9. What do you think Jesus means by this? Is he saying it's *impossible* to enter the Kingdom of God if you're rich – that you *must* become poor to gain eternal life? Why/why not?
- What is the most tempting aspect of money for you? Success? Status? Security? How does what Jesus teaches here help you gain a better view of money?

The disciples express as much surprise at Jesus' teaching as the rich man ('Then who can be saved?'). They similarly assumed that wealth was a sign of God's favour, and so surely a wealthy Jewish elite who has kept all the commands is a 'shoe in' for the Kingdom. But if they're not – then who is?

10. How do Jesus' words in v.27 answer the rich young ruler's question – and that of his disciples in v.26?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

11. What obstacles were hardest or are hardest for you to overcome in entering the kingdom/eternal life? How has God helped you?
12. How do vv.29–30 encourage you to be wholehearted and sacrificial in your discipleship?



BLINDNESS AND SIGHT

Mark 10:32–52

1. Think of a time when your vision was obstructed for some reason (bad light, fog, dirty glass). Were there consequences to not being able to see clearly?

READ Mark 10:32–34

2. In vv.32–34 Jesus predicts his death for a third time. Compare this prediction with the previous two (8:31; 9:31). What do you notice?

READ Mark 10:35–45

3. What is James and John's request (vv.35–37)? What 'vision' of leadership does this reveal they hold – and why is it ironic? (Consider what Jesus has just said.)
4. What is Jesus' response? How is his exchange with James and John, and the reference to his 'cup' and 'baptism', a rebuke to their ambitions?



- Do James and John's ambitions resonate with you? What specific ways does Jesus' teaching challenge your expectations about Christian discipleship?

5. When the other ten disciples hear about this 'status request' they understandably become indignant. In response, Jesus again emphasises that the last will be first. What new motivation for service is found in v.45?

- Consider your actions and what motivates them: are there ways that our lives can better conform to Jesus' view of greatness?

READ Mark 10:46–52

6. When Bartimaeus hears that it's Jesus passing by what is his response (what does he do and say)? What does this show about Bartimaeus?

7. Bartimaeus's persistent plea catches Jesus' attention and Jesus calls him over. What does Bartimaeus do when told that Jesus is calling him? What significance might there be in this?



8. Why do you suppose Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted him to do for him?

After Bartimaeus's explicit request for sight, Jesus declares 'Your faith has healed you' (that is, your faith in *me, Jesus*, has healed you) and 'immediately' he receives his sight. In response, Bartimaeus begins 'to follow him down the road'.

9. In what way might we consider Bartimaeus a 'model' of true discipleship?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

10. Think of some times when you cried out for mercy and you were showed it by God. What mercy do you need in your life right now? What is keeping you from crying out?
11. What things from this chapter would you share with a 'spiritually seeking' friend?



TRIUMPH AND TEMPLE

Mark 11:1–26

1. What are some 'rituals' that you do/our society does without much thought? Is this a problem? Why/why not?

READ Mark 11:1–11

2. Jesus gives his disciples specific instructions. What happens when the disciples follow these instructions? What does this tell us?
3. Why do you think Jesus' instructions are so specific? In particular, why does Jesus 'need' this young, unriden donkey to enter Jerusalem?

As the disciples lay their cloaks on the young donkey and Jesus sits on it, those following in the crowd and those ahead pick up the momentousness of what is taking place – they spread their cloaks and cut branches, and they start to shout.



4. What does the crowd shout? What is the meaning of it (and what irony is there)?

In v.11 Jesus enters the temple but doesn't stay. Mark says: *After looking around at everything, since it was already late, He went out into Bethany with the Twelve.* After the triumphal entry why such an anti-climax? The passage that follows hints at the reason.

This passage is an example of one of Mark's 'sandwiches', a literary feature where an event begins and is resolved either side of another event. Here the 'bread' of the sandwich is a curious encounter with a fig tree (vv.12–14 and 20–26), while the 'filling' is Jesus' visit to the temple (vv.15–19). The 'bread' of the fig tree story should make us read the temple 'filling' in a different way than we would if it were on its own.

READ Mark 11:12–26

5. What does Jesus do when he encounters the fig tree with no fruit? What might be the meaning behind this?
6. The whole temple area was vast – countless people coming and going through the various outer and inner courts. What does Jesus do when he enters the temple complex?



7. Buying and selling was a necessary part of temple commerce (e.g. worshippers purchasing an animal for sacrifice, etc.). This being so, why do you think Jesus does what he does (and says what he says)?

8. What do we learn from the various responses of:

- Jesus (v.17)?
- The religious authorities (v.18)?
- The people (v.18b)?

The next morning the disciples pass by the now withered fig tree and remark on it (vv.20–21). In light of their trip to the temple the day before Jesus takes the opportunity to teach about faith in God, with a focus on belief and prayer.

9. What do you make of Jesus' words in vv.23–24? What is Jesus promising here? What *isn't* he promising?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION



BAD TENANTS

Mark 11:27–12:12

1. What are some of the things behind people's refusal to accept authority? When is it *legitimate* to reject someone's authority – and when is it *illegitimate*?

