

rockypc SERIES COMPANION 2024



ONE STEP CLOSER

Mark's Gospel

WEEKS 16-18

*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.





THE WAY OF THE CROSS

MARK 8v22-9v1

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:

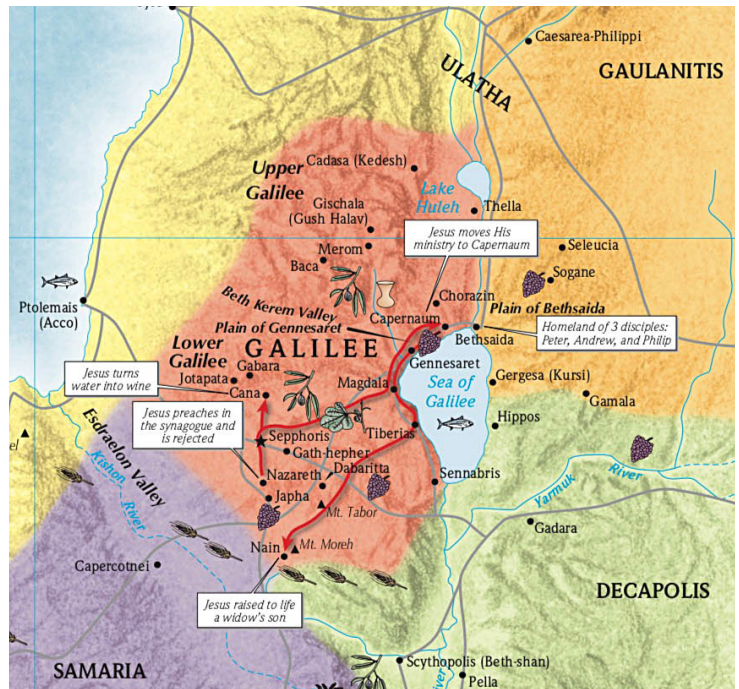
A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

GETTING STARTED

If you were to ask your not-yet-believing friends and family 'Who is Jesus?', how do you think they would answer?

Our GROWTH GROUP studies finished last term with Jesus healing a chronically ill woman and raising a little girl from death. Over the next few chapters, Jesus has sent his disciples out with authority to preach repentance and to heal. They won't always get a good reception, like John the Baptist. Jesus compassionately fed 5000 Jews with just a little bread, in the wilderness. Then he crossed to the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee by walking on water and declared himself to be the I AM that Moses met at Mt Sinai. He condemned the Pharisees' hypocrisy and exposed our hearts, from which come all sorts of uncleanness. Next, a Gentile woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter because his kindness didn't stop with the Jews. And Jesus demonstrated this by giving bread to 4000 Gentiles, in the wilderness. But through it all, the disciples still have hard hearts that don't see and hear clearly who Jesus is. We pick up the story as they are still traveling around the Gentile side of the lake. You can find the place on the map.



READ MARK 8v22-26

1. What stands out to you about this miracle? How is it different from other healings? What is the same?
Don't try to answer all of your questions yet, we'll keep reading and come back to this story again later.

READ MARK 8v27-30

2. Throughout Mark's story, people have been asking who Jesus, including the disciples. 1v27; 2v7; 4v41; 6v2-3. King Herod has heard the same theories as the disciples (6v14-16). What are the current theories?

3. How does Jesus turn the question to become more personal?

4. What does it mean to call Jesus the 'Messiah'? See also, Mark 1v1; 1v11; 2 Samuel 7v12-17; Psalm 2v4-8

READ MARK 8v31-33

We've seen Jesus call himself the 'Son of Man' numerous times before. He is drawing upon an Old Testament image.

READ DANIEL 7v13-14

5. How would you describe the Son of Man, in your own words?

6. What is jarring about Jesus' teaching in Mark 8v31?

Jesus is putting Daniel 7 together with another Old Testament figure, in a completely new way.

