

Study notes for Mark's gospel: 1:1-15

discussion guide

(Linked to sermon of 07/01/2024)

which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks

Introductory thoughts:

We begin a new exciting series on Mark's gospel, which is considered by a majority of scholars to be the earliest gospel written and one that Matthew and Luke independently had access to. There is no infancy narrative in Mark's gospel to introduce Jesus but Mark's distinctive gospel begins with the Jesus' public ministry. From January to Easter we will journey with Mark as he tells the Jesus story, and we will journey with each other until we reach Mark's tantalising conclusion. See <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/mark/> - for an overview of Mark.

On the surface Mark's gospel seems to be simple and straightforward with a clear plot from the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee in the north of Judea then with a transition with Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah in Mark 8:29 until his execution and resurrection in Jerusalem. It demonstrates that Jesus is a man of action, immediately engaged with his turbulent Judean world, and offers himself as the suffering sacrificial servant of God who seeks to reconcile people to God as he offers his life as a ransom for many. Whilst Mark's gospel is the shortest and very likely the earliest of the 4 gospel accounts, is it, perhaps the least understood? I think that Mark's gospel is both cryptic and ironic for a discipleship purpose.

Have you ever read or listened to Mark's gospel in one go or over a couple of weeks? What do you think may be the advantages of reading or listening to Mark's gospel as a book?

Mark 1:1-15 is like a mini-overture to the whole gospel of Mark with many themes and ideas highlighted being elaborated on and explored further in the narrative. What themes or ideas can you discover as you read this passage?

Mark 1:1:

Even just looking at the opening verse what biblical themes can you pick up on?

In bible studies we often focus on a particular short passage and then use other verses or passages to explore it further. Do you think it would be useful also to explore larger passages of the bible or even the main elements/themes of different books of the bible? Have you bought or thought of buying an Introduction to the New Testament?

If you want to explore the idea of the good news why not watch the short video

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

Mark 1:2-8

In the passage what role does John nicknamed the Baptist play? You may wish to explore the Old Testament quotes from Ex 23:20, Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. and also an inferred quote from 2 Kg 1:8 to see what light they throw on John's ministry?

In what way can you prepare the way for God to act in your life?

Why do you think people were flocking to John? Why did God's chosen people, the Jews, feel need the to be baptised in the Jordan by John?

Does Is 1:1:16-18 help illuminate this reason? What do these verses say about the nature and scope of repentance? Why does repentance involve inward personal change and outward social change?

How do you think and feel about our current Christian culture? Is there a need for change?

Is there a significance in the Jordan location? (see the story of Jacob, the story of Joshua) Was there a need for a new Israel – a new kingdom?

Was John's call to repentance enough for the people? Was there anything missing? For an OT perspective read Jer 31:31-34 and Ezk 36:24-28

Mark 1:9

Why did Jesus get baptised by John in the Jordan?"

Note – I suggest that Mark does not say that Jesus confesses his sins but that Jesus identifies with his people during his life, in his sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of the people and in his resurrection being the first fruits of the new creation.

Mark 1:10-11

What biblical images spring to mind as you read these verses? (Ps2:7 and Is 42:1) What else was torn open in Mark's gospel (Mk15:38) Is there any connection?

As soon as Mark declares God's purposes for Jesus then the reader is informed that ¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted^[a] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

These are 2 of the most puzzling verses in Mark's gospel – Many are not sure what they mean. Is Jesus a new Adam restoring a heaven-earth creation dynamic and defeating Satan and enabled by the Spirit to overcome all cosmic and earthly opposition? (Is 11:6,8)

Angels ministers in Ps91:21, I Kg 19:5,7 so they can sustain a prophet even despite no recognition from his family, the leaders of the people of God, and the ruling authorities?

Mark 1:14-15

In what ways do you live in the God' kingdom?

Mark 1:15 is as famous as John 3:16. Has the time come for change? Political pundits say so. Is the kingdom of God near and here today in terms of inward and outward change in our country and in Southampton? What could make it more real in St James by the Park?

In what ways will you follow Jesus in 2024?

<https://bibleproject.com/articles/mark-gospel-servant-messiah/> summary article on Mark's gospel