

# WELCOME

The Good Book Club:  
The Gospel of Mark

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THE  
GOOD BOOK  
CLUB

## The Gospel Of Mark | Epiphany 2021

### ABOUT

Begin 2021 with the Gospel of Mark! The Good Book Club returns to read the earliest and shortest of the four gospels, starting Friday, January 1, 2021, through Shrove Tuesday, February 16.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

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# Reading List



## THE GOOD BOOK CLUB

### 2021 ~ Gospel of Mark

<b>Friday, January 1</b> HOLY NAME <i>Mark 1:1-11</i>	<b>Tuesday, January 19</b> <i>Mark 7:31-37</i>	<b>Saturday, February 6</b> <i>Mark 13:28-37</i>
<b>Saturday, January 2</b> <i>Mark 1:12-20</i>	<b>Wednesday, January 20</b> <i>Mark 8:1-13</i>	<b>Sunday, February 7</b> <i>Mark 14:1-11</i>
<b>Sunday, January 3</b> <i>Mark 1:21-45</i>	<b>Thursday, January 21</b> <i>Mark 8:14-26</i>	<b>Monday, February 8</b> <i>Mark 14:12-25</i>
<b>Monday, January 4</b> <i>Mark 2:1-12</i>	<b>Friday, January 22</b> <i>Mark 8:27-38</i>	<b>Tuesday, February 9</b> <i>Mark 14:26-42</i>
<b>Tuesday, January 5</b> <i>Mark 2:13-28 *</i>	<b>Saturday, January 23</b> <i>Mark 9:1-13</i>	<b>Wednesday, February 10</b> <i>Mark 14:43-65</i>
<b>Wednesday, Jan. 6</b> EPIPHANY <i>Mark 3:1-12</i>	<b>Sunday, January 24</b> <i>Mark 9:14-32</i>	<b>Thursday, February 11</b> <i>Mark 14:66-72</i>



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SAINT

MARK



## The Gospel of Mark

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- What do you notice if you read the Gospel of Mark?
- Who was Mark? When and why was this gospel written?
- How is the gospel structured?
- What are some key themes of the gospel?
- What questions does this gospel prompt for our Christian living today?



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# What do you notice about the Gospel of Mark?

- Short: shortest of the four gospels
- “Missing” pieces: birth narrative, genealogy, resurrection appearances
- Abrupt
  - Mark 1:1: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”
  - Greek word *euthys* used 41 times: “immediately,” “at once,” or “just then”
- Compared to other gospels, Jesus doesn’t have a lot of monologues / sermons
  - 2 extended discourses (chapter 4 and chapter 13); compare to 5 sermons in Gospel of Matthew, or lengthy farewell discourses in John



# Jesus is more “human” in Mark

- Jesus heals leper in chapter 1
- In Mark, Jesus is “moved with pity” (1:41) to heal him but this is taken out of Matthew and Luke
- After healing leper, Jesus “sternly charged him” not to tell anyone (1:43), but no sternness in Matthew or Luke





# Disciples don't get it

- Jesus walks on water in chapter 6
- Mark concludes: “they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand...[and] their hearts were hardened.” (6:52)
- Matthew concludes with apostles worshipping Jesus and saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (14:33)



# Reality of human suffering

- Mark is more detailed about suffering of people Jesus heals
  - “There met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones.” (5:2-5)
  - Parallel story in Matthew (8:28-34) has none of this description
- Similar lengthy description in Jesus’ healing of a woman with unstoppable bleeding (Mark 5:21-43 and Matthew 9:18-26) and epileptic boy (Mark 9:14-29; Matthew 7:14-21; Luke 9:37-45)
- Mark is concerned about the real human condition of people and the suffering they are experiencing







## Who was Mark?

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- The text frustrates this question: it makes no reference to the author at all
- Gospel begins in the wilderness and makes no effort to connect that reality with the reader
  - Other gospels try to bridge gap between reader and setting
- Mark is not one of the named apostles (like Matthew or John) and Mark (Marcus) is one of the most common names in the Roman Empire