READ ISAIAH 52v13-53v6

7. How would you describe the LORD's servant, in your own words?

8. What strikes you about the interaction between Jesus and Peter in Mark 8v32-33?

In a private moment, on the way, Jesus speaks plainly about who he is and how he will suffer. Then to the whole crowd, he explains what it means to follow a Messiah like this.

READ MARK 8v34-9v1

9. What do you think it means to 'deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me'?
How do v31 & 35-38 fill out this picture? What is the alternative?

10. When is the moment of glory, when God's kingdom comes with power? See 9v3-4; 15v17-20, v37-39; 16v4-6

11. Thinking back to the healing of the blind man in v22-26, how is his story a picture of Peter and the disciples?

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.

Do you struggle to put together the images of Jesus as the glorious Son of Man and a lowly servant who suffers and dies? How can he be both?



How are you tempted to try to save your own life? When are you likely to be ashamed of a crucified Messiah?



What have you given up to follow Jesus? Has it been worth it?

What have you read today that spurs you on to keep following Jesus even when it's costly?



PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God that Jesus is the Messiah, the majestic Son of Man who has all authority, power and rule.
- Pray that we would see Jesus' glory in his suffering and death. Praise him as the king who was lifted up on a cross, so that he might bear our sins and bring salvation. Praise God for exalting Jesus as he raised him to life.
- Ask God's forgiveness for when we've been ashamed of Jesus. For when we've sought to hold onto our lives instead of giving them up for him and the gospel.
- Pray that we would deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus, knowing that he is worth it.



THE GLORY OF JESUS

MARK 9v1-32

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

Where is your favourite mountain? What makes it so good?

Last week, we heard Jesus say that as the Messiah, he would suffer, be killed and rise again. And his followers would also lose their lives and yet receive real life.

READ MARK 9v1-4

1. What happens up this mountain? See Daniel 7v9-14

2. How does this echo other mountain-top experiences in the Bible?
See Exodus 24v13-18; 34v29-35; 1 Kings 19v7-13 — *Note: Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai*

3. What is significant about the appearance of Moses and Elijah in this moment? See Malachi 4

READ MARK 9v5-8

4. How does Peter respond to the events? See Leviticus 23v39-44

5. What is significant about the voice from the cloud? See Psalm 2v6-8; Isaiah 42v1-4; Deuteronomy 18v15-19

READ MARK 9v9-13

6. What are the two questions the disciples have as they walk down the mountain?

7. How does Jesus answer the second question? See Mark 1v4-8 and remember Malachi 4

READ MARK 9v14-20

8. Describe the scene as Jesus, Peter, James and John reach the base of the mountain.

9. What angers Jesus? See Deuteronomy 32v18-20

READ MARK 9v21-29

10. What is the spirit trying to do to the boy?

11. What do we learn about Jesus here? v22-23, v27 (cf Mark 5v39-42)

12. How is the father a model for faith (in contrast with the others who are there)?

In v29, Jesus is not trying to signify that there are different types of evil spirits. Rather, he is making a comment about the faith of the disciples. In 6v7, he sent them out with authority to drive out spirits. But they are unable to do so in this instance, because they are no different to the rest of the unbelieving generation. In 11v22-24, Jesus links prayer with faith that God will do as they ask.

READ MARK 9v30-32

This is the second time, Jesus has told his disciples that he will soon suffer, die and rise again (8v31). The disciples still don't understand.

13. How have the two stories — on the mountain top, and at the foot of the mountain signaled that the kingdom of God is crashing in to the world, right in front of them?

growing disciples

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What convinces you that Jesus' kingdom has come with power?

How have you seen Jesus' power and glory?



How do you struggle with unbelief?

How does the faith of the father in this story encourage you when your faith is failing?



How do you want to respond to Jesus and the glorious picture that you've seen today?

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise Jesus as the Son of Man, glorious and loved by Father God.
- Praise Jesus as the king who brings God's kingdom with the power of his resurrection.
- Praise Jesus as the one strong enough and compassionate enough to overcome death and evil.
- Confess that we often struggle with unbelief.
- Pray that Jesus would overcome our unbelief and grow our faith in him.



