

New Testament Life and Times

The Gospel, according to John Mark

(Most material taken/adapted from The New Testament In its World, by N. T. Wright)

Leander Church of Christ

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Notes available from <https://ClassNotes.LeanderChurch.org>

Introduction

The **gospel of Mark** is
densely packed
fast-paced
action-filled

It is a narrative about

1. **Jesus** of Nazareth
2. **his life** and teachings
3. his divine **identity** and human vulnerability
4. God's kingdom **breaking in** through him
5. the Judean and Roman **opposition** mounted against him

It is a story of prophecy and **power**, **resistance** and betrayal.

The story's climax includes Jesus' violent death by crucifixion and an **abrupt and enigmatic ending** pointing to his resurrection. *<see next slide>*

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ “Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'”

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

⁹ ^a When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. ¹⁰ She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

¹² Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. ¹³ These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

¹⁴ Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

¹⁵ He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

¹⁹ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. ²⁰ Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

What do you DO with the END of Mark's Gospel?

Article by Paul Carter, 6/25/2018

I don't own a commentary written in the last 100 years that argues in favor of [including the last 12 verses as part of] Mark's Gospel.

Not one.

“It is virtually certain that 16:9–20 is a later addition and not the original ending of the Gospel of Mark.” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary.)

<see 12/27/2020 class handout for rest of article>

Introduction (2)

9:37:30

Mark's style of Greek is primitive and even sometimes clumsy, but his craft as a storyteller is arguably without peer.

Mark more than makes up in power what (by comparison with the other gospels) he lacks in length.

Introduction (3)

Mark tells the story of Jesus as the *unveiled story of Israel*.

At key moments in the story—

- the baptism,
- the transfiguration,
- *the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi*,
- Caiaphas's question and Jesus' response at the trial
 - *<see next page>*
- the centurion's words at the foot of the cross —

the veil is lifted, eyes are opened, and, like Elisha's servant, we see the horses and chariots of fire round about the prophet.

Introduction (4) -- Caiaphas

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”

“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”

Introduction (4b) -- Vindication

Jesus' words declare in effect:

1. yes, I am a true prophet;
2. yes, what I said about the Temple *will* come true;
3. yes, I AM the Messiah;
4. you will see me vindicated;
5. **my vindication will mean that I share the very throne of Almighty God.**

Short Video (1.5 minutes)

9:40:30

- Vindication is not *exactly* the same as Vengeance... but they are close.
- The Roman empire was faced with something more powerful than they had encountered before, and did not know how to control it.
- In the video... It works better if you think about MARK saying the words on Jesus' behalf. <just a suggestion>
- ~Vindication Video~
 - Online link: <https://youtu.be/5uzO8LgX76w>

Textual Notes

9:43

- **Origin**

- Anonymous. Early second century attribution to John Mark. Close to Peter.
- No alternative figure has ever warranted consideration.

- **Date**

- NTW – AD 65 – 75
- RVL – AD 55 – 60 after Nero's Triumphal Procession (crowned Caesar), or AD 72 – 75, after Titus' Triumphal Procession with captives and booty from the overthrow of Jerusalem in AD 70.

- **Place** – Rome or Syria

- **Purpose** – <next page>

Textual Notes (2)

9:44

- **Purpose** – An *apology* for a crucified Messiah and a *polemic* against the imperial power of Rome.
 - Mark spells out that **Jesus is the royal son of God**, the Messiah, in whom God's kingship is being mysteriously revealed... *EVEN THOUGH*, contrary to expectations, Jesus' messianic activities and inauguration of the kingdom were focused on **suffering and crucifixion**.
 - Mark contains clear *counter-imperial connotations*. The language of 'gospel', 'lord', and 'kingdom of God' presents Jesus as the figure who ushers in a new world-order that will rival, and potentially replace, the Roman empire. Mark's crucifixion scene portrays Jesus' death as a mock-triumph, the anti-type to a Roman victory parade ("Triumph").

