



# THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

The Gospel of Mark  
A Study Guide for Individuals and Groups

# READ THIS FIRST

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## The Gospel of Mark: The King and His Kingdom

### Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as his “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) and expects us to faithfully represent him to the world. In order to faithfully live out this mission we must grow intimately familiar with who Jesus is and what he has done. Thus, it makes sense to have our first weekly study focus on the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Though this series, “The King and His Kingdom,” will not be an exhaustive study of the person of Jesus, we will become thoroughly acquainted with his message, mission, attitude and actions. Not only will we see Jesus in action, but we’ll also get a glimpse of what life looks like in Jesus’ Kingdom. Mark is a fast-paced, hard-hitting, action-packed book and we will spend fourteen weeks examining the highlights of his account.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to deepen your love for Jesus. Whether you are just beginning to explore what it would be like to follow Christ or you’ve trusted him for a long time, my hope is that your heart would be delighted by his majesty, power, humility, trustworthiness, sacrifice and victory. Only as we grow satisfied in Jesus will we be able to bring his love and grace to our hurting world.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons  
Lead Pastor

### The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Mark’s Gospel. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

### Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

### Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

### Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to [info@secondmilechurch.com](mailto:info@secondmilechurch.com).

# GETTING TO KNOW MARK

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## An Introduction to the Gospel of Mark<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel of Mark is generally believed to be the first of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). It is considered the model and often the source for the other gospels.

### What the Gospels Were Not

They were not basically instruction. Although the gospels contain dialogues and teaching (like Plato's philosophies) they were basically focused on the historical events surrounding one historical figure—Jesus. Yet, they were also not really biographies, because they show little interest in most of Jesus' life. What kind of biography ignores all but the last three years of a man's life, and then spends one-half of its length on his very last week? However, though they are historical, they are not really histories. When we compare the four gospels, we learn that they do not necessarily give accounts of Jesus' life in the same order in which they occurred. Not only that, they say very little about outside events. There is little effort to put Jesus' life into the broader context of the history of the day. The writer ignores events that the writer of a normal history would include. Finally, the gospels are not legends or myths. Many people have believed they are myths since they contain miraculous elements.

### What the Gospels Were

What then is a gospel? The word gospel (Mark 1:1) does not mean either "teaching" or "record," but "news." An angel was a herald or messenger that brought news of some historical event that had already happened. The most common examples in Greek literature are "evangels" about a victory in war or the ascension of a new king. We have found an inscription of a royal proclamation that begins: "*The beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus.*" Emperors who had ascended to power or who put down a threat would send out heralds announcing the good news about the strength or inauguration of the kingdom. That messenger would always be proclaiming some historical event (e.g. a coronation, a great victory in battle) which would introduce a radical new state of affairs, a new situation for the people, for they now had to relate to him as king.

Why is this important to grasp? When Christians chose the word *evangelion* to express the essence of their faith, they passed over words that Hellenistic religions used, such as *illumination* (photismos) and *knowledge* (gnosis) or that Judaism used such as *instruction or teaching* (didache) or *wisdom* (sophia). Of course, all of these words were used to describe Christianity, but none achieved the centrality of gospel. This means that the word gospel was chosen to communicate:

**First**, that the gospel is news about what God has already been done for you, rather than instruction and advice about what you are to do for God. The primacy of his work, not our work, is therefore the very essence of Christian faith. In other religions, God reveals to us how we can find or achieve salvation. In Christianity, God achieves salvation for us. The gospel brings news primarily, rather than instruction.

**Second**, that the gospel is all about historic events, and thus it has a public character.

"It identifies Christian faith as news that has significance for all people, indeed for the whole world, not merely as esoteric understanding or insight." (William Brownson)

In other religions, the stories of miracles and other special events in the lives of the founder are not essential. Whether or not Buddha did Miracle X, does not affect whether the 8-Fold path to enlightenment works or not. But if Jesus is not risen from the dead, Christianity does not "work." The gospel is that Jesus died and rose for us. If the historic events of his life did not happen, then Christianity does not "work," for the *good news* is that God has entered the human "now" (history) with the life of the world to come. But if Jesus came historically, then all people should acknowledge and believe in them.

### Date

Most scholars believe that Mark was the earliest of the four gospels. (Careful study shows that Matthew and Luke followed Mark at many places rather than the other way around). Also, there is no clear reference at all to the momentous event of 70 A.D. — the fall of Jerusalem to Roman forces after a Jewish rebellion and the complete destruction of the Temple. It is difficult to believe anyone writing after 70 A.D. could have left such an event out (or even have left it implicit). There is, therefore, no good reason to date Mark any later than 65 A.D. This means that Mark was writing about events just 25-30 years before.

That is very important to recognize. It means that there were thousands of eyewitnesses to all these events still alive when this document was written. That has two implications. **First**, it means that the author had abundant sources for producing an accurate account. He did not have to rely on legends that had been handed down and that could not be verified. **Second**, it means that there is a control making it very difficult for an author to fabricate accounts. For example, it would be nearly impossible to successfully publish a (false) story in the year 2000 that a meteor crashed in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1970 killing dozens of people. There are

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<sup>1</sup> This full introduction was taken from Timothy J. Keller, The Gospel of Mark Study Guide, 2005. This study guide is available for purchase at [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com)

too many people still alive who lived in Bethlehem at the time. Better to make up a story about the meteor crashing in Bethlehem in 1770. Then your story will be harder to disprove. Thus the dating of Mark before 70 A.D. encourages us to trust his reporting.

