

## **The Gospel of Mark ~ Following The Servant King**

*Week 1: Introduction & Chapters 1 ~ 3:12*

### Introduction

Mark is the shortest of the gospels and is generally considered to be the first one written. Along with Matthew and Luke, Mark is one of the Synoptic Gospels. “Synoptic” literally means seen with one eye or sharing a common view. Matthew, Mark, and Luke share much of the same material...with John being considerably different from these three. Even though the Synoptic Gospels share much of the same information, they each have a different focus, a unique emphasis, a distinctive flavor, a special purpose.

So what is special/unique about Mark? One of the first things a reader might notice is how fast-paced Mark’s account is. The action moves quickly from one scene to the next. Along with that, there are fewer recorded teachings of Jesus (i.e. fewer long discourses compared to the other gospel writers; fewer red letters, if you will). The pace of Mark even comes out literally—notice how often the word “immediately” (or a similar word/synonym, depending on the version/translation you’re reading) is used. A modern day editor would tell Mark that he is overusing that word...unless it is key to his purpose...which it is.

What is Mark’s purpose, and how does the pace of the book demonstrate and support that? Please take note of the title we’ve given this series: *Following The Servant King*. “Servant King” is an oxymoron. Those are two distinctly different roles on the social spectrum. But that is exactly how Mark is portraying Jesus in his gospel account. And when the King says or does something...things “immediately” happen. Mark goes out of his way to demonstrate the authority of Jesus. And yet, at the same time, he portrays Jesus as humble, gentle, kind, tender, sacrificial...of a very different character than we tend to think of someone in authority. So be on the lookout for that as you read through this book (and I’ll highlight it throughout these notes as well).

Who is this Mark that offers us this account? We are introduced to him in the book of Acts, chapter 12, as John Mark (or John, also called Mark...see Acts 12:12, 12:25, 13:5), who was a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas until he deserted them (see Acts 13:13, 15:37-40). We may have been introduced to John Mark earlier in the Biblical story—or, perhaps better stated, Mark may have subtly introduced himself in his own gospel. In Mark 14:51-52 we read “*A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.*” It’s such a strange little detail in the story, one which none of the other gospel writers include. It smacks of a first hand account, which is why it is often speculated that this young man was, in fact, Mark.

Another question that can be asked is: Where did Mark get his information? Or, who was his source so that he could provide the details he did? The general consensus is that Peter was Mark’s primary source. In I Peter 5:13 we see the close association between Mark and Peter as Peter calls him “*...my son Mark*” (not literally/biologically his son, but his spiritual son...his son in the faith, you might say).

This gospel was originally written with a Roman audience in mind. Mark was trying to demonstrate the deity of Jesus and the unique character of this God as One who would sacrifice Himself. Jesus is King and God, yet He is unlike any king or god anyone would ever expect. And we are called to follow this Servant King as loyal subjects who follow His example/pattern of life.

Of course, no introduction (that I would offer) would be complete without sharing a link or two from the Bible Project. 😊

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-mark/>

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/mark/>

These are really good and provide a nice breakdown on how the book flows. I particularly like the simple outline of the book they offer...

- I. Who is Jesus (Chapters 1-8a)
  - II. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Messiah (Chapters 8b-10)
  - III. How Jesus becomes King (Chapters 11-16)
- *Do you have a favorite Gospel account (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)? If so, why is that your favorite?*

*(\*\*\*Note to Table Group Leaders: As usual, I'm going to offer you more discussion questions than you can likely get through in the time allotted. They will be bullet pointed, italicized, and colored like the one above, and sprinkled throughout the notes. Pick a few that you like best—or use them as fodder to come up with your own. Also, we're going through Mark at a very fast pace and a high level point of view. There are many, many details that I simply don't have time and space to elaborate on. I would recommend creating space in your group for people to mention what they observed in their reading or what questions they have from their reading. Even if we can't address anything, we want to encourage curious reading and engagement with Scripture.\*\*\*)*