Apology – "a reasoned argument or writing in justification of something, typically a theory or religious doctrine"

Outline of Mark

1. Prologue (1.1–15)
2. Galilean ministry (1.16—8.21)
3. The revelation of the Messiah in Caesarea Philippi (8.22—9.1)
4. Jesus, discipleship, and the way to the cross (9.2—10.52)
5. Jesus in Jerusalem (11.1—12.44)
6. The Olivet Discourse (13.1–37)
7. The Passion of Jesus (14.1—15.39)
8. The resurrection (16.1–8 [and 9–20])

1 - Prologue 1.1-15

9:47

Mark's gospel, as we have it, opens with 'The beginning of the **gospel** about Jesus the Messiah' (1.1).

- The word '**gospel**' (*evangelion*) was in use in connection with celebrations of the **Roman emperor** and his achievements.
- But the term also goes back to Isaiah 40 and 52, where the echoes are of the 'good news' of the **end of exile**, the '**new exodus**', and the **return of YHWH himself** to rescue his people and to reign over them, and the world, **as king**.

2 - Galilean Ministry (1.16–8.21)

- Jesus' public work in Galilee is a whirlwind of healings, exorcisms, teaching, and **confrontations with local leaders**.
- Jesus calls two sets of brothers to join him as 'fishers of men' (1.16–20 KJV).
- He astounds the crowds with his unmediated authority, healing a man with an unclean spirit on the sabbath (1.21–28). He heals Simon's mother-in-law, then various others (1.29–34).
- He heals a man with a virulent skin-disease, who celebrates wildly despite Jesus' injunctions to silence (1.40–45).
- Across Mark 2.1—3.6 we find miracle stories that provoke increasingly **volatile confrontations** with local cultural leaders...
- Signs of the inbreaking rule—and presence!—of Israel's God now intensify. Jesus and the disciples are caught in a furious squall on the Sea of Galilee in their small boat. The disciples wake Jesus up, and he calms the storm with a word. When the disciples ask, 'Who then is this?', Mark's understanding is clear. As Richard Hays puts it, 'For any reader versed in Israel's Scripture, there can be only one possible answer: it is **the Lord God of Israel** who has the power to command wind and sea and to subdue the chaotic forces of nature.'

3 - The revelation of the Messiah in Caesarea Philippi (8.22–9.1)

Arriving in Bethsaida, Jesus heals a blind man, unusually taking two attempts: at first, the man sees people but they look like trees; then he sees clearly (8.22–26).

This odd little scene, unique to Mark, illustrates what happens next, when Jesus and his disciples head north to Caesarea Philippi and he asks them who people say he is. This is the crucial turning-point in Mark's story. The popular rumor has it that Jesus is a prophet (like the man seeing people dimly as though they were trees), but Peter declares, 'You are the Messiah' (seeing clearly).

Then, to his disciples' shock and dismay, he tells them that he must now go **to his death**. Calling the crowd, he declares that all those who want to follow him must likewise **take up their cross**. The kingdom of God is indeed coming with power; his own death, rather than denying that victory, will be its instrument. Thus, if the **first half of Mark's gospel was about the powerful son of God**, the **second half will be about the suffering son of man**.

4 - Jesus, discipleship, and the way to the cross (9.2—10.52)

Attention then focuses on Jesus' conversation with a rich young ruler, who wants to know how to be sure of inheriting the 'age to come'.

He claims to be Torah-observant, but **Jesus wants more**: he must sell all, give to the poor, and follow Jesus.

Following Jesus, in other words, trumps even Torah.

The incident encapsulates Jesus' teaching about wealth and poverty, but also signals the **radical change** and challenge of the kingdom.

