



Mark – A Kingdom People – Fact Sheet 1

Introduction:

What was it like for those who first heard Jesus say, 'follow me'? What did such a commitment mean? What was the personal cost? What impact did Jesus have on the individual lives he touched and challenged? (over 20 such recorded instances within Mark's Gospel). Throughout Mark's Gospel, we will be considering the answer to these questions plus more – always looking to apply it to ourselves as we are challenged to be a Kingdom people.

Authorship:

Although the Gospel (lit. *Good News*) itself does not accredit authorship to anyone specifically; Mark's authorship has been pretty much uncontested and assumed since the very early church fathers. Mark, also called John Mark (Acts 12:12), was not one of the 12 disciples; but was indeed a missionary colleague of the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:5); plus a close companion of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13), as well as the cousin of Barnabus (Colossians 4:10). Mark's eye-witness style may well be a mixture of his own experiences of Jesus as an observing 'teen', but would certainly be the direct accounts as relayed to him by Peter, whom it is believed greatly influenced the Gospel.

Background:

The book of Mark was written against a background of first century spiritual thirst in a landscape of Roman oppression. The Lord hadn't visibly been 'active' with His direct Word since Malachi, some 400 years earlier. The people of Israel were looking for the fulfilment of the prophetic, messianic promises of their scriptures; our Old Testament. It is no surprise as such to see that as one reads the Gospel, the political and social climate provides the backcloth into which the Lord (who still speaks through His Word & people today), inaugurates His visible, 'new' covenant. As we see the actions of Jesus, as we hear His words; it will be good to reflect upon how they were first viewed and received by the very first listeners. However, this is not an exercise in first century hermeneutics (biblical understanding) only; we need to remember that our Bible is also a 'mirror' in which our very own and personal responses need to be wrestled with. Who is Jesus? What does the 'flow' of Mark tell us about the Christian life as we seek to be His disciples today? With regards geography, the early parts of the Gospel, indeed to chapter 10, take place in the northern area of Galilee; Jesus' home patch (Nazareth is in Galilee). From chapter 10, Jesus' ministry moves to Jerusalem and the south; with the occasional wanderings into Gentile (non-Jewish) territory; again, a significant 'Kingdom' act and message.

The shortest of the four Gospels (16 chapters, 661 verses), Mark is deemed to generally be the most chronological; additionally considered to be the first written, with the vast majority of Mark's Gospel being utilised by both Matthew and Luke. However, a key point to note is that the Gospel was written, primarily to be remembered (people did not have New Testaments then!). With many of the original eye witnesses dying and/or been persecuted under Nero; there was a great need for the Gospel of Christ to be recorded, remembered and passed on – thus the structure. Andrew Page gives us a helpful structure in his book *The Mark Experiment*, dividing the Gospel into six segments:

- The Message (1:9-3:6)
- The Power (3:7-6:6)
- The Training (6:6-Ch8:30)
- The Cost (8:31-Ch10)
- The Judgement (Ch11-13)
- The Love (Ch14-16)

This flow is a useful one to remember as we walk through the Gospel of Mark over the coming weeks. Yet even here, this useful flow can typify the Christian life; with the initial receipt of the message, the received power, our need to be trained and equipped, the associated cost, with consequences of rejecting such a great salvation, all in response to the ultimate act of love and sacrifice as demonstrated by our Lord Himself.

Message & Themes:

Three key questions are raised and answered by Mark throughout the Gospel:

- Who is Jesus?
- What Did He Come to Do?
- How Should We Respond?

Keeping these three in balance will ensure that our understanding and personal application to our lives, is a healthy one. Knowing who Jesus is, but giving little thought to what He came to do (the Cross) will leave us simply admiring Jesus as a good, moral teacher. Acknowledging what He did on the cross, yet failing to apply the implications for our lives will leave us unchanged; perhaps with more 'head knowledge' but little impact in the world where the Lord has called us to be His Kingdom people. We will do well to not only assess the preaching as we sit under it – but to also ensure that equally, we are good listeners (Mark 7:14) and subsequently responsive 'doers'.

Chapter 1: Good News From God:

Dividing our chapter into several sections, we can see that:

First: The News is about a Person: 1:1:

The announcement from Mark is 'Good News' (vs1), yet much more than that, it is life-changing news, history making news. Not about the church, or a church programme, or way of living; but about a person – Jesus. Thus Mark commences his Gospel leaving us in no doubt as to who his message is about and just who Jesus is as he announces, 'the beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (vs1). Jesus the Christ, Christos, the promised Messiah; yet also the Son, the Divine Son. Mark's message is life-changing news about the promises of God coming to fulfilment in and through His Son, Jesus.