### Chapters 1 ~ 3:12

The very opening line of the book presents Mark's thesis statement, if you will, "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" (1:1) In the rest of the book Mark lays out the evidence for his readers for them to consider and invites them to come to their own conclusions...though obviously with the hope that his readers will agree with his thesis and respond accordingly. Incidentally, some translations might say "Jesus the Messiah" instead of "Jesus Christ". The words (titles actually) Messiah, which is Hebrew, and Christ, which is Greek, both mean the same thing..."anointed" or "anointed one". Both have royal and religious connotations, as both kings and priests were anointed. And there was a longstanding expectation that God would send an anointed one to make everything right. Mark's claim from the outset is that Jesus is that anointed one.

Mark starts and ends quite abruptly. There's no nativity scene or genealogy, no background information...just off and running. (I told you it was fast-paced.) Mark writes with an urgency because he has an important message that requires a response. The first person we're introduced to is John (the baptizer) as a fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah made about 700 years prior. It was foretold that a forerunner would appear shortly before the arrival of the Messiah, and Mark, along with all the gospel writers, indicates that John is that forerunner.

And that forerunner also has an urgent message, in essence, "*Get ready! The Lord is coming!*" And, boom, right away Mark presents the reader with Jesus of Nazareth. (Not subtle, but effective.)

There's an old British expression that says wherever the queen goes she smells fresh paint. Meaning, if the queen is coming, everyone cleans, repairs, paints in order to prepare for the queen's arrival. John's prescribed preparation for the King's arrival was "*Repent!*"

All four gospels have some account of Jesus' baptism. All four mention the Spirit descending like a dove. The three Synoptic Gospels each mention the Voice from heaven. Let's slow down and consider what the Voice (The Father's) said, "*You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.*" (1:11) There is a lot going on here.

First, Mark is basically saying that his thesis statement (1:1) is backed up by the Voice from heaven. He's presenting this incident as evidence. Second, and most significantly, is what the Voice states: "*You are...*" This is a statement of identity. "*...My Son*" This is a statement of belonging. "*...whom I love.*" This is a statement of worth, value, significance. What we're going to see as we go through Mark is that Jesus remained consistent with this statement about Him. He received it and ran with it.

Now allow me to let you in on a key theological truth: What is true of Jesus, as the quintessential, representative human, is also true of us. Our identity, belonging, and value/worth/significance come from God. This is what it means to be a Christian, a disciple/follower of Jesus. Many things compete for our identity, but only Jesus gets defining rights. In other words, we are who He says we are. All other distinctive factors about us are ordered and relativized by our primary identity as Christ followers.

The world around us tells us that we need to discover, or create, or figure out, or manufacture our identity. Nope. We simply have to receive it. We're also told that we have to achieve, accomplish, acquire, perform, look and act a certain way, etc. in order to belong or have value/worth/significance. Again, nope. Jesus hadn't done anything...no miracles or healing or teaching or resurrecting...nothing. God the Father affirmed His identity prior to any of that. It could be argued that Jesus was able to go on and do all that He did because He received and trusted the words of the Father and He simply lived consistent with those words.

Friends, we don't need to get God to love us. He already does. We simply have to learn to trust that He loves us and allow His love and the great value He has for us to guide us. Jesus shows us the way.

- *When you think of your "identity" what comes to mind? One way we can answer that is by completing this statement: I am \_\_\_\_\_. How do you complete that statement? Likely, we can fill that blank in with lots of things, all of which on some level are true and accurate. But what is your most fundamental "I am \_\_\_\_\_" statement?...the one that gives order and meaning to everything else?*
- *In order for us to be confident and secure in our identity, it has to be founded/rooted in something that can never change or be lost. However you answered the question above, what is that identity rooted in?*

All three Synoptic Gospels state that immediately after Jesus' baptism He goes into the desert/wilderness for forty days, during which He is tempted by Satan. Matthew and Luke detail the temptations; Mark does not. But if you're familiar with the temptations you'll know that Satan's temptations were aimed specifically at Jesus' identity...*"If you are the Son of God..."* (see Matthew 4, Luke 4). I mention this because it is vitally important that we understand that at its core our "faith" is a matter of identity, not an issue of "religion".

