

Mark 1-8

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Mark's gospel was written to Gentiles, most likely to Roman Christians. While Matthew's gospel is known for being highly structured, Mark's gospel is the most dramatic. It's written in a fast-paced narrative style, it's shorter than the other gospels, and is split into three major acts, or some consider two acts with an intermission.

In Mark's gospel, be on the lookout for...

- The word "Immediately"
- Reactions to Jesus described
- Jesus telling others to stay silent

Mark 1:1-4

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,
the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

How is Mark's start to his gospel different from Matthew's?

Mark 1:8

I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

This is the second time Mark has done this. In verse two, he quotes Isaiah, talking about a messenger, and then who enters from stage left?

So now, who are you expecting to enter from stage right?

Mark 1:9

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

What Matthew takes 11 verses to discuss, Mark does in 2 verses.

Mark 1:12-13

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Mark 1:21-28

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

This passage is a great example of Mark’s style. We are also introduced to the first time Jesus tells someone to be silent about His identity. Why do you think He does this?

Mark 1:42-44a, 45

And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go..." [...] But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

What reason are we given for this command of silence?

Mark 2:5-12

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

Mark 18-20

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

For as often as Jesus is silencing others, He also does things like this which are revealing of who he really is, making that tension between the hidden and revealed continue to rise.

Mark 3:7-12

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Jesus is swarmed by people while still ordering silence.

Mark 3:16-21

He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

This portion demonstrated Mark's handle on the dramatic narrative. Imagine reading for the first time, and you have no idea what will happen next. Mark just drops in this "Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him," leaving the reader hanging! What did Judas do? What happens to Jesus in the betrayal? Mark's response: We'll get to that later, moving on!

And then he does it again with Jesus' family!

Mark 3:22-27

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." 23 And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. 27 But no

one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Who is the strong man Jesus speaks of here? Who is the robber? What are the goods?

Mark 4:10-12

And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that

“ ‘they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.’ ”

Jesus is quoting Isaiah 6:9, which in context is about Israel's hardness of heart. God determines the time for punishment has come, and while they will still hear his decrees, the time to change their ways has passed.

Mark 4:13-20

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

This again highlights the tensions between what is hidden and what is revealed, and that tension is aligned with those who do and do not believe, and that truth is not just in seeing or hearing but in perceiving and understanding.

Mark 6:49-52

but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Mark states plainly that the disciples were astounded because, despite all the miracles, they were still blind to his true identity.

Mark 7:24-30

And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Again, we see this tension where Jesus wishes to be hidden and yet cannot be. The woman is essentially identified as a non-Jew, and the statement of Jesus about the children and the dogs refers to Jews and Gentiles. Jews are the children, and are offered the bread first, while Jews considered Gentiles to be dogs. It is worth noting that the Greek word has a diminutive, so it would be better translated as 'little dogs' or 'puppies.'

The woman's response is to call Jesus Lord (the only time anyone calls him Lord in the gospel of Mark), affirm the primacy of the Jews, and suggest that even Gentiles can receive something while the Jews are the target of Jesus' ministry. It is for her faith and humility that Jesus heals her daughter.

Mark 8:22

And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.”

The final portion of Mark’s first act foreshadows what is happening and about to happen. Jesus lays hands on this man twice; is that because he could not fully restore his vision the first time?

How does this reveal what is happening, considering Jesus has been saying everyone is blind up to this point?

Homework

Read Mark 8-16

What questions do you have from the reading?

Dive Deeper

If you want to keep studying on your own this week, check out these resources:

- Four Portraits, One Jesus *by Mark L. Strauss*
- A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New *by G. K. Beale*
- Get the handouts at DeeplyBiblical (<https://deeplybiblical.com/gospels/>)