READ Mark 11:27–33

2. The chief priests, scribes and elders come asking a seemingly straightforward question about Jesus' authority. What are the 'these things' that they refer to?
3. What does Jesus' reply and the subsequent discussion reveal about his questioners' motives?
4. Jesus refuses to answer unless they can answer his question first. What is his question, and how does it 'turn the tables' on his questioners?



- Think of times when people have asked you questions about Christianity or the Bible. What might you learn and apply from Jesus' response?

READ Mark 12:1-12

5. Summarise the parable/the actions of each main character (vv.1-9).
6. In making his point Jesus then quotes Scripture (vv.10-11). What point is being made in Psalm 118:22-23?
7. What point is Jesus making to the Jewish leaders by telling this parable and quoting Psalm 118 here? What is the analogy?
8. How have the Jewish leaders done this – historically and now in Jesus' day?
9. Consider the response of the Jewish leaders. What do they want to do? What do they end up doing and why? What does this reveal about the question of authority?



- How do some of the dynamics of this parable show up in our world today? How do you respond to them?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

10. How does the image of the building with Christ as the cornerstone impact your life today?
11. When we struggle with sin or feel confused about what we believe, how can we bring our questions to Jesus in a way that recognises his authority?



TESTING QUESTIONS

Mark 12:13–27

1. There's an old saying: *Christians are so heavenly minded they're of no earthly good.* In that view what is the difference between being 'heavenly minded' and 'earthly minded'? Do you agree there's a difference between the two? If so, how would you characterise it?

READ Mark 12:13–17

2. What does Mark tell us is the reason the Herodians and Pharisees are sent to question Jesus?
3. How is this seen in (a) the way they engage Jesus? (b) the question they ask?
4. What is Jesus' answer? How does it avoid the trap?



5. This establishes an important principle for God's people. What sorts of things are rightfully 'Caesar's' (i.e. the government's) and what are God's?
- What might this look like for God's people today? What does it look like for you to *give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's*?

READ Mark 12:18–27

6. The second group of questioners is the Sadducees. They differed from their Jewish contemporaries because they rejected the idea of resurrection (v.18). How is this seen in (a) the scenario they describe? and (b) the question they end up asking?
7. What is Jesus' response (vv.24–25)? How does he draw out their misunderstandings about *both* resurrection and marriage?
8. Consider the rest of Jesus' response (vv.26–27). How is it particularly appropriate for the Sadducees who accepted only the authority of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament)?



FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

9. Does Jesus' teaching here about resurrection make sense to you? Why/why not? How should it affect the way we live now?

10. Both the Herodian/Pharisee group and the Sadducee group tried to engage Jesus in a 'battle of wits' – they weren't seeking genuine answers, they were seeking to justify their existing attitudes about God/towards Jesus.

In what ways do we sometimes try to engage God in a similar battle of wits?



THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

Mark 12:28–44

1. What do you see as the most powerful motivations in people's lives around you?

Mark records one last interaction between Jesus and a questioner, followed by some related teaching. This interaction and teaching go to the heart of what it means to worship God and live as one of his people.

READ Mark 12:28–34

2. Like the chief priests, elders, Pharisees and Sadducees, another teacher of the law comes to Jesus with a pointed question. What evidence is there that he is *not* out to trap Jesus?
3. What does Jesus say is the greatest commandment? Why is this his answer?



4. In classic rabbinical fashion, Jesus adds a second command to his reply. What is it, and what relationship does this second command bear to the first?

- If you were to evaluate your daily activities on the basis of 'love for God and neighbour', how would you fare?

The scribe not only endorses Jesus' answer, he takes it a step further: that these commands are more important than even burnt offerings and sacrifices (that is, a godly heart posture is more important than religious ritual).

5. What are some contemporary examples of 'burnt offerings and sacrifices'?

6. What do you make of Jesus' response to the scribe (v.34)?

Jesus makes a point about the Messiah's identity in the next account (vv.35–37). He calls into question the scribes' understanding that the Messiah is David's son – in the simple, literalistic sense of 'descendant'. This fitted with the nationalistic expectation of a political Messiah.



Jesus doesn't deny that the Messiah comes from David's line, but he points out that King David himself, in his own Spirit-inspired words, referred to the Messiah as 'Lord' (*the Lord said to my Lord*; Psalm 110:1) – in its context, a title higher than 'king'. Only a Messiah who is both *fully human* and *fully divine* can be both Lord *and* descendant, and such a Messiah has a far greater mission than just political restoration.

Chapter 12 ends with two contrasting pictures: the proud scribes and a lowly widow.

- Why does Jesus' identity matter so much? What difference does it make to your life?

READ Mark 12:38–44

7. What is Jesus' warning about the scribes? How does it relate to the rest of his teaching and actions in chapters 11 and 12?
8. Consider the following account of those donating to the temple (vv.41–44). What two 'groups' of givers do Jesus and his disciples observe? How much does each group give?
9. What contrast does Jesus draw? What point is he highlighting?



- What implications does this example have for our giving to God's work?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

10. In what ways are we in danger of behaving like the scribes:

- In our personal lives?

- As a church?

11. How can we as a church live out the greatest commandment(s)?

