

Mark: Study 1 - Prepare the Way

1. Some background, about Mark
 - (a) Mark 12:12 His family
 - (b) 1 Peter 5:13 his relationship with Peter
2. About the Roman audience: Rome's "divine" Emperors
 - Julius Caesar (48 BC-44 BCE) "The Carthaeen people honor the god and emperor and savior of the inhabited world Gaius Julius Caesar, son of Gaius Caesar."
 - Augustus Caesar (30 BCE-14 CE) "Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of god"
The Priene Calendar Inscription in honor of Caesar Augustus, ca. 9 BCE.
"Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (excelled even our anticipations), 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."
 - Tiberius Caesar (14 - 37 CE) Emperor Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of god
 - Caesar Caligula (37 - 41 CE) Inscription on altars in Athens and Halasarna honor Gaius Caligula as a "new god"
 - Claudius (41-54 CE) "Claudius god"
 - Nero (54-68 CE) "Nero Claudius Caesar.... the savior and benefactor of the inhabited world", "The good god of the inhabited world, the beginning of all good things".
3. Who was John the baptizer?
 - (a) The details of his clothing 2 Kings 1:8
 - (b) The details of his diet. Why do you think Mark mentions only locusts (Joel 2:21-25) and honey (recall the phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey")? What is the symbolism of locusts, of honey?
 - (c) John's ministry
 - i. What was the purpose of John's ministry?
 - ii. Mark uses the Greek word "euthus" 38 times in his book, and all but one of those it is translated "immediately". The one exception to this translation is in the phrase "make his paths straight (euthus)". What might be a better way to understand this phrase and what are the implications? (Removing obstacles: What are some of the obstacles to the good news?)
 - iii. What does Isaiah say is necessary for this to happen, and what did John say was necessary for this to happen? How do they relate? What is the symbolism of mountains and valleys in Isaiah? What is the symbolism associated with wilderness? What is the spiritual principle demonstrated here?

Is. 40:3-5 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

(d) What was the content of John’s message?

- i. What is the image depicted by “one who unties the thong of his sandals”?
- ii. What are some contrasting features of “baptizing with water” vs. “baptizing with the Holy Spirit”? (It is ok if you can’t figure this out yet. Remember, you are reading this in 60 CE somewhere in the Roman Empire, before much of the New Testament was written.)
- iii. Imagine seeing John and listening to him speak. What are your expectations of the one who he announces is coming?

4. Summarize in one sentence the main message of this section.

Mark - Study 2: Introduction to Jesus

The introduction to Jesus involves two components, his baptism and his wilderness experience.

1. His baptism

- (a) What is different about his baptism and the other baptisms performed by John the Baptizer, i.e., what is said about John's baptism of the people of Judea that was not said of John's baptism of Jesus?
- (b) What happens immediately after Jesus is baptized and what is the meaning/significance of these things? What three things are communicated by these events? How does this speak to the difference in baptisms mentioned in the above question?
- (c) Both Matthew and Luke include genealogies of Jesus in their books, but Mark does not. Think about why this might be:
 - i. What is the purpose of a genealogy and why might the audiences of Matthew and Luke have "needed" a genealogy?
 - ii. Who was Mark's audience? What is Mark trying to establish? Does a genealogy help or not help this? What does Mark use to make his point, instead of a genealogy?

2. His wilderness experience

- (a) What is the significance of the statement that Jesus was immediately impelled to go into the wilderness, especially in light of what he had just heard? Are these two in conflict? Remark: The word translated "impelled" is the Greek word "ekballo" which is translated "cast out", (pg.2, line 22 and pg. 3 line 6) and "sent away" (pg. 3, line 11).
- (b) What is the significance of Jesus' response to this feeling of being impelled (or cast out)? What does this tell us about Jesus?
- (c) What do you think are some of the emotions Jesus had while in the wilderness? What is the significance of the things Jesus experienced in the wilderness? (Remember what wilderness symbolizes.)

3. Summarize