# Mark in the New Testament

- John Mark in the Acts of the Apostles: son of prominent Christian woman in Jerusalem (12:12) who is co-worker of Paul and Barnabas (12:25) and cause of split between the two (15:37-39)
- A Mark mentioned in 1 Peter
  - “Your sister church in Babylon [Rome], chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.” (5:13)
- Early church seemed to take for granted that Mark was a follower of Peter
  - “Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ.... he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers.” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*)
- Key fact of gospel is that author doesn’t want to get in the way of the story





# Why a gospel?

- Why would Mark think a document like this gospel was needed? What made him sit down and write a gospel?
- Up until this point, apparently no one has thought to write something like this
  - Early Christians have been writing letters to one another
- Consensus is that Mark is written sometime between 65 and 75: a full generation after Jesus' ministry
- In chapter 13, Jesus talks about length about temple and its destruction; seems to be written against background of Jewish War of 66-73



# A tumultuous time

- Roman Empire ruled by Nero (54 to 68)
- 60s saw a series of earthquakes and other natural disasters
- Military defeat to Parthians in 63
- Rome burns in 64
- Neronian persecution of Christians, including likely death of Peter and Paul
- Emperor Nero succeeded by “Year of Four Emperors” (68)





# Jewish War (66 – 73)



- Jewish revolt against Roman rule led to war, including destruction of temple in 70
- Factionalism and division among Jewish people as they divide about how to respond to Roman Empire and war: cooperate, rebel, abstain

# Palestine: Centre vs. periphery

- Centre is urban (above all Jerusalem): economic and religious power concentrated here
- Periphery is rural: agricultural, landless, economically poor, religiously excluded
- Jewish War sees violence between urban and rural residents of Palestine
- Also sees the capture of Jerusalem by rural guerilla leaders who march on the temple
  - John of Gischala: in 67, he routs Roman army and enters Jerusalem triumphantly, urging people to join his revolt
  - Eleazar of Simon: leader of a group of *lestes* (bandits) who sets up headquarters in inner temple





# Political Divisions in Palestine

- Divisions among Jewish people in Palestine
  - Priestly caste offering religious leadership
  - Urban Jews in market centres
  - Rural revolutionaries looking to overthrow system
  - Urbanites opposed to Rome and alarmed by rural poor
  - Rural poor alienated from political, economic, and religious power and not obviously aligned with anyone
- Mark writes a gospel that speaks to people living in this divided time by pointing back 40+ years earlier to the ministry of someone named Jesus
- That story begins in the wilderness (1:4-13) and Galilee (chapters 1 to 10): rural, agricultural, peripheral region



# Why did Mark write?

- Look to beginning of gospel:
  - “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1)
- Good news = gospel = *euangelion*
- A word Mark uses at key moments in gospel, including 3 times in first 15 verses
- Inscription discovered at Priene in Asia Minor, dates to 9 BC
  - “Since he, Caesar, by his appearance exceeded the hopes of all former good messages, surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good news for the world that came by reason of him...





# Mark and *euangelion*

- Mark places *euangelion* of Jesus in opposition to Roman imperial ideology: Jesus is true son of God
- The “beginning” of the good news is found in the wilderness and then in ministry in Galilee of Jesus; Roman Empire’s good news begins in Rome
- Mark teaches the reader about Jesus by telling stories about Jesus
- A two-level drama
  - Jesus is present in the few years in the 20s that the gospel covers
  - Jesus is speaking directly to the people who are reading the gospel in the 60s—and ever since
    - “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” (4:40)
    - “And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (13:37)