Second: The News was Predicted: 1:2-3:

Jesus was not God's 'plan B', an after-thought or alternative. This good news is the news that was clearly predicted in God's Word as, 'written in Isaiah the prophet' (vs2) amongst others. Mark then goes on to quote a mixture of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Mark accredits the whole quotation to Isaiah, not unusual for the major writing (Isaiah in this case) to be at the header. The very first listeners were looking and seeking a Messiah; and were keen to see God fulfil His promises. Jesus was that fulfilment, with John's Gospel putting it clearly as he describes Jesus as the Word that, 'became flesh and dwelt amongst us' (John 1:14). Mark's good news was predicted.

Third: The News is to be Proclaimed: 1:4-13:

If Malachi/Isaiah speaks of a forerunner to the good news, verse 4 tells us who this forerunner is, 'and so John came...' (John the Baptist). Yet came doing what? '...baptising in the desert region and preaching...' (vs4). Good news cannot be responded to unless it is heard (Romans 10). Yet *what* is to be proclaimed? Verse 4 again; a message of 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. This good news demands a response, one that 'turns around' from one's current direction; and follows a new one. Verse 5 shows the response to John's message, whether exaggerated or not, Mark wants us to know that the response was big, with 'the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem' going out to be baptised by John (vs5). This was something huge, not least, enough to cause Jews to be baptised (unheard of). The description of the 'messenger' is one of a prophet (vs6 – see also 2 Kings 1:8) – with such a scene provoking and evoking great expectation of God's activity. Yet with all the frenzy caused by John's preaching, Mark reminds us of the true focus; not John, but one 'after (him)' (vs7) who will 'baptise (them) with the Holy Spirit' (vs8). Such promises of the Spirit of God at work amongst the people, again would stir up expectation of the fulfilment of long awaited promises (Joel 2:28-32).

Mark then gives us the first hint about what Jesus came to do, as Jesus Himself undergoes John's baptism (a baptism of repentance – vs9-13). Yet whose sins was Jesus associating Himself with? Certainly not His own, the sinless Son of God with whom God was well pleased (vs11). The baptism of Christ also has a Trinitarian emphasis, the Father speaking, the Son in the water, the Spirit descending.

The Good news of Mark is about a person (Jesus), was predicted, it is to be proclaimed and:

Fourth: The News is Personal: 1:14-20:

Verse 14 gives us the first hint of the 'cost' of following Christ, 'after John was put in prison'. In typical Mark style though, the detail is not dwelt upon, there is something more important for us to grasp and see; we need to keep focussed on the 'who' of Mark's Gospel. Following Jesus is a personal decision with a personal cost. The next two verses introduce us to the topic of Jesus' preaching, 'the Kingdom of God' (vs15); with the required response, 'repentance and belief'. Entry into God's Kingdom plan starts with hearing the Good news, the message; and doing something about it, turning around (repenting), going in a new direction (Christ's), and believing in who Jesus is and what He came to do.

The personal call of the Kingdom message is seen in verses 16-20, as Jesus calls His first disciples, Simon and Andrew (vs16) and James and John (vs19). Their call is simple to understand, but hard to do, 'follow Me and I will make you fishers of men' (vs17):

'Follow Me...' – a call to a new direction – to follow Christ

'And I will make You...' – let Me change you

'Fishers of men....' – people who prioritise My Kingdom business.

All of us are called to personally respond to the Good News from God – it is personal.

Fifth: The News is Practical & Life-Changing: 21-45:

The Good news of God is not simply an ideology or a new set of beliefs or standards; but is practical and life-changing. In this first practical section showing the impact of Jesus' words and actions, Mark records four incidents for us (the driving out of an evil spirit, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, the early preaching of Jesus in the synagogue and the healing of a leper). Yet before Jesus 'does' anything, Mark emphasises His early intention and focus of 'teaching' (vs21). God's activity is only truly contextualised and understood in response to His Word. In verse 22, we see one of the first of many recorded 'reactions' to Jesus, a common one, that of 'amazement'. This is a regular pattern in Mark, the action/words of Jesus, followed by the account of the reaction of the people.

In the four accounts in this section (21-45), there are several common factors:

- Lives are changed
- Jesus has total authority (be it over evil, sickness or other)
- The people are amazed
- There is no opposition (not until chapter 2!)

Throughout Mark, the people, not least the disciples often fail to see just *who* Jesus really is; yet the evil spirits in this early chapter have no such issue (vs23-24). The immediacy of Mark's Gospel also comes through, (vs12, 18, 20, 29, 42, and 43); Mark is moving us on at a pace. Although the demons are happy to declare who Jesus is (vs24), Jesus is not keen for their publicity. Such comments would only (as seen later) fuel the false expectations of the people for an earthly Messiah and deliverer, one who would free them from their current oppressors. Yet Jesus had a different agenda, a Kingdom agenda; yet not an earthly Kingdom; but rather one 'not of this world' (John 18:36). It would take some time for the people to understand it, if at all. Still today, the challenge is for us not to invite Jesus to 'follow us' and 'sort out our current earthly issues'; but rather to heed the call to 'follow Him' and be recruited for His Kingdom business; to be a Kingdom people.

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word"
Psalm 119:18