

THE GOSPEL

# *Kingdom Authority*

ACCORDING TO MARK

*The Gospel according to Mark: Kingdom Authority*

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# Introduction

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. -Mark 1:1

When Mark chose these words to open his account of the life and ministry of Jesus, the term gospel (εὐαγγελίου/euangelion) was not being used to designate a specific literary genre. Up until this time, the word for *gospel* was most often used to speak of literal good news. For example, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament from the second century BC) used this word in 2 Samuel 4:10: “When a man told me, ‘Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing *good news*, I seized him.”

Early in Paul’s missionary and teaching ministry, he began to more narrowly define the use of “good news/gospel” to that of Christ’s dying for our sin and being raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). It is this double meaning that Mark is eager to share with his readers. Yes, it is news that is good. But even better, it is the the good news of Jesus. In a sense, we hear Mark, at the beginning of his account, saying simply:

Here is the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the good news of how he came, lived, died, and rose again; the good news of one granted all kingdom authority because He was and is the Son of God the Father. It began....

Mark makes clear his intention to record the story of Jesus, and—in doing so—he prepares us to buckle up and hold on for the fast and furious ride ahead. He starts off with great urgency, and continues with lively and vividly descriptive text. Mark aims to inform his audience about Jesus: who He was, what He came to do, and what it means to follow Him. All the while, he reminds believers that, despite the experience of an imperial world order and pagan culture, it is only Jesus who has true *kingdom authority*. So critical is this theme of authority that one of the more climactic moments involves a Roman centurion who witnesses Jesus upon the cross. He acknowledges Jesus as *the* kingdom authority, the one who “truly is the Son of God.” (Mark 15:39).

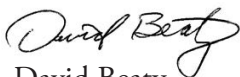
It is our prayer that *The Gospel according to Mark: Kingdom Authority* will speak directly to each individual going through the study. The time in God's Word will significantly impact our engagement (loving, learning, and living out) of God's Word. We hope this study of Mark's biographical and historical narrative will sharpen our understanding of who Jesus is to us (our Christology) and how we demonstrate our desire to follow Him (our discipleship).

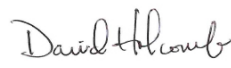
Over the course of ten units, we will cover the weekly Scripture in our Sunday morning messages. We encourage you not only to reflect on the teachings, but also to spend time daily on the noted chapter(s). To begin each unit in this guide, you will find a specific passage that has been chosen to prompt critical thought and reflection for that week's text. These *Kingdom Moments* should encourage us to seriously consider our response to the various instructions, questions, and teachings. Additionally, questions have been provided for personal time and for discussion with others—small groups, spouses, family, and friends.

There are a few critical contextual details that we think will be helpful in our understanding of this fascinating book (see *Know Before You Go* section). Take note of these, always being mindful that context matters! Scripture cannot mean today what it did not mean to the original author and audience. In fact, as you prepare, we would highly encourage you to explore additional commentaries on Mark and on first-century Roman-Greco culture. If our objective is to understand what it was like to walk in the sandals of Mark, then into the sandals of Mark we must go.

The Gospel according to Mark is a gift of inspired authorship and preservation. May the *good news* come alive as we study and may the *good news* transform our witness as we live it out.

In Christ,

  
David Beaty  
Senior Pastor

  
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Minister of Discipleship

# Know Before You Go

## Background Details

Mark—also known as "John Mark" (Acts 15:37)—was not an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life. Although it is possible that he, as a young man living in Jerusalem, would have been caught up in the events of Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection. Most noteworthy in regards to Mark was his presence at the birth of the church, just after Pentecost, as many came to his mother's house to pray (Acts 12:12).

Additionally, we find Mark mentioned as having joined, and later been removed from, the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25, 15:39) and referenced in Paul's letters (Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11, Philemon 24). He eventually finds a lasting companionship with his spiritual mentor, Peter, who writes: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

It is in Peter's identification of Mark as "my son"—which indicated a special relationship between the elder Apostle and the younger pupil (think about Paul and Timothy)—along with the overwhelming early church tradition, that elicits a near-consensus opinion for Mark as having served as either: (a) Peter's interpreter/secretary (if Peter were alive when this work was completed), or as (b) one who recorded what he had recalled from Peter's teaching and preaching (if Peter had already been martyred when this work was completed). Peter is said to have died in Rome around AD 64-65, and most accounts of this Gospel are dated between early AD 60s and 70s. In other words, it's not exactly clear what the authorial relationship between Mark and Peter was. It is clear, however, that what we have in the Gospel according to Mark are seemingly the first-hand accounts of the Apostle Peter.

