

rockypc SERIES COMPANION 2024



ONE STEP CLOSER

Mark's Gospel

WEEKS 6-9

*growing
disciples*
sacrifice. serve. speak



ONE STEP CLOSER

AN INTRODUCTION TO MARK'S GOSPEL¹

Jesus is the man of action, moving quickly and decisively from one event to the next. From the opening sentence, Mark's Gospel is packed full of action. It begins with God's interruption of history (1v1) and ends with a declaration that changes lives (15v39). But this book is not ancient history that belongs in a museum, Mark places all his readers in the story, recording for us the fast-paced movement of Jesus' ministry. In town after town, and story after story Mark shows us Jesus, the Son of God who's come to change the world.

The narrative moves quickly—the word 'immediately' appears 41 times in this the shortest and earliest gospel account, moving the action forwards with conflict arising quickly.² The people Jesus interacts with can't understand how He will bring all God's promises to bear as one who came to suffer, die and rise again.³

Mark shows us Jesus doing, more than Jesus teaching (in comparison with the other Gospel stories which include longer teaching sections), but the teaching is always there. What Jesus says is the climax to the story. Time and again, through his actions and his words, Jesus draws us towards himself because of his deep compassion for people in great need. Jesus shows what love is and the story moves unerringly towards the moment on calvary where Jesus dies on a cross, bearing God's wrath, so that God might pour out his love on all who would draw near to Jesus in faith.

Mark's Gospel story about Jesus focuses on the action. Our response to Jesus therefore, can't be passive, but, like his ministry, must be deliberate and decisive. He invites us, in each episode, to step closer to him — to know him, to see what he is like, to experience his compassion in our own lives, to be confident in his strength.

This year, we're taking a slow walk through Mark's Gospel. Taking one step at a time towards the cross. It's our hope that you'll find Jesus worthy of your greatest attention: unpredictable but reliable, gentle but powerful, authoritative but humble, human and divine. We urge you to consider the significance of his life for your own life, day-to-day, and invite you to take ONE STEP CLOSER each day.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT READING THE GOSPELS — MARK IN COMPARISON WITH MATTHEW, LUKE & JOHN

We want to recognise that each of the Gospels tell the same overall story, and include very similar, smaller episodes in that story. It can be tempting then to read MARK in constant comparison with the other Gospels. However, it's important to realise that each Gospel writer is telling the story from their own perspective, with their own specific purpose behind what they include (or choose to leave out). Often this relates to the specific audience they're addressing. That's why we have four Gospels, and not one!

During this series, try to resist the temptation to look at the other Gospels to compare narratives (certainly not as the first thing you do). Instead, try to read Mark's Gospel on its own terms. Try to see how the details included by Mark fit together to form a compelling picture about who Jesus is, and how Jesus' identity is tied to his life-giving death on a cross.

¹ 'Gospel' means at its simplest 'good news'. It is a proclamation that things have changed for the better. Typically in the ancient world it was a word used to announce victory in battle. In the Bible, it proclaims the good news of the arrival of God's Promised King, heralded by the coming of His Promised King, Messiah Jesus. When used of the first four books in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), we are referring to the good news story about Jesus according to that author.

² The Greek word translated 'immediately' is εὐθύς. In the New International Version, it is also translated with words like 'at once' or 'without delay'.

³ Mark's Gospel is presented in two acts. Act One identifies Jesus as God's promised Messianic King (ch1-8), whose purpose in coming, revealed in Act Two, was to give his life by dying on a cross as a ransom for many (ch9-16).

SO, WHO WAS MARK?

The earliest and most reliable information about Mark comes from Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis until 139AD. Papias said that John Mark was a secretary and writer for the apostle Peter. Interestingly, Mark mentions Peter more than any of the other gospel writers. As you read through Mark, you'll see almost nothing happens where Peter is not present. The entire account then, is almost certainly the eyewitness testimony of Peter.

The book itself turns on Peter's confession:

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Mark 8v27-31

The events of Mark's gospel take place around Palestine, an area from Caesarea Philippi in the North to Beersheba in the South. During Jesus' ministry this region was ruled by the Roman Empire during the reign of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs, Antipas and Philip.