# Structure of gospel

- Prologue (1:1-13): Isaiah quotation, John the Baptist, baptism, temptation
- Jesus in Galilee: preaching, healing, exorcising, ministering (1:14-8:22)
  - Discourse on parables (4:1-33)
  - Jesus demonstrates his power in word and deed and proclaims a kingdom
- Transition: Jesus teaches on discipleship and Christology (8:27-10:45)
- Jesus in Jerusalem: entry, last teachings, arrest, trial, execution (11:1-15:47)
  - Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem (11:1-12:44)
  - Eschatological discourse (13:1-37)
  - Last day, trial, suffering, and death (14:1-15:47)
- Epilogue (16:1-8): Empty tomb



# Themes: Who is Jesus?

- What titles does Mark give to Jesus?
- *Christ* (messiah) 7 times and each of those is carefully chosen
  - 1:1: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God”
  - Jesus is the messiah—and he is the son of God
- Son of God
  - “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” (1:11)
  - “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (9:7)
- Son of Man
  - “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” (9:31)
- Jesus tells other people to keep his status secret and it is the demons who recognize him: “I know you are, the Holy One of God.” (1:24)



# Son of God, Messiah, and Son of Man

- Jesus on trial, abandoned by friends, subject to legal proceedings of dubious validity
- “Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’
- Jesus said, “I am;
- and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’” (14:61-62)
- What kind of messiah is this?







# Christ on the cross

- “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” (15:31-32)
- “Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!’” (15:39)
- It is precisely when Jesus is on the cross that he is most truly the messiah
- Note use of word see

# Theme: Seeing the way of the Messiah

- Recall structure of gospel and key transition section 8:22 to 10:52—Jesus links messiahship to suffering and ultimate vindication
- Transition section bracketed by two stories of Jesus healing blind people
  - 8:22-26: Jesus puts saliva on eyes of blind man; healing is gradual: “I can see people, but they look like trees walking”; Jesus tries again and succeeds
  - 10:45-52: Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”; healing is immediate: no saliva needed
- Seeing and believing are closely related: Mark is showing us what kind of messiah Jesus is so we may see and believe



## Theme: “The way of the Lord”

- Bartimaeus is healed: “Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.” (10:52)
- Opening quotation from Isaiah: “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your **way**; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the **way** of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” (1:2-3)
- Isaiah passage at start of gospel is in reference to God leading Israelites out of exile and back to Jerusalem; now Jesus is the one leading the people of God on the way out of Galilee and towards Jerusalem
- Key difference: one is a triumphal journey, other is journey of rejection, suffering, and death
- For Mark, that is what it means to be messiah: way to triumph is the way that leads through the cross





# Theme: Jesus and power

- Gospel of Mark written at a time when who has power is being contested: Roman empire and Jewish rebellion, divisions among Jewish people as well
- Visions of power are similar: militaristic, violent, oriented around seizing control, dominating situation, making others do what you want them to do



# Jesus and power

- Jesus' disciples are not immune from this
- James and John have a request for Jesus: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." (10:37)
- Other ten disciples get upset: "So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'" (10:42-45)



# Jesus' trial and God's power

- When Jesus is on trial in chapter 14, Mark stresses the unjust and arbitrary nature of exercise of human power: lies, unfair procedure, abuse
- This is what state violence and persecution look like from the perspective of the victim: confused, confusing, punitive, isolating, and ultimately power will get its way
- It is this situation when Jesus confirms himself to be the messiah: only when he is alone, stripped of all power, in middle of nightmare, with no hope of life or a happy ending, that he gives up the secrecy and declares who he is
- We can only understand the power of God in Christ when every possibility of power has been taken away





# The good news of Jesus' power

- The kingdom of God cannot be dethroned because of pain, disaster, human failure, or oppression
- God is not where you thought God was, God is not what you thought God was, God is here in this trial and God's power is made perfect in this abandonment
- Recall chapter 10: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (10:45)
- Jesus' trial and death sets us free from fantasy:
  - that God's power is just like ours, only bigger
  - that if we gain power we need to cling to it at all costs