Further, in *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, we find the earliest reference to the Gospel according to Mark coming from Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis. Papias is noted by many early church fathers as having been a regular “hearer” of the Apostle John, and, in a writing dated between AD 95 and AD 120, Papias states:

And John the Presbyter also said this, Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy, but not however in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but as before said, he was in the company with Peter, who gave him such instruction, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses ... Mark was carefully attentive to this one thing, not to pass by anything that he heard, or to state anything falsely in these accounts.<sup>1</sup>  
- Eusebius, EH 3.39.15

Note the reference to “discourses.” One of the unique characteristics of Mark's writing is that there are fewer passages of what Jesus *said*, and more of what he *did*. Unlike Matthew, and even Luke (who gave significant space to the sermons, teachings, and parables of Jesus), Mark emphasized the authority that Jesus demonstrated through His actions.

The Gospel according to Mark is unique among the other Gospels in several ways. Perhaps this is mostly due to the intended audience: Gentile believers within the Roman churches with a less-sophisticated literary background and a greater need for explanation of the Aramaic language and Jewish cultural nuances (or even the elimination of specific Jewish biographical content like genealogies). One of many examples is found in Mark 5:41, where Mark explains the Aramaic as he writes, “Taking her by the hand he [Jesus] said to her, 'Talitha cumi,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'” Further, the use of specific Latin words—*census*, *denarius*, *praetorium*, *flagellum*—points to a Roman provenance of the Gospel.

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1 C.F. Cruse (translator), *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 105.

Perhaps most unique is how Mark writes in what most observers consider to be an oral text, or a text intended to be presented by way of an oral presentation—as opposed to strictly a reading. There are various features of early-century Hellenistic drama that appear in this book. The most telling is the expansive, or wide-ranging and extensive, storytelling, the use of repetitions, of dual expressions, and the linking of a new incident with the previous story. All of these elements make for a more memorable narrative that is easier for listeners.

This understanding helps to explain Mark's pace throughout, moving quickly, not resting very long at any one place, and providing significant details, such as the hole in the roof that is made when the paralytic is lowered down into the house for Jesus (Mark 2:4), which is left out of Matthew's account. These features of oral literature are one of the reasons this book is so easy to follow. It may not be the most sophisticated work of literature, in terms of Greek language structure and styling, but it was perfectly inspired to add yet another dimension to the Gospel narrative and reach yet another intended audience. In a real way, it speaks volumes about our first point above, that Peter must have been a truly dynamic preacher and a man truly worth listening to!

Interestingly, in 1976, a solo recitation of this complete Gospel narrative gained international fame.<sup>2</sup> Billed as a one-man show of “what scholars agree to be the first and most authentic biography of Jesus,” Alec McCowen initiated a performance that would draw thousands, from Broadway to the White House to various London theaters, over the next 15 years. Mr. McCowen's decision to select Mark testifies to the Gospel's uniqueness. He said in a 1990 NY Times interview (Qualifier: McCowen is an actor, not a theologian. However, his impressions best represent how many of us discover Mark.):

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2 R.T. France, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC): The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 10.



The Apostle John struck Mr. McCowen as too mysterious for the theater, Matthew as too didactic and Luke as too poetic for an actor with his feisty style. It was in some despair that he turned to Mark, whom he remembered as the weakest of the four. "I started learning little passages to see if it would come alive, and instantly realized it was absolutely right. The style had a blunt, astringent quality which suited me. And it was a Gospel of action not teaching, one which had plenty of episodes and dwelt on none for too long."<sup>3</sup>

Prayerfully, many will continue to appreciate the quality of Mark's writing in oral styling while coming to grips with the life-changing message of the Gospel.

The final detail to consider is the way that Mark has structured this book into three geographical stages. Some commentaries refer to this arrangement as "Mark's Drama in Three Acts."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it will assist some of us in keeping the narrative straight from week to week.

After the initial introductory verses, in which Mark sets the scene, he writes only of time in and around Galilee between Mark 1:14 and 8:21. It's here that the authority of Jesus is on full display. Mark moves the narrative forward quickly, with Jesus demonstrating authority over disease, demons, nature, and more.

Next, between Mark 8:22 and 10:52, the storyline moves along the road to Jerusalem. Here we will look at one of the more suspenseful moments, when Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Do you recall who answers Jesus correctly? That's right, Peter. Can you imagine how emotionally charged Peter would be as he taught others about that moment!

