

The Nature of the Gospel- Mark's Gospel Introduction

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 24th November 2013

Intro-

- The word Gospel comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'good news' or 'God-news'. It refers to the good news of what Jesus came to do for us, namely- take the punishment for our sins by His death on the cross, freeing us from God's righteous judgment against our sins and then rising from the dead for us as a proof that if we repent (are truly sorry for our sins) and trust in what He has done, we will be saved from Hell and go to Heaven when we die. This is the Good News. There are four Gospels and each of these tells the story of what Jesus did, each from a slightly different perspective- a bit like 4 news channels covering the same event.
- Last time we looked at John's Prologue and noted the nature of Jesus:
-Jesus is God -Jesus loves to work through people -Jesus is a catalyst (He causes a reaction) -Jesus identifies with people.
- This time we will look at the start of Mark's Gospel, at his introduction. Here we will get a flavour of the aspects of what Jesus did that Mark wanted to get across to his readers.
- Who is this Mark? What were his credentials for writing a gospel anyway?
- The Mark who wrote this gospel appears elsewhere in the Bible, where he is called John Mark. He is from Jerusalem and first appears in Acts 12:12, during a time of persecution of the Church there. Herod had imprisoned the Apostle Peter after seeing that it pleased a number of the Jews when he killed James.
- Mark, like Jesus, had a mother called Mary. It was in Mark's mother Mary's house that there was a prayer meeting going on for Peter to be released. God answered these prayers and Peter was led out of prison by an angel and went himself to Mark's mother's house. Hence we see here Mark must have been a close friend of Simon Peter.
- The Apostle Paul then hooks up with him and takes him from Jerusalem to Antioch, and then has him as a companion for his first missionary journey. For some reason Mark returns early and goes back to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13)- we are not told why, maybe he is concerned about his mother, or perhaps concerned about Peter. As a result of this Paul is reluctant to take him on his next missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41) but Barnabas wants to team up with Mark and they go their separate ways on mission.
- However, by the time Paul writes his letter to Philemon (Philem v24) Mark is back with Paul as his 'fellow labourer'.
- In Peter's first letter (1Pet 5:13) Peter passes on greetings from Mark and calls him 'my son' (indicating that he was his spiritual father).
- So this John Mark was both a close companion with Paul, but it would seem, even closer to the Apostle Peter. Very early Church tradition says that this Gospel which Mark wrote down was actually the preaching of Peter as he recalled the things Jesus had done. In the early 2nd century Papias, the overseer of a Church in Hierapolis, wrote that this Gospel was written by: "Mark, (who) having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ." (see Eusebius History of the Church).
- Other early writers such as Irenaeus agree with this. "No early church tradition and no church father ascribes the Gospel to anyone other than Mark." (source: Wikipedia).

- If this is true, you could in some ways say that this is Peter's Gospel, and just as I said in my last message that the Apostle John was qualified to tell us about the nature of Jesus, the Apostle Peter most certainly was- again part of the 'inner three' of the disciples, and extremely close to Jesus, the one to whom Jesus announced 'on this rock I will build my Church' (which some take as a reference to Peter, others to the revelation which Peter had of Jesus being the Christ- either way, Peter is a key person to tell us about Christ).
- Let's read the introductory chapter of Mark's gospel and see if we can get a flavour of what it was that impacted him about Jesus.

Read Mark 1;1-45

3 aspects of the nature of Jesus from Mark's introduction to his Gospel:

1. The simplicity of the Gospel- v1 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'

- Starts with a single sentence which says a similar thing to John's whole prologue- 'the 'beginning' (*reference to Genesis again perhaps?*) of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. Again reference to Jesus being more than just a person, Him being God in the flesh. This time, however, put in the simplest terms without poetic style or metaphors, but again put in a way the hearers would understand- this time they wouldn't understand so much the Hebrew nuances that John's hearers would, so things are kept simple.
- Shortest gospel- presents the Good News as simply as possible. What are we like at presenting the Gospel? Could we do it in 2 minutes? That is often all the time we will get to tell someone about Jesus before there is a distraction. We need, like Mark to know what are the key points of the gospel and how to get those points across effectively. *Discuss these briefly.*
- This gospel, as well as the other gospels in the Bible, were written not in classical Greek (the language of literature) but KOINE Greek (the common language) so that all people could understand it. If you don't have a Bible in modern English invest in one- God wants to speak to you in a language you understand. For many years during the Dark Ages the Bible was kept by the priests in Latin, and only the priests understood the language. So Wycliffe came along and did the first translation into English of the Bible and paid for the privilege with his life. He knew, as Mark did, that the Gospel must reach people in their OWN language.
- Tradition has it that Mark took the gospel to Alexandria in Egypt (and that the Coptic Church started from this). Alexandria was named after Alexander the Great. Alexander's mission was to take Greek culture all over the world and Alexandria was known as a cultural centre for Greek culture. Mark would have to put things in a way those from a Greek culture could understand rather than write for an exclusively Jewish audience. Mark's gospel explains Hebrew customs (Mark 7:1-4; 14:12; 15:42) and Aramaic words (Mark 5:41; 7:11; 14:36) so others can understand. Whenever the Old Testament is quoted it is the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) which is used (e.g. Mark 1:2; 2:23-28; 10:48b; 12:18-27; also compare 2:10 with Dan 7:13-14). (Source: Wikipedia). As Christians we must try to bridge the gap with non-believers and new-believers by explaining terminology where possible and try to avoid jargon.
- **Application:**
- Be willing to live with the tensions of things you don't yet understand- Jesus has ALL the answers- some we will understand this side of Heaven, others once we get

to glory, but there are answers. It takes faith to exercise patience and trust in the Lord rather than leaning on our own understanding.

- Don't disqualify yourself from being used by God, saying 'I don't know enough to be used by Him' etc. I was used by Him from the first week I accepted Him into my life- I didn't have all the answers but I knew a man who did- just be willing to be used- make yourself available to Him and He will use you.
- Overcome your fears and insecurities of being obedient to the things He asks you to do. The Apostle Paul was trained by a Jewish Rabbi, but was not it would appear formerly trained in the Greek forms of oration as some lecturers would have been. As a result, even though he had been called to go to the Gentiles he was at a disadvantage when doing public speaking, compared to someone from a different background such as Apollos. When he preached the gospel to those in Corinth he says he did not '...come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God..I was with you in weakness and fear, and in much trembling' (1Cor 2:1-5)- Paul goes on to say that he was rather coming in the power of the Spirit to demonstrate the Gospel to them, so their faith would be in God's power rather than Paul's intellect. When we step out for God we will feel the same, but God is with us and God will work through us when we let Him, just as He did through Paul.

2. The scope of the Gospel-v16-17 'And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men"'

- Mark tells us about some of the people Jesus chose to be His disciples- Simon Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen, we are told. They were normal blokes whose lives would be transformed by Jesus.
- Some people say 'no thankyou, I'm not religious' as if you have to be a certain 'type' of person to follow Christ. This Gospel makes it plain: the Good News is for everyone.
- Jesus did not bypass the uneducated in order to call the educated- He called all types of people to follow Him. Simon Peter and Andrew were uneducated fishermen and were noted by the teachers of the law to be so. It says in Acts 4:13-14 'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realised that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it'. The difference was 'they had been with Jesus'. If we are willing to spend time with Jesus He will make use wise, He will make us bold, He will educate us with His wisdom. The Gospel is simple- a child can understand it, but far too complex for those unwilling to yield to it.
- In the next chapter Mark will relate how Jesus goes on to ask someone from the most despised class of people- the tax collectors, to also follow Him. Are there people who we would (in our minds) disqualify because we think they would never want to follow Jesus. Surely, given the right circumstances anyone could turn and follow Christ, and this is perhaps what Mark's gospel here is trying to get across to us.
- For those who maybe have not yet committed their lives to Jesus- do you disqualify yourself? Do you think that you've got to first of all 'clean up your act' before you come to Christ? You will never achieve it. Come to Him as you are, warts and all. Come and let HIM wash you clean by the blood He shed on your behalf when He died on the cross, bearing your sin and shame.
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3. The **Speed at Which God Can Work**- v42 'immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed'.