ENTER LIFE

MARK 9v33-50

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.)

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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 makes hell an uncomfortable topic for us?

In Mark 8v31, Jesus explained to his disciples that his death was looming (along with his resurrection). The disciples misunderstood Jesus' mission as the Messiah (8v32-33). So Jesus explained what it would mean to follow a crucified and risen Messiah in 8v34-38. A pattern is established!

Last week, we heard Jesus explain his immanent death and resurrection again in 9v30-32. Today, we're going to see how the disciples misunderstand once more, and how Jesus explains more of what it looks like to follow him.

READ MARK 9v33-37

1. What status do the disciples think comes with hanging out with Jesus?

2. How does Jesus address this attitude?

Note: In the First Century, children were not idolised as they are today. They were an example of insignificance.

READ MARK 9v38-41

3. What is John's problem with this exorcist?

4. How does Jesus value someone that John thinks is an insignificant outsider?

5. How does this flow from the discussion in v33-37?

READ MARK 9v42-48**READ HOSEA 2v7-9**

6. How were these priests causing others to stumble a few hundred years before Jesus' time?

7. How are Jesus' disciples in danger of the same sin in Mark 9v42? How do we know this is a terrible and grievous thing to do?

In v43-48, the focus switches from causing others to stumble, to stumbling yourself. Perhaps these are connected, as causing another to stumble leads to stumbling yourself.

8. What dramatic images does Jesus use, to show why stumbling at the entry to life is so bad?

Jesus is not recommending self-mutilation. He speaks in vivid metaphor to show the drastic action we should take against any sin that leaves us outside life and in the terror of hell.

'The Greek word for 'hell' in vv43, 45 and 47 is *Gehenna*, from which the Hinnom Valley, the steep ravine of the southwest of Jerusalem (Josh 15v8) where human sacrifice had been practiced under Ahaz and Manaseh (2 Kings 16v3; 21v6), derives its name. The detestable practice was ... abolished by King Josiah (2 Kings 23v10), who desecrated the Hinnom Valley by making it a rubbish dump. "To go to hell, where the fire never goes out," became a symbol of divine wrath and punishment... of darkness, pain, and torment.'

p294, Edwards, The Gospel According to Mark Pillar Commentary

READ ISAIAH 66v18-24

9. What is the contrast between those inside God's kingdom and those outside?

10. What makes being outside of life with Jesus, and being in hell, so bad?

READ MARK 9v49-50

Jesus switches metaphors here from a fiery rubbish dump outside Jerusalem, to pure burnt offerings on the altar of the temple.

READ LEVITICUS 2v11-16; NUMBERS 18v8-10, 19

11. What is the purpose of salt in burnt offerings?

12. How is being salty a picture of following Jesus, from Mark 9v49-50, cf v34?

growing disciples

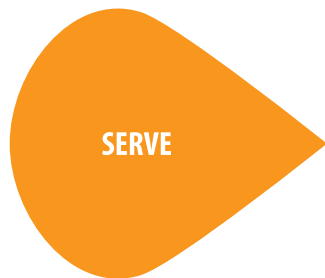
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How are you in danger of crushing others to seek your own greatness?

As you examine the way you treat others, what might cause them to stumble?



How can you welcome and value the outsider/the insignificant/the weak, as Jesus does?



What sins do you need to amputate from your life, so that they don't cause you to stumble and not enter life?

How will your life be different in purity and peace?



Should we talk about hell with other Christians? What about with not-yet Christians? Why or why not?



PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise Jesus for valuing the outsider, the insignificant and the weak. Praise him that he welcomes even the least into his kingdom.
- Confess when we have crushed or excluded others instead of welcoming and serving them. Ask forgiveness for causing others to stumble and making it harder for them to enter life.
- Pray that we would take drastic action to carve sin out of our lives. Pray that we would grow in purity and a desire to serve God in holiness.
- Pray that we would long to enter life and avoid being outside in hell. Pray that God would stir our hearts for those who are still facing hell, so that we might share the gospel of Jesus with them.