The Gospel stories are certainly intended to speak to everyone, but as mentioned above, each Gospel author has a specific purpose for what they included, often targeted towards a specific audience of people with specific needs.

Mark's Gospel seems to be especially focused on Roman Gentiles, making sure he explains things from the Jewish/Hebrew culture that wouldn't otherwise make sense. So, it's significant that from the turning point of Peter's confession about Jesus' identity as the Messiah, the story moves rapidly to its conclusion where a Roman centurion looks up at Jesus on the cross:

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

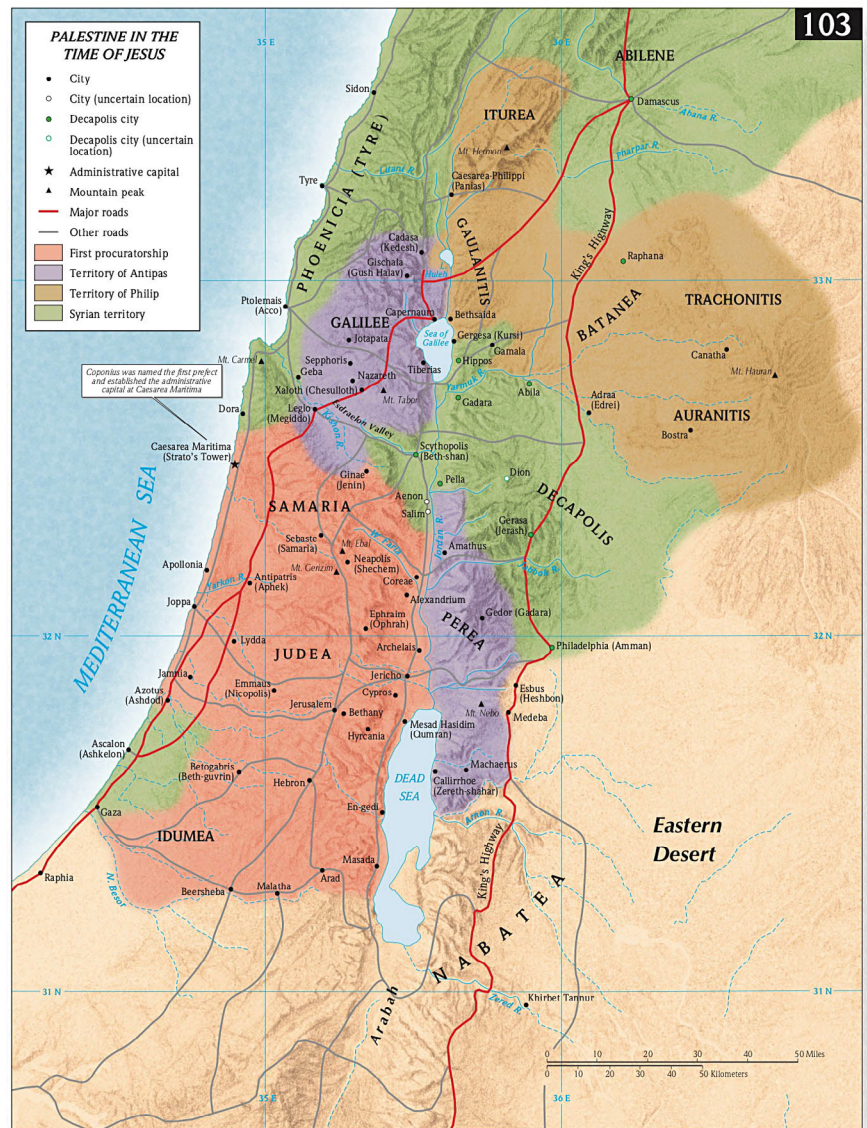
Mark 15v39

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS SERIES COMPANION

ON YOUR OWN—Take your time reading through each of the passages and consider where you are up to in Mark's Story. Ask where Jesus is currently located, find it on the map, and consider whether this is significant. If you have time, work through the questions before your GROWTH GROUP so that you've started thinking about the topic before you arrive.

WITH YOUR GROWTH GROUP—Don't be afraid to stop and talk about things that grab your attention or raise questions for you. Above all, spend your time considering what we learn about the man, Jesus, and consider what it will mean for you to take ONE STEP CLOSER to him in faith.