- *Satan/the devil is presented as real in all four Gospels. How do your/our modern sensibilities feel about that?*

Again, Mark moves fast. He doesn't bother to tell his readers how or why John is imprisoned (1:14)...he mentions it more as a transition statement of when Jesus' public ministry began. (FYI...John ticked off King Herod. Mark will backfill the details of that in chapter 6.)

Here's an interesting question: What is the gospel/good news? Many would say it's that Jesus died and rose again. Well, He certainly did. But how could that be the gospel/good news He proclaimed if He hadn't done that yet? (see 1:14-15) The gospel/good news Jesus proclaimed was that *"The kingdom of God is near/at hand."* This IN NO WAY minimizes the importance of the crucifixion and resurrection. That's an integral piece of the story of Jesus and His Kingdom. Keep in mind Mark's opening words, *"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus..."* (1:1) We can think of the "Gospel" as a proclamation AND the story that supports that proclamation.

- *The "gospel" is a word we throw around a lot. What are we referring to when we use it? (It's important that we understand the gospel because the Church exists to share it.)*

Moving on, quickly, Mark tells of the calling of the first disciples...Simon and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John. (1:16-20). *"Come follow Me...and I will make you fishers of men."* This call/invitation is very much within the rabbinic tradition of discipleship. But typically the type of people who would receive such a call/invitation were those who had progressed through the rigorous formal educational process. The fact that these were fishermen meant that they did not have the typical educational background and credentials. So just what

was Jesus calling/inviting them to? As with all rabbi/disciple relationships of the day, the opportunity was to: Be with Jesus...to Become like Jesus...and to Do as Jesus did. This is what discipleship/apprenticeship is all about. We, too, are offered this opportunity. This is what it means to be a Christian.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkOZEt-KwZw>

(I've shared this video in previous series, but this presents a good understanding of the rabbi/disciple relationship. It is good for us to have this in mind as we read about Jesus and His disciples...and as we consider what it means to be disciples of Jesus ourselves.)

- *Would you describe your experience of the Christian faith as one of apprenticeship? How so, or how not? If not as apprenticeship, how would you describe it?*

In the first miracle/healing that Mark presents he introduces a key theme within his book: Authority. Jesus is presented as teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum (Capernaum functioned as Jesus' base of operations during His public ministry). It's interesting that Mark doesn't bother telling us WHAT Jesus taught. He simply says that Jesus taught "...as one who had authority" (1:22), and that is backed up with the deliverance of a guy with an evil spirit.

Two noteworthy things: First, the dude with the evil spirit was at the synagogue on the Sabbath. That would be akin to a possessed person being at a church worship service on Sunday for us. Not exactly where you would expect to find such a person. Secondly, Mark presents this possessed guy as the first person to recognize who Jesus really is, "...the Holy One of God" (1:24)

Remember, Mark's goal/thesis is to present Jesus as the Christ/Messiah. To do so convincingly and persuasively Mark will describe and demonstrate the power/authority Jesus had, which is commensurate with what one would/should expect of the Christ/Messiah. Actually, most of the first eight chapters of Mark are designed to show the power/authority of Jesus. Mark quickly piles on with the healing of Simon's mother-in-law and many others with various diseases and evil spirits (1:29-34), the healing of a leper (1:40-45), and the healing of a paralytic (2:1-12)

- *Whose authority do you live under? Or who has authority over you? What roles/positions do you recognize as being/having legitimate authority and on what basis?*
- *How is the authority of Jesus seen in your life personally and in our life collectively as a church family? Do you/we recognize Jesus' authority over every aspect of life...or just certain parts of life?*