## Author

The author never names himself (though cf. Mark 14:51-52), but the unanimous testimony of early church fathers (who knew the apostles and their disciples) was that the author was John Mark, a friend of the apostle Peter. Mark's home was a frequent meeting place of the apostles in the very earliest days of the church (Acts 12:12). He was a cousin to Barnabas, Paul's companion, and was on several journeys with Paul. Later, he worked with the St. Peter, and was with him in Rome when he died under Nero's persecution in the mid-60's A.D. In 140 A.D. Papias, wrote:

"Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he remembered of the things said and done by our Lord, but not, however, in order."

This is, therefore, "The Gospel according to Peter." Unlike Matthew, Luke, and John, it begins where Peter comes into Jesus' life. Peter is usually present, as if the stories are from his perspective. Vivid details are present when Peter is there, but are often missing when he is not. It even leaves out words of praise for Peter (e.g. Matthew 16:17) included in the other gospels.

## Form

Mark was a brand new genre (or type) of literature. There has never been anything like the four gospels. Reynolds Price calls it a "new thing entirely." It is almost as if a whole new literary form had to be invented to bring a whole new, unique message. (New wineskins for new wine!)



Week 1

# KINGDOM IS AT HAND

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Mark 1:1-20

.....  
"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
repent and believe in the gospel."  
.....

(Mark 1:15, ESV)

## Introduction

Mark's Gospel starts with a bang. In the first twenty verses we're introduced to a number of people and we learn of Jesus' predecessor (John the Baptist), Jesus' baptism, Jesus' temptation, the launch of Jesus' ministry and the calling of Jesus' first disciples. It all happens fast (notice that the word *immediately* occurs four times in these verses: 1:10, 12, 18, 20). Events that take other Gospel writers paragraphs to explain are summarized by Mark in one sentence. As Tim Keller writes,

Mark is telling us that God has 'broken in' to history. His style gets across a sense of crisis, and conveys that the status quo has been ruptured. We can't think of history as a closed system of natural causes any more. We can't think of any human system or tradition or authority as inevitable or absolute anymore...Jesus has come; anything can happen now.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, Jesus' message is concise: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel." This message, as well as the style of Mark's writing, communicate the need for action. Jesus is portrayed as a *doer*, moving quickly and decisively from event to event. After all, it is Jesus' deeds that save us, and therefore we need to respond with action. We must repent, believe and follow him. We can't remain neutral. We must not just sit and think. We can't keep finding excuses not to follow him. Rather, like the first disciples described in Mark 1:16-20, we must follow him now—even if it means we leave the comfort of our lives behind.

Jesus has come into the world, not bringing advice or a political agenda, but bringing "good news" (this is what the word *gospel* means). "The kingdom of God is at hand."

Life can never be the same.

## Investigation

Read Mark 1:1-20.

1. How would you summarize John the Baptist's message? Why was this message important?
2. In verse 11, the Father's voice comes from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." If Jesus already knew that he was the Son of God, then what was the significance of this statement?
3. It seems strange that the Spirit would be the one driving Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted? Why do you think Mark specifically mentions that the Spirit was responsible for sending Jesus to the wilderness?
4. What is the connection between the kingdom of God being at hand and the call to "repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15)?

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 4.

## Implication

5. A big theme in this passage is “repentance,” which is “A heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Why do you think people are so reluctant to admit their own sinfulness?
  
6. The Bible teaches that if anyone is in Christ, he or she has received “adoption” into God’s family (Galatians 4:4-7). Therefore, the words of Mark 1:11—“You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased”—apply to each Christian. Do you find it hard or easy for you to believe “down deep” that you are unconditionally loved by God as Father? Why?
  
7. Mark 1:15 indicates that repentance is something that needs to be ongoing rather than just a one-time event. What current sinful areas of your life require you to repent and (re)believe the gospel?
  
8. Jesus’ call to follow him always involves becoming a “fisher of men” (like a missionary). Who has God put in your life that you can reach out to with the good news of Jesus? Make a list of these people and write one thing that you can do in the next month to reach out in love to them.

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994). 1253.

## Other Issues

### **What is the significance of John’s “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”?**

A major part of Jewish worship and ceremony was the various ablutions and washings that had to occur constantly. They represented the need for being holy and cleansed from sin in order to stand before a holy God. Ordinarily, this meant washing one’s hands before going in to the temple, and so on. Only Gentile converts who wanted to be part of Israel’s worship had to be baptized thoroughly (by effusion or immersion) as part of the ceremonial rites that made one “clean” and fit for the presence of God. Jews were never baptized because they were already considered “clean.” But John’s ministry was very startling. It called *every* one to be baptized. It signified, first, that your pedigree and moral record did not matter. Everyone was going to have to be saved by grace to enter this kingdom. Secondly, it signaled the need for complete newness—a new people of God would need to be formed, and a new covenant with God would have to be made. No wonder John’s ministry caused such a stir! His ministry of baptism was so unique that he could be called “*the* Baptist”—because no one else had ever done such a thing! He was declaring (what the prophets had said), that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were only pointers to something else—that no one was “fit” for the kingdom except through grace, that a radical salvation was needed.<sup>4</sup>

### **So, does baptism actually forgive sins?**

No. God forgives sin by sheer grace. This forgiveness only comes through turning from sin (repentance) and trusting in Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross (faith). This is a gift of God, from beginning to end (Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism, then, is an outward symbol of an inward reality. In other words, those who have inwardly repented from sin and trusted in Jesus demonstrate or “act out” this faith by being baptized. Dr. Wayne Grudem writes,

When (a person) goes down into the water it is a picture of going down into the grave and being buried. Coming up out of the water is then a picture of being raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. Baptism thus very clearly pictures death to one’s old way of life and rising to a new kind of life in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Baptism is a great blessing to those who have put their hope in Christ and is the first step of obedience for new believers. Nonetheless, it is not meritorious—it does not earn or cause a person’s forgiveness or salvation.

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 968.