ON SUNDAY—Make sure you bring your SERIES COMPANION along with you, so that you can keep track of any questions you have and record the way that God's Spirit is helping you to understand His Word and grow in your love for Jesus.





EARS TO HEAR

MARK 4v1-34

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

GETTING STARTED

Who do you find hard to listen to? What makes it hard? Who would you rather listen to?

Last week, we heard Jesus tell us who is inside his family — those he calls into relationship with him (3v14) and those who do His Father's will (3v35). Today, Mark recounts a number of parables Jesus told, which help us understand more about who is on the inside and on the outside of Jesus' kingdom.

READ MARK 4v1-2

1. What do the crowds lead Jesus to do?

READ MARK 4v3-9

2. Imagine this parable is the only thing you heard Jesus say. What do you think you'd notice about the farmer? About the seed? About the soil? About the crop?

READ MARK 4v9-13

3. Who has ears to hear, according to Jesus? (compare 4v10 with 3v34-35)

READ ISAIAH 6v8-12

4. God sends Isaiah to his people, Judah, with a warning that they will be sent into exile. What will stop the people from turning back to God?
5. Mark sandwiches the quote from Isaiah between the telling of the parable, and his explanation of the parable's meaning (in v13-20). He does this help to highlight the prophecy at the centre. How do Jesus' parables fulfill God's words to Isaiah? Are parables just good illustrations to make Jesus' point more clear?

READ MARK 4v13-20

6. In your own words, describe the different responses to the word. What are the different outcomes? What strikes you as you read this explanation?

7. How have you seen these different responses so far in the people we've met in the gospel of Mark?

8. What crop or fruit do you think is produced by those who hear and accept the word? (see also Psalm 1v1-3)

9. From v13, how does this parable explain all other parables? (including those that follow in Chapter 4)

READ MARK 4v21-25

10. We often read this parable about the lamp as referring to our own evangelism, as though we should be more bold to share the gospel. However, this doesn't make the best sense, given the context of the previous parable. Who is hiding and disclosing? Who is responding and how? (see also Proverbs 9v7-12)

READ MARK 4v26-32

11. What do we learn about the kingdom of God from these 2 parables?

READ MARK 4v33-34

12. In summary, why did Jesus follow this pattern of giving parables to the crowd and then an explanation to his disciples when they were alone?

growing disciples

At **rockypc** we have 5 core values — we want to be growing disciples who are DEEP IN THE WORD, SEEKING GOD, on MISSION, as we SERVE in COMMUNITY together.

Jesus says 'Consider carefully how you hear'. How do you respond to God's word? What kind of soil describes your response?

What crop/fruit has Jesus word been producing in you?



What entices you away from listening to Jesus?

If you haven't been listening or producing fruit, what can you do to take a step closer to Jesus?



What have you learned today about the kingdom of God that can help you in speaking with not-yet-believing friends and family?



Prayer Ideas

- Praise God that his word has been sown in us, that we can be part of his kingdom, through Jesus.
- Confess when we have been slow to listen and hard-hearted to not accept God's word. Pray that God would unstop our ears and soften our hearts. Ask that we'd step towards Jesus, coming to him so we might understand and obey.
- Pray that God would grow a massive crop in us. That we would produce the fruit of repentance, faith and righteousness.
- Pray that God's kingdom would grow, beyond our expectations. Pray for friends and family who don't yet believe in Jesus — that they would hear and accept him. Pray that we would persevere in sharing the word about Jesus and in praying for them.



WHO IS THIS?

MARK 4v35-41

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

GETTING STARTED

Have you got a boating story to share with the group? Seasickness? Near-drowning? A near miss?

Jesus has spent a few chapters of Mark's story beside the lake, the Sea of Galilee, where he's been preaching, healing and calling followers (1v16; 2v13; 3v8; 4v1). Now we come to a section with three lake *crossing* stories (4v35-41; 6v47-52; 8v14-21). Jesus is criss-crossing between the western, Jewish side of the lake and the eastern, non-Jewish side. These lake crossings explore the disciples' journey from fear to faith. We're looking at the first story today.