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3 Benedict Nightingale, *Theater; The Gospel According to Alec McCowen*. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/18/theater/theater-the-gospel-according-to-alec-mccowen.html?pagewanted=all>, March 18, 1990.

4 France, 11.

Finally, between Mark 11:1 and the empty tomb of 16:8, all of the activity takes place in and around Jerusalem. This includes the Passion of Christ, the acknowledgement of the centurion at the cross, the burial, and word of His resurrection.

Note: Although it is often bracketed with an explanatory footnote, most English Bibles include the text of Mark 16:9-20. However, the external evidence, via textual criticism, suggests that the earliest and strongest manuscripts do not include these verses. Further, the internal evidence, identifiers like continuity of thought, verb and participle tense, vocabulary and style, all indicate an author other than Mark.<sup>5</sup> So what does this mean?

For one, it appears that a scribe, at some time within the early church, summarized the thoughts that were taught elsewhere and attempted to “finish” Mark’s work. These thoughts are likely based on revealed truth from the other Gospels and/or the Epistles. However, they do not appear to be authentic to Mark. As for our treatment of this passage, these verses can always be used in comparative studies to other Scripture, but should never be used in the formulation of doctrine, particularly a doctrine based solely on 16:9-20. So why do they remain? Well, there is the slim possibility that the majority opinion is wrong, so Bible translators have opted to leave this passage in place until absolute certainty can be obtained, and to recommend leaning on them as early Christian literature more so than canonical Scripture.

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5 John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible, ESV* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2011), 1464-65.

# Sermon Notes



3. What is repentance?

4. Why was Jesus baptized?

5. What is the kingdom of God, and how is it seen on earth?



# Sermon Notes

# Unit 2

## The Authority of Jesus

Mark 2:1-28; Mark 3:1-35

### *Kingdom Moments*

And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” -Mark 2:16-17

### *Study Questions*

1. Why did Jesus heal the paralytic and how did this point to His authority to forgive sins?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In Mark 2:17, what does Jesus mean when He says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"? Do we tend to share the love of Christ and the gospel message more often with the healthy or the sick? What are the risks of only fellowshiping with the healthy? ...with the sick?







# Sermon Notes

# Unit 3

## The Word of the Kingdom

Mark 4: 1-41

### *Kingdom Moments*

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" -Mark 4:39-41

### *Study Questions*

1. Note verse 13. Why is the parable of the sower and the Word so significant? Can you "teach" this parable to others, encouraging "good soil" in others? (This is not a yes/no question; literally, can each of us explain this parable when the opportunity arises? Practice with your group.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is it possible to appear to have faith, and yet not have genuine, saving faith?



4. Why did Jesus so often use parables in his teaching? What two purposes did the parables serve?

5. Having already seen Jesus do many miracles, why were His disciples still lacking faith? (vv. 35-41) (Hint: what question did they continue to ask and not fully grasp?)

# Sermon Notes









# Sermon Notes

# Unit 5

## Jesus Sees the Heart

Mark 7:1-37

### Kingdom Moments

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." -Mark 7:20-23

### Study Questions

1. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees hypocrites? How was Jesus defining the word "hypocrite"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How were the Pharisees putting their "human traditions" above God's Word? How should we protect against that today?





# Sermon Notes





3. Note 8:34-38. What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus?

4. Note the verses 8:26, 8:30, and 9:9. Why does Jesus continually tell people not to tell anyone about what He was doing?

5. What truths about Jesus are revealed in His transfiguration (9:2-13)?

6. What truths about the kingdom of God are seen in verses 9:33-41?  
How can we be "least" and "servant to all"?

7. What does it mean to "have salt in yourselves"? (Mark 9:50)

# Sermon Notes

# Unit 7

## Laying Down Your Idols

Mark 10:1-52

### Kingdom Moments

"But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." -Mark 10:43-45

### Study Questions

1. In verses 3-9, Jesus responds to a "test" from Pharisees who questioned Him about divorce. James Edwards notes that "the Pharisees reflect the view that marriage is a disposable contract."<sup>6</sup> Jesus takes them back to God's design for marriage from the beginning as He quotes Genesis 2:24. Jesus then adds the words that have been repeated in countless weddings: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (v. 9).

What biblical values are necessary for a healthy marriage?

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<sup>6</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark: Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 301.





# Sermon Notes









# Sermon Notes







# Sermon Notes







6. Why were Jesus' disciples so slow to believe the reports of His resurrection?

7. As you reflect on the Gospel of Mark, what are some of the most significant things you have learned about:

- Jesus?

- discipleship?

- the Gospel according to Mark?

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