5 - Jesus in Jerusalem (11.1–12.44)

9:51

We then have the most dramatic ‘Markan sandwich’:

1. Jesus curses an unripe fig tree
2. pronounces judgment on the Temple
3. then finds the fig tree withered away.

The Temple has become a haunt of bandits: Jesus was known to promise a new temple, while the current Temple and its ruling elite will meet destruction **when the son of man is vindicated.**

6 - Olivet Discourse (13.1-37)

Jesus' prophetic denunciation of the Temple reaches a crescendo in the much-misunderstood Olivet Discourse.

The chapter is not about the end of the world, except in the important sense that **Israel viewed the Temple as the linchpin that held heaven and earth together.** 'End-of-world' language was thus appropriate for the forthcoming destruction of the Temple, and that language would have been so understood by both Jesus' hearers and Mark's readers.

7 - The Passion of Jesus (14.1–15.39)

The hastily convened Sanhedrin attempts to find a legal pretext to have Jesus executed.

The original charge focuses on his claim to destroy and rebuild the Temple; that would imply a claim either to royalty or to a new kind of priestly authority, but by itself it would hardly be a capital offense.

Finally the high priest asks Jesus on oath if he is the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One. The question of Jesus' identity as 'son of God' (a messianic title) would be implied by the Temple-question, but it would also give the Sanhedrin an accusation of sedition to take to the Roman governor. Caesar was 'son of God'; who then was this? Jesus, however, gives the court yet more: 'I am . . . And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' This combines Psalm 110.1 with Daniel 7.13, both of which refer to a figure enthroned beside YHWH, an honor most Jews were reluctant to attribute to a mere human being.

Jesus' words declare in effect: **yes, I am a true prophet; yes, what I said about the Temple will come true; yes, I am the Messiah; you will see me vindicated; and my vindication will mean that I share the very throne of Israel's God.**

7 - The Passion of Jesus (14.1–15.39) #2

Mark portrays the event as a triumph, analogous to the celebrations of a returning victorious general. The Praetorian Guard hails Jesus, crowning him with thorns; he is heralded as a 'son of god'. Whether or not Mark's readers knew of Titus's triumph after the capture of Jerusalem, the symbolism would be potent.

Schmidt summarizes the parallels between Mark's crucifixion story and a Roman triumph:

The Praetorians gather early in the morning to proclaim the triumphator. He is dressed in the triumphal garb, and a crown of laurel is placed on his head. The soldiers then shout in acclamation of his Lordship and perform acts of homage to him. They accompany him from their camp through the streets of the city. The sacrificial victim is there in the procession, and alongside walks the official carrying the implement of his coming death. The procession ascends finally to the Place of the (Death's) Head, where the sacrifice is to take place. The triumphator is offered the ceremonial wine. He does not drink it, but it is poured out on the altar at the moment of sacrifice. Then, at the moment of being lifted up before the people, at the moment of the sacrifice, again the triumphator is acclaimed as Lord, and his vice-regents appear with him in confirmation of his glory. Following the lead of the soldiers, the people together with their leaders and the vice-regents themselves join in the acclamation. The epiphany is confirmed in portents by the gods: 'Truly this man is the Son of God!'

Triumphal Procession (RVL)

- [RVL Class Granbury RomanTriumphalProcessionParallels 17m03s.mp4](#)

8 - RESURRECTION (16.1-8 [and 9-20])

Mark's gospel, at least in its earliest surviving versions, ends with three women arriving at the tomb on the morning after the sabbath to complete the burial process by anointing Jesus' body. They find the stone rolled away, and meet an angel ('a young man dressed in white'). The angel tells them not to be afraid, announces that Jesus has been raised, and instructs them to tell Peter and the others that Jesus will meet them in Galilee. The women disobey: they are afraid, and they do not tell anyone...

MARK AND THE BIG PICTURE

Mark is a book to confront outsiders with the reality of Jesus.

It is also a book to challenge believers who are 'committed' only as far as their own convenience allows, urging them to embrace the way of self-giving love as the Jesus-shaped pattern of true life.