# Theme: Jesus and the kingdom

- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (1:15)
- Jesus embodies this kingdom in his healings, exorcisms, and teachings—and in who he hangs out with
- Jesus is surrounded by crowds: “A large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.” (5:24)
- Mark uses the Greek word *ochlos* to talk about these crowds
  - *Ochlos* = mob, rabble (English word ochlocracy)
- *Ochlos* are sick, socially alienated, poor, women—those excluded from society are the ones Jesus spends his time with
- “A crowd was sitting around him... and looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’” (3:32, 34)



# Jesus' alternative kingdom: economics

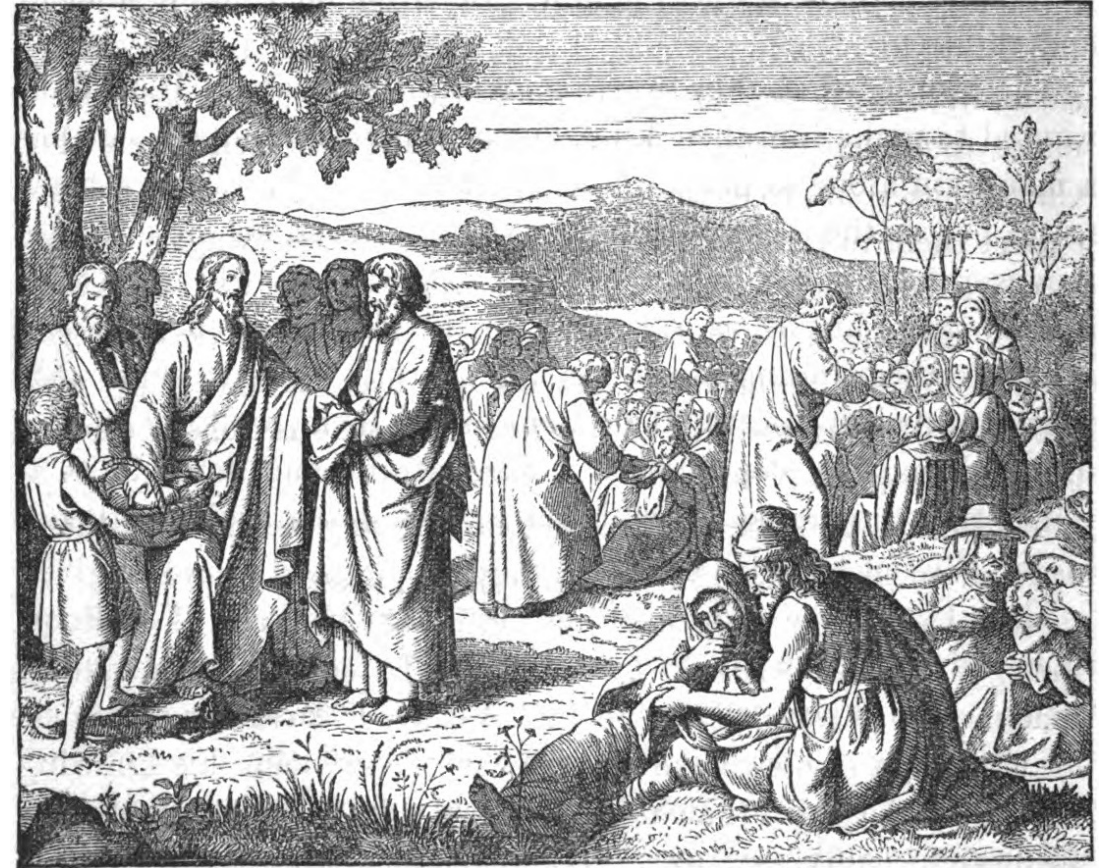
- Jesus is in a deserted place but still followed by a large, hungry crowd: “he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without shepherd.” (6:34)
- Disciples have the market on the mind: “send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.” (6:36)
- Jesus: “you give them something to eat”; disciples: “are we to go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread?” (6:37)





