

The Gospel of Mark

Servant. Savior. King.

It seems a bit strange on the surface, the fact that we have four books of the Bible, all situated at the very beginning of the New Testament, all of which claim to tell the same story about Jesus. As you read through these in turn, you find that though Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all sharing about one *person*, they do so from wonderfully distinct perspectives. Like folks describing the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, those watching from a Midtown Manhattan penthouse would describe it differently from those watching on the sidewalk at E 59th St and 8th Ave, who would describe it differently from those watching the NBC broadcast from their couches at home.

Mark was maybe there with Jesus, but if so he had a bit part in the story of the Gospels. Yet, as Church history tells us, he spent time with Peter in Rome and it was there, at the center of the empire, that he heard Peter's account of life and ministry alongside Jesus of Nazareth. It's the story of Jesus that Mark tells so compellingly in his Gospel.

Mark's Gospel doesn't simply invite us in — it pulls us in, moving inexorably toward questions that demand an answer. Who is Jesus? What kind of Savior is he? What will it mean if I follow him? We are confronted with a King and his Kingdom who demonstrates immense power and, yet, regularly moves against the preconceived ideas about power and authority that pervaded his day. We are shown a Messiah who comes in strength and wisdom and, yet, also bears the dirty hands and aching muscles of a servant offering his life for a world that, in many cases, wants nothing to do with the hope and promise that he offers.

The questions that, as we read Mark's Gospel, we must ask about Jesus might sound theoretical and, maybe, academic. But Mark has anything and everything else in mind, because he's writing to a people who are suffering. He's writing to a Church that finds itself *in* the world and *wrestling against* the powers and authorities of this world, clinging to hope in a resurrected Messiah even though, right now, they can't see him or touch him or audibly hear his voice.

To them—to us—Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus our Messiah as a Sovereign King, as a Suffering Servant, and, ultimately, as the Savior we are called to lay our lives down before and follow.

Mark 1:1-13 Discussion Questions

- 1) What assumptions do you make about Jesus? For example, do you assume that Jesus would agree with your political or social ideology or, perhaps, do you assume that what Jesus taught his disciples means something different for us today? Where do these assumptions come from?
- 2) Look at Mark 1:1. How would you define the words that Mark uses here: *gospel*, *Christ*, *Son of God*?
- 3) Mark uses a fusion of three Old Testament passages in 1:2-3 (Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3). Read these three passages. By utilizing these passages, what is Mark saying about the arrival of Jesus?
- 4) What does John the Baptist say about Jesus?
- 5) Describe the baptism of Jesus (1:9-11). Who is present? What is said? Why might these things be significant for Mark's presentation of Jesus?
- 6) What is surprising/unexpected about Jesus's immediate departure into the wilderness and temptation there?
- 7) What is something (an observation, a character, a statement) that caught you by surprise in these first verses in Mark? How might these opening scenes push against your previously-acknowledged assumptions about Jesus?
- 8) How would you characterize/describe Jesus and his ministry in light of these first verses in Mark? What is one thing about Jesus (or more!) from these first verses in Mark that you would like to continue to meditate on throughout this coming week?