In the midst of all this fast-paced action and activity let's not miss a couple key details Mark offers. In 1:35 we read, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed." When we take all the gospel accounts together we see that this was a regular practice and rhythm for Jesus. So if He's the rabbi that we pattern ourselves after...the one we want to be like...then we want to adopt a similar practice/rhythm of solitude and prayer as well. (This is also a way in which we, today, carve out

time and space to BE WITH Jesus.) A big part of the reason we offer weekly “Soul Training Exercises” and periodic Prayer School is to help us cultivate this practice/rhythm. Additionally, while none of the gospels explicitly state WHY Jesus had this as a regular practice, wisdom would say that spending time alone with the Father in prayer is HOW He stayed immersed in His true identity, HOW He dealt with all the difficulties of public life and relationships, HOW He stayed true to the mission and vision. Again, if Jesus needed to do that, we do as well and for all the same reasons.

- *How do you spend time with Jesus/God? What sort of practice/rhythm do you have to cultivate that relationship? What sort of fruit have you experienced from that practice/rhythm? How has it changed/transformed you?*

In this week’s reading, Mark also offers us a glimpse into the emotional side of Jesus. It can be easy to think of Jesus as somewhat stoic, sort of emotionally detached or above feelings. But that is not how Scripture depicts Him. We are emotional creatures because we are made in the image of God, who has emotions.

Notice Jesus’ response to the man with leprosy, “*Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man.*” (1:41, emphasis added) This is a graphic and emotionally powerful term that means to be viscerally moved on a gut level. It can even be translated as “Filled with indignation/anger.”, though compassion or pity is more fitting here. On another occasion (see 3:1-6) we read “*He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...*” (3:5) “Deeply distressed” can also be translated as “grieved”. Compassion, anger, grief...these are powerful emotions. So not only is Mark telling us about the authority of Jesus as the Christ/Messiah, he’s also telling us something about His character.

This reminds me of Psalm 62:11-12, “*One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that You, O God, are strong, and that You, O Lord, are loving. Surely You will reward each person according to what they have done.*” This is consistent with how Mark is presenting Jesus, the One with authority...He’s strong/powerful and at the same time loving. Isn’t that exactly what we want of the One in charge, our King and Sovereign?

- *We are living in a time when the character of those in authority is far more questionable than anytime I can remember in my lifetime. What are the traits of someone with “high character”? How is high character (or what we might call virtue) developed? What’s the connection between character/virtue and identity?*

In chapter two and the early part of chapter three Mark shows the authority of Jesus in ways beyond the miraculous. With the healing of the paralytic (2:1-12) Jesus says, “*But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.*” (2:10-11, emphasis added). Forgiving sins is something only God has the authority to do...which is exactly the point. Remember Who Mark is portraying Jesus to be.

Later Mark presents the “Sabbath controversies” (see 2:23-3:6...gleaning grain on the Sabbath; healing on the Sabbath) and Jesus’ words, “*The Sabbath was made for humankind, not*

*humankind for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*” (2:27-28, emphasis added) Jesus’ authority is rooted in His identity, not simply His capability...though His capability is quite impressive.

Jesus’ favorite title for Himself was “Son of Man”. This term comes from the book of Daniel. *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given **authority, glory and sovereign power**; all peoples, nations and people of every language worshipped Him. His **dominion** is an everlasting **dominion** that will not pass away, and His **kingdom** is one that will never be destroyed.”* (Daniel 7:13-14, emphasis added) This was Jesus’ self-understanding.

Jesus understood Who He was as well as the authority that came with that. But, as we see very early in Mark’s account, tension was beginning to build with the other power brokers, the cultural influencers, the authority wielders of the time...the Pharisees. While Mark’s account doesn’t mention it, even John the Baptizer had some tension with the Pharisees (see Matthew 3:7-17, John 1:19-28). They wanted to know what sort of authority John had to be doing what he was doing. That same line of questioning regarding legitimacy and authority was also directed at Jesus (see Mark 2:18-28).