READ MARK 4v35-38

1. How are the disciples reacting to this natural disaster? What do you think is behind their question in v38?

READ MARK 4v39-41

2. How does Jesus respond to the storm? How does he respond to the disciples?

3. The disciples are even more scared after the storm calms down. What new question does this raise for them?

This short story is jam-packed with Old Testament background. Let's dig into it now.

READ GENESIS 1v1-9

4. How does God relate to water in the Creation story?

READ JOB 26

5. What does God's power over water show about him?

READ PSALM 107v1-3; 23-32

6. This Psalm tells a number of different stories about people in distressing situations. What did those in trouble on the sea learn about the LORD? How should they respond to him, according to the Psalmist?

READ JONAH 1

7. What similarities can you see between Jonah’s story and Jesus’? What are the differences?

READ PSALM 46

8. What does this Psalm tell Israel to remember about the LORD when he stills chaotic waters and warring nations?

Let’s put this Old Testament background together with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee in the foreground.

9. What is the answer to the disciples’ accusing question in Mark 4v38? How do you know?

10. What is the answer to the disciples’ terrified question in v41? How do you know?

11. Jesus’ questions in v40 show he was expecting them to have faith in him, rather than fearing. Why *should* they have responded to this event with faith?

growing disciples

At **rockypc** we have 5 core values — we want to be growing disciples who are DEEP IN THE WORD, SEEKING GOD, on MISSION, as we SERVE in COMMUNITY together.

What wrong assumptions do you tend to make about Jesus? That he’s not God? That he doesn’t care? That he’s not powerful? Something else?

How has God’s word challenged these assumptions today?





This part of the story shows us that when we understand who Jesus is, as God himself, we can respond rightly to him. Should we fear Jesus?

Can you trust Jesus to keep you safe?

How might you have faith in him, in place of fear? How can you take one step closer to Jesus?

Prayer Ideas

- Praise Jesus for being powerful over his creation. Wind and waves obey his mighty word. Pray that we would have humility to understand that we can only see the outer fringes of his power.
- Praise Jesus for caring for us. He uses his immense power to keep us safe with him. Pray that we wouldn't fear him, but that he would be our refuge.
- Praise Jesus as God himself come near to us. Ask forgiveness for when we've not seen him rightly as the powerful, caring God.
- Pray that we would respond to Jesus in faith, stepping closer to him.



THE STRONG MAN

MARK 5v1-20

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

GETTING STARTED

Do some word association together. What words do we associate with 'tombs' in Australian culture?

Jesus has been traveling around the western side of the Sea of Galilee, which was predominantly Jewish in ethnicity and religion. Last week, we saw Jesus cross to the eastern side of the lake where people of other ethnicities and backgrounds lived. This is the first of a number of stories in Mark's gospel where Jesus' power and compassion stretches beyond traditional Jewish boundaries.

READ MARK 5v1-5

The region of the Gerasenes has a number of names. You can find it on the map, labeled Gergesa (Kursi).

1. What strikes you about this man?
2. What is unclean/impure here? (see Deuteronomy 7v1-8; Numbers 19v11-22)



3. What problems do Jesus and his disciples face in meeting this unclean man?

READ MARK 5v6-13

4. What do we learn about the impure spirit?

A legion was a unit in the Roman army of 3000-6000 soldiers.

5. What do we learn about Jesus?

6. How has Mark foreshadowed this event? (Mark 1v23-27; 3v22-27, see also Isaiah 9v1-7; 49v5-10)

7. Why do you think Jesus sanctions a mass pig suicide? (see also Leviticus 11v4-8)

READ MARK 5v14-17

8. What makes the villagers afraid? How do they react to Jesus, in their fear?

9. How does this man's story mirror the previous story on the lake? (Mark 4v35-41)

READ MARK 5v18-20

Four times in this story someone falls before Jesus to plead with him — the man who is controlled by demons (v6-7; 10), the villagers (v17) and the man a second time, now that he has been restored (v18).

10. What does this show about who Jesus is? (see also Isaiah 45v23-25)

11. What does the man ask Jesus? (see also Mark 3v13-15)

12. Having told numerous people (and demons) not to tell others about Jesus' healing, why do you think Jesus now gives him this task?