- The 'immediately's in this first chapter- eight in this first chapter (vs. 10, 12,18,20,21,28,31,42), forty-two times in Mark, only seven times in Luke (a much longer gospel) and four times in John.
- Huge number of events covered in this first chapter- healings, deliverance, baptisms etc. Towards the end of John's gospel (in John 20:30-31) he says that Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but the things which are recorded are written that people may believe in Jesus and have life. John then finishes his Gospel by saying 'And there were also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen' (John 21:25). Hence here, Mark is trying to convey the huge number of things Jesus achieved in such a short time frame.
- Fast-moving Gospel, action-packed. This is the James Bond of the Gospels- an action film.
- If Mark did write down what Simon Peter said then this Gospel fits quite well into what we know of Simon. Simon was the impulsive disciple who did not like to hang around in the boat and wait, but wanted to get on with the action. He was the one who spoke out about not having his feet washed by Jesus, then in the next minute asked for a whole body wash. He was the one who so clearly stated the truth about who Jesus was and then in the next minute had to be rebuked by Jesus for trying to stop Him going to the cross. He would be the first disciple to speak up on behalf of the others- he was a man of action. If this gospel reflects his preaching, then like him, it is noteworthy for its high speed action. Imagine you could spend 3 and a half years with Jesus whilst He ministered. Think about all the needy situations and people pressing in to receive help and healing. Jesus coming into Peter's life must have been like a roller coaster ride!
- Just three and a half years of ministry and Jesus achieved SO MUCH. What if in our next three and a half years we did as many things as Jesus did to advance the Kingdom of God. Well He is with us now, working through us. The church in the book of Acts exploded in FAST growth throughout the world. Today in many places on earth the Gospel is changing nations at an amazing rate. Rinehart Bonke recently did a meeting with over a million people.
- Seasons with God- 400 years silence between the Old and New Testament when it appeared God did not speak through a prophet, 30 years of Jesus growing up and we are told very little, all appears quiet, and suddenly it all happens when Jesus starts His ministry!
- The 'suddenly's of God- book of Acts- Acts 2:2 'Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting'. This was the sound of God coming by His Holy Spirit in power. Each was filled with God's Spirit and the result was the sudden growth of the Church. Look at the numbers of people that have visited Wales and been saved in a very short period of time in Cwmbran- we can sow for a long period of time and see some fruit for our labours, but God is able to suddenly break in and cause unprecedented growth. This is what we are believing for and praying for, whilst also being obedient and preaching the Gospel. When God brings revival there is a sudden change and there is an increase in pace, and we see this reflected in the style of writing Mark uses in his Gospel.
- Isaiah 60:22 says "A little one shall become a thousand, And a small one a strong

nation. I, the LORD will hasten it in it's time'. Or in another translation 'In it's time I will do this swiftly'. This is a promise that we had as a Church plant right at the beginning and we thought the Church would grow very quickly, but the words say rather 'In it's time I will do this swiftly'. This means we shall know a time of very rapid numerical growth, above and beyond that which we could achieve- it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

