

# Gospel of Mark

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

We are going to be looking at Mark's gospel, reading it together and exploring it a chapter at a time. As an introduction to this week's reflection, it would be good to read Mark 1:1-8, and then after that read the rest of chapter 1.

### Short Reflection

When we begin to read the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life, three out of the four writers take a good amount of time to set the scene before they begin; Matthew goes through a whole genealogy alongside the story of Joseph, Luke gives an ordered account of the story of Jesus's birth, John talks about the creation of the world and the Word of God. Mark on the other hand does things a little differently. He hardly wastes any time at all on preface – according to Mark, Jesus just sort of appears in Galilee. (This isn't the case of course, that's why we read all the Gospel accounts- although, it does illustrate my point.)

However, Mark does spare enough time for eight verses before Jesus begins his public ministry. So, what is it then, that Mark thinks is so crucial for us to hear as we begin this story of Jesus Christ? He opens with this – 'the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet.' As it is written....

In the video I prepared for this week, I spoke about the newness of Jesus's ministry – that God is doing a new thing. God is coming to be with his people, to heal them, to teach them, to restore them and most importantly to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is come near. Mark in these opening chapters makes it clear to us the readers that the news he is telling us about, the things about which we are going to read, have not been done before, they are new. However, alongside this theme of newness, this looking forward into the kingdom of God, Mark takes a moment to look back – 'as it is written.' He quotes for us here a passage from Isaiah, written hundreds of years before, which talks about the one who will prepare the way for the Lord, the one who we now know to be Jesus's cousin, John the Baptist.

But why does Mark tell us this? Why out of all the information he could share with us, about Jesus miraculous birth, about the angels visiting Joseph, maybe even about Jesus's childhood, why this passage from Isaiah?

I think this is one of the reasons: Mark wants us, the readers, to understand that although what is happening is new, it is not disconnected from what has gone before, it is not separate from what God has been doing – there is continuity. Jesus came to usher in a new thing – the kingdom of God – but this part of the story, this chapter, is held within the whole story of Scripture, the story of God with his people. Everything that God has been doing has been leading up to this moment, and to understand fully what is about to happen we need to look back to what has gone before.

So, as we read Mark together, let us take a little time to locate the gospel in this bigger story, and wonder at it. It's the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the Exodus, the law, David and the temple, the prophets. But most importantly it's the story that now, through Jesus, has become our story as well. For every chapter and every verse is there to point us toward Jesus, the Son of God, who, through the wonders of his life, death and resurrection, about which we are going to read, has come to call us home, to life in him.

Mark in these eight verses introduces us to a new chapter of the story that God has been telling since the beginning. So now, let us allow ourselves to get lost in it, immerse ourselves in it, be changed by it and encounter Jesus, the author of it all, within it.

## Questions

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- 1: How does looking back help us to move forwards? What can we learn about faith through it?
- 2: "This story is our story." What parts of the story of scripture have most helped you to understand Jesus ministry? Why? What parts are most important?
- 3: Glance over the other parts of this chapter; what sticks out to you? what other parts of the story catch your attention.

## Prayer

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- 1: Pray first for God to speak through his word - it is a simple prayer but one worth remembering
- 2: Pray for God to allow us to read scripture with fresh eyes; no preconceptions, no expectations - just allowing scripture to speak for itself.
- 3: Pray for God to help us to learn lessons from the past, to not make the same mistakes and to each day step toward our future in God.