13. What is his message? (remember the disciples' question in Mark 4v38)

growing disciples

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As Christians, should we fear evil spiritual powers? Why/why not?

SEEKING GOD

How have you experienced Jesus' restoration and cleansing? Are there parts of this man's story that resonate with you?

SEEKING GOD

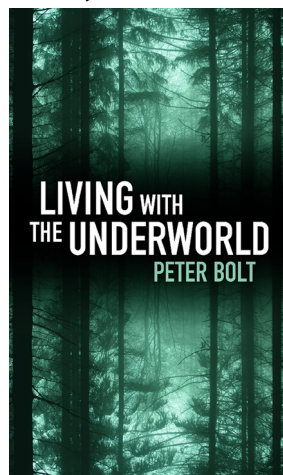
What is the essence of our message to those who are still in darkness?

How have you been able to share what the Lord has done for you with a non-believing friend/family member recently?

MISSION

If you would like to read more, check out this short article by Chuck Lawless, from The Gospel Coalition [Does Demon Possession Happen in the West?](#)

Or grab a copy of this book by Peter Bolt [Living with the Underworld](#)



Prayer Ideas

- Praise Jesus who is stronger than every evil power. Pray that we wouldn't fear spiritual powers, because Jesus defeated them at the cross.
- Praise Jesus for restoring and cleansing us. Thank him for releasing us from the powers of darkness, so that we might follow him.
- Pray that we would tell others of his mercy and all that he has done for us.



2 DAUGHTERS

MARK 5v21-43

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

GETTING STARTED

What do you think makes death so scary for most people? What actions does the fear of death lead to?

In Chapter 4 and 5, Mark is telling us a number of stories that demonstrate people's response to Jesus — either in fear or faith. From the chaos of a storm on a lake to the chaos of a demon-possessed man, Jesus brings peace and restoration to those in need. Today's stories come in a sandwich form. The story in the middle helps make sense of the story at the start and the end.

READ MARK 5v21-24a

1. What's Jairus' attitude as he comes to Jesus? How do you know?

READ MARK 5v24b-28

2. What do we learn about this woman?

3. How does her social position compare with Jairus'? (see Leviticus 15v19-31)

This law about the uncleanness of women comes in a larger section of Leviticus talking about skin diseases, mould, and male discharges, all of which make people unclean. So there is no sense that women are singled out to be outcasts or morally inferior. These laws were to point Israel to the everyday nature of their uncleanness before God, and their need for him to cleanse and purify them.

READ MARK 5v29-34

4. What happens when the woman touches Jesus' cloak?

5. How do the disciples rebuke Jesus?

6. How is the woman an example of faith?

7. How does Jesus treat this woman? What does he do for her beyond the physical healing?

READ MARK 5v35-36

8. How do you imagine Jairus felt when he heard the news? When he heard Jesus' reply?

READ MARK 5v27-43

9. What stands out to you in the interaction between Jesus and the crowd at Jairus' house?

10. What do those with Jesus, inside the house, see him do? (Mark 3v13-15; Mark 2v19)

11. What parallels/connections do you see between the two stories? (see also Leviticus 15v25; Numbers 19v11)

growing disciples

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Are you afraid of death? Where does it lead you?

How might faith in Jesus be the answer to these fears?



How has Jesus freed you from suffering, bringing life, peace and healing?

What comfort and hope can we have from the way Jesus treats the upstanding Jairus and his daughter, and the nameless outcast woman?





Some people accuse Jesus of being a misogynist and anti-women. From what you've read today, would you agree or disagree?

How might Jesus' attitudes and actions help us relate to women and girls as a **rockypc** COMMUNITY?

Prayer Ideas

- Praise Jesus for having power over death. Pray that we would trust him in the face of our fear of death.
- Praise him for freeing us from suffering, and for bringing, life, peace and healing
- Thank God for his compassion and kindness to those who are socially acceptable and to those who are on the margins.
- Praise Jesus for gently including women in his family and calling them daughter. Praise him for seeing them and for making time for them. Pray that as a **rockypc** COMMUNITY we would treat women and girls with the same respect and kindness Jesus showed.