- v15 'The time is fulfilled' -i.e. The kingdom is coming now! Our previous session on the Kingdom of God- most were expecting a future kingdom, or for the kingdom to come fully then, but Jesus announced that the Kingdom had come, but would continue to increase and one day would fully come when He returned. Here Mark wants us to see the dramatic speed at which God's kingdom can break into people's lives. The kingdom of God advances through us as we step out in faith and preach the Gospel in God's power.
- **Application:**
- What do you expect God to do? He probably will. Jesus said so many times 'Your faith has made you well'- it appears in the gospels that the numbers of miracles seen grew as people's expectation of Jesus grew. Also when there was little expectation Jesus was Himself hindered by the culture of unbelief.
- If we have an expectation that things are going to take another 7 years they probably will, but if we keep our expectation high of our great God then He is able to bring the breakthrough very quickly.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit- this was key to the growth breakthrough of the early Church. It was also after Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit at His baptism that things sped up and huge numbers were saved and set free.
- Everyone needs to be involved, not just a few people. This is not just for the leaders but all Christians- we are all to share the good news in power. Bill Johnson's Church in America- he has trained his congregation to pray for the sick and expect God to do things and God does. As a result a huge part of their routine is telling stories about what God has been doing. This is what we have here packed into Mark's gospel- many stories crammed in about the amazing things Jesus was doing. Let's get to the point where we, like Mark, want to testify to the amazing things God is doing all around us, and don't have enough time or space to get everything written down and recorded.

4. The Supernatural aspect of the Gospel – v34 'Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons'

- This first chapter is packed with supernatural events! The Heavens part, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, God speaks audibly, Angels minister to Jesus, there is deliverance in the (normally ordinary) Synagogue, Simon's mother-in-law is healed, the whole city gathers at the door for healing and deliverance, demons are being cast out of people all over Galilee and a leper is cleansed.
- Jesus did more than just teach (he did teach- v22)- He did miraculous signs to back the message up. People believed the gospel because not only did they hear it, but they could also see it when people were made well and also delivered from demons. Today people need the same if we are to see the results Jesus saw.
- There are two bits of information Mark gives us which are relevant to this. The first is that the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus (v10). This is relevant because it is from this moment onwards that things start to happen. It was the same for the early Church- the Holy Spirit filled them and they were able to minister in God's power as they preached the Gospel. Jesus in fact said they should not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the Promise of the Father (the Holy Spirit) which he also described as being 'endued with power from on high' (see end of Luke and start of Acts). As they

did this they would witness to Jesus by the power of the Spirit and be effective. We now don't have to wait like they did- the Holy Spirit was to be poured out on a certain day- the day of Pentecost- we don't have to wait for this- Pentecost has taken place- the promise of the Spirit is for us TODAY, even NOW. However, even though we don't have to wait, we still need to be filled by the Holy Spirit or we will not see the signs following the preaching of the Gospel- the Holy Spirit makes all the difference. Ask God to fill you today.

- The second bit of information which Mark gives us is that Jesus taught as one with authority unlike the teachers of the law (v22). Immediately after saying this Mark relates the incident of the demon who cried out through the person in the synagogue- Jesus is not fearful or surprised by this- He commands the demon to be quiet and come out and it does. This is how Mark illustrates the authority that Jesus has. Jesus does not pray that the Father will drive the demons out- He commands the demons to go- takes authority over them. When Jesus heals the sick His normal method is not to pray that the Father heals them- no, He speaks healing to them, or tells them to do something they could not do, because He knows He has authority over sickness. In the same way, when Jesus sent out His disciples He gave THEM authority over demons and sickness. Rather than praying for people and asking God to make them better, we see that the disciples also spoke with authority over sickness like they actually believed God had given them authority over sickness (e.g. Peter and John in Acts 3:6 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk'). Peter would have cast a demon out in a similar fashion, but this time he is speaking words of authority to a person telling them to be healed in Jesus' name.
- **Application:** It is when we too realise the authority we have in Christ that we will see a breakthrough in the number of people being healed. Next time you get the opportunity to pray for healing for someone who is with you, rather than asking God to do it, why not speak to the person and tell them to be healed in the name of Jesus, speak to the injured part of the body and tell it in the name of Jesus to be healed etc. Let God do what only He can do once you've done what only you can do- God will not exercise authority on our behalf- we have to do that (He would rather work through us than in spite of us)- let's be bold and speak out in faith rather than doubt or fear.

Summary

Mark's Gospel reveals the Good News of Jesus in the following ways in his introductory chapter:

- **The Simplicity of the Gospel**
- **The Scope of the Gospel**
- **The Speed of the Gospel**
- **The Supernatural Gospel**

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