

MARK'S GOSPEL FOLLOWING THE SERVANT-KING

INTRODUCTION

EXPLORING JESUS

No one is more loved and hated than Jesus Christ. Jesus was born in an inconspicuous fashion to an unmarried woman named Mary, adopted by a carpenter named Joseph, and spent the first three decades of his life mostly unknown to anyone outside of his family circle. Around the age of thirty, he left his father's carpentry business, was baptized and launched a public ministry. He spent his time on the road preaching to anyone that would listen, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and teaching his followers. He enjoyed hanging out with men and women that most religious types rejected as morally unacceptable. He often fought with the religious leaders and found himself on the wrong side of the power structures of his day, who considered him a dangerous figure. They were especially nervous about his claim to be God. His public life lasted only three years before he was put to death as a heretic and instigator.ⁱ

On the surface, his earthly accomplishments seem rather bleak. He gathered several hundred followers, but his travels were confined to a fairly small geographical area. He never attended graduate school, never blogged, never wrote a top ten song, never profited from a government bailout, and never had a theme park named after him. He didn't leave an estate to a large family – in fact, he had no family and no estate when he died.ⁱⁱ

Despite his seemingly meager life-story, Jesus is the most famous person in human history. He has been a prominent fixture in the world's music and art. Literature is filled with Christ-images. We celebrate holidays in his honor. Governments incorporate values taught by Jesus. His teachings have spread throughout the globe and are admired by both rich and poor, by both illiterate and hyper-educated.

Yet, Jesus remains a controversial figure. People debate the reality of his life and dispute the validity of his claims to be God. In fact, some debate whether he made any claim to divinity at all. Scan the television just before Christmas or Easter, and you'll hear plenty of opinions discussed, creating just enough controversy to warrant an hour of programming.

With all of this focus on the life of Jesus, it's amazing that many people have never really studied what the Bible has to say about the most important figure in human history. In this series, we will do exactly

that: we will explore Mark's Gospel in order to learn what we can about this man named Jesus—his claims about himself, his teachings, his actions, his passions, his death, his resurrection, his legacy. We will spend most of 2010 working our way through the sixteen chapters of Mark's Gospel.

NOTE'S ABOUT MARK'S GOSPEL

Mark is the shortest of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) in the New Testament. Most scholars believe that Mark was the first of the four gospels to be written, although we cannot be certain on this point. The early church fathers were unanimous that the author of this gospel was Mark, who was sometimes called John Mark elsewhere in the Bible.

Mark's mother owned a large home in Jerusalem which remained open to many of Jesus' followers. The Apostle Peter was apparently at this home quite often. In fact, in one episode a house servant recognized Peter's voice when he called from the gate, so he must have been a frequent visitor. Mark's connection to Peter was an important one. He had been in Jesus' inner circle and had witnessed firsthand Jesus' teachings, miracles, life-lessons, confrontations, death and resurrection. After Jesus' death, Peter emerged as the clear leader of the fledgling church, and Mark would have listened to Peter preach many times. When Mark wrote his gospel, Peter was his primary source of information. Mark was also a friend of the Apostle Paul, as well as a cousin and friend of Barnabas. Mark travelled with these men as a missionary in the early days of the church.

Mark's Gospel, then, is an account of Jesus as understood by a key leader in the Christian church which was written sometime soon after the middle of the first century. Mark's Gospel would be dispersed throughout the churches and used continuously as a document to be read aloud or quoted orally as a source for preaching and teaching.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this sense, it's not a typical history book. While the book is about actual historic events, these events are not necessarily presented in the order in which they occurred. Nor is it a biography. Mark does not attempt to tell Jesus' entire life story; instead, he records events of Jesus' life that are crucial for understanding Jesus' mission to save others and establish a new kingdom. Third, it's not a myth or legend, even though some people claim it must be because it tells of miracles that are outside our experience. Lastly, it is not simply a book of spiritual experience or moral teachings. While you will find spiritual experiences and moral teaching, the "gospel" of Jesus is about a real person who lived and acted in history as any other person.^{iv}

Why is this so important? It is critical because the historic events of Jesus life that are the basis of our salvation and the establishment of his forever kingdom. If these events of Jesus did not occur, then Christianity crumbles. On the other hand, if they are true, then all people should follow and worship Jesus. A "gospel" is a unique type of book. Gospel means "news." In this case, it is the good news about what God has done for us in the person and life of Christ to secure our salvation and restore His kingdom.^v

In terms of style, Mark offers little commentary, preferring to let Jesus speak for himself. Roughly 40% of the book is Jesus' words.^{vi} In the places where Jesus is not speaking, Mark keeps the action moving,

showing the drama of Jesus' preaching, healing, training, serving, feeding, and giving his life away (literally) for others. This makes the book a quick and engaging read.^{vii}

THE MESSAGE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

The theme of the gospel can be grasped from a single verse: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In this verse, you see the surprising paradox of a Servant-King.

Mark's Gospel is about a new King who has emerged on the scene to restore His ancient kingdom. Tim Keller writes:

However, this King comes in a way that reverses the values of the world – in weakness and service, not strength and force – to die as a ransom for us. Therefore we enter this kingdom through the "upside-down" pattern of the King who went to the cross.

We are accepted not because of our ability or merit, but through the sheer grace and repentance. We "live out" this kingdom by following the "upside-down" pattern of the King who went to the cross. We live lives of sacrifice and service.^{viii}

Jesus invited us to enter this kingdom, but we can only enter on his terms. If we are to follow this Servant-King, we must learn his way of seeing, his way of loving, his way of being.

ⁱ Mark Driscoll and Gary Brashears, *Vintage Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007) 11-12.

ⁱⁱ Driscoll and Brashears, 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002) 9-11, 35-41.

^{iv} Timothy J. Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church. *The Gospel of Mark* (New York, NY: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005) Introduction to the Gospel of Mark.

^v Keller, Introduction.

^{vi} Mark Driscoll, *Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God*, (2009), <http://marshillchurch.org/luke>, 14-15.

^{vii} Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983) 318.

^{viii} Keller, 1.