Jesus, being rooted in Who He was, deftly dealt with the Pharisees, often leaving them speechless. Sometimes Jesus even went on the offensive as we see at the beginning of chapter 3. *“Another time He went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal on the Sabbath.”* (3:1-2) They clearly hadn’t caught, or accepted, the point Jesus had made in their previous exchange (2:27-28). *“Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent.”* (3:3-4)

This was a relatively easy question. A child could correctly answer this question. Jesus was subtly questioning their authority and legitimacy. Their lack of response spoke volumes. This helps explain Jesus’ reaction. *“He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”* (3:5-6)

The religious leaders did not have the character to match the influence and authority they held. They were more concerned about their place in society and how they were viewed by others than they were about the welfare of the people they were supposed to care for. They were more focused on being above people than they were about serving people. What we see in Jesus is what Kingdom power and authority looks like (again, the Servant King).

- *How important is Jesus’ authority to our understanding of Him?*

We don't want to miss that the confidence and security we see Jesus functioning from came from His deep understanding of His Identity, which was affirmed at His baptism. You and I have the same opportunity to live from a similar place of security and confidence as we are deeply rooted in our identity given to us by God. (Remember, the theme for this year is Rooted and Grounded in Love. We are God's beloved children. We want to live from this fundamental truth.)

With that in mind, I've included a couple links to songs that remind us of our identity in Christ. Listen to them, and allow the truth they convey to wash over you and sink deeply into your soul.

▶ Lauren Daigle - You Say (Lyric Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8WK9HmF53w>

▶ Who You Say I Am (Lyric Video) - Hillsong Worship

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcC1Bp13n\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcC1Bp13n_4)

The final paragraph of this week's reading (3:7-12) describes the growing popularity of Jesus as crowds from all over flocked to Him. Who wouldn't be drawn to such a person?

(scroll down for the Soul Training Exercise)



## Soul Training Exercises

- In preparation for next week, read Mark 3:13-5:43
- Solitude & Prayer
  - As we saw this week (see Mark 1:35) times of solitude and prayer were a regular pattern/rhythm for Jesus. These are basic, foundational spiritual formation exercises. Maybe you already have a regular practice of this. That's great. This week's invitation, then, is to perhaps take an extended time this week to be alone and pray. If this is not a regular practice for you, perhaps give it a shot. Carve out some time this week to be alone and to pray. Maybe for 10-15 minutes; maybe for an hour. Here's an exercise from our friends at the Order of The Common Life that you might find helpful.

### SIFT: An Awareness Exercise\*

Right now, as you let your eyes close, notice your breath. Is your breath deep or shallow? Is your breath flowing easily, or does it feel tight? However you breathe, simply follow it in...and then out...in and then out.

- What other **Sensations** might you notice in your body right now? Are your muscles tense? Can you feel your heartbeat? Or is there a sensation washing over your whole body? Just notice whatever there is.
- What, if any, **Images** might be coming to your mind's eye. They may be recognizable pictures—people, scenes—or maybe just colors, fuzzy shapes, something abstract and hard to name. Right now, just be aware that they're there.
- Next, what **Feelings** do you find inside of you? Peaceful? Anxious? Frustrated? Maybe several at once. Any feelings you notice are welcome in this moment.
- And finally, what **Thoughts** can you notice running in your mind, floating to the surface or even stuck somewhere. Maybe it's hard to put words to some of these thoughts too. That's OK. They're allowed to be just what they are.

Now, as you move on in your time of prayer, find your breath again. What sensations, images, feelings or thoughts feel especially significant to you now, that you might take to Jesus in prayer?

What might you want Jesus to look at with you, see and acknowledge in you, or respond to as you spend time together?

\*Special thanks to The Order of the Common Life for this exercise.