# Jesus' alternative: economics

- “He ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.... He blessed and broke the loaves.” (6:39-41)
- Rather than being anonymous and separated consumers in a marketplace, Jesus forms a community of consumption based on gift and blessing, not market and purchase
- “And all ate and were filled [satisfied].” (6:42)



# Following in way of Jesus' kingdom

- Not arguing for withdrawing from existing order
- Not interested in reform—demands are more radical than this
- Not interested in military triumph
- Not despairing at having to accept a world dominated by power
- Following Jesus is a costly practice: rejection, persecution, leaving family
- Social engagement on this model is not easy: practices of communality (including with Gentile), sharing, enoughness, attentiveness to poor
- How to keep hope that this is the right way forward?



# Theme: Sermons about hope—and patience

- Two sermons: chapter 4 and 13, one for each of two main sections of gospel
- Chapter 4: parable of the sower and “kingdom is like...” parables
- Parable of the sower: you’ll face opposition—from Satan, persecution, and the “lure of wealth”—but 100-fold growth is coming
  - The kingdom might be a little group now (12 apostles) and not seeming all the successful—but the faithful seed will prevail in extraordinary fashion
- The kingdom is like planting a seed—its growth is not obvious (it’s in the ground), it’s not under human control, and the job of the listener is not to provoke the harvest (“he does not know how”) but to concentrate on sowing the seed





## Discourse in chapter 13

- The signs you see around you right now—of other people claiming to be messiahs, of temple being profaned—are not the signs of the coming kingdom
- “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn.... And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (13:32-37)



# Jesus looks to the future

- Like farmer waiting for harvest, followers of Jesus are on a timeline between God planting the seed and the full realization of the kingdom
- Jesus has announced the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near, but it is not the final coming of Son of Man in glory
- How to respond?
  - Patience: change is not quick and triumphal; need to find the right soil and let it grow
  - Hope: you see the opposition to this kingdom message, but this is just the sowing of the seed—the harvest is coming
  - Be alert, be attentive, do not compromise on all that Jesus has taught so far



# Theme: The good news of human failure

- Gospel of Mark ends with moments of human failure
- Peter: “Then Peter remember what Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.” (14:72)
- Empty tomb:
  - “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” (16:7)
  - “So they [the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (16:8)



# The good news of human failure

- Tension between what the narrative tells us and what we know to be true
- In the narrative, Peter's last scene in gospel is of him in tears at his denial of Jesus—but we know he became a leader of the church
- In the narrative, the women run away—but they must have told someone because the story got told to Mark and the community he was writing to
- No one in the story succeeds—but the good news succeeds
  - The proof of this is the community that is reading this gospel, whether during Jewish War or covid-19 pandemic





# The Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Peter?

- Jesus' promises in the gospel and God's action will overcome any human failure—God's action is made known through imperfect followers
- In the gospel, there is no ultimate victory of Jesus: we don't see him vanquishing his enemies or coming again in glory
  - Christians believe that Christ will come again in glory so live with hope and patience now as people of that kingdom he will bring
- The Gospel of Peter?
  - Not a perfect apostle but a typical one: repeatedly misses the point of what he witnesses and is exemplary in his wrongness
  - “go, tell his disciples and [even] Peter” to meet the Messiah in Galilee



# Questions for reading Mark now

- Gospel: What is good and new about what Jesus has to say?
- The way of Jesus: What helps us see the way of Jesus in our lives?
- Alternatives: What alternative model of living do followers of Jesus present to the world now?
- Power: What are our understandings of power now? How are these similar or different to those of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark?
- Galilee: How are Christians called to go to Galilee and hear again the proclamation of the kingdom by Jesus?



# What's next?

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Read the Gospel of Mark

Use these slides, recording, and other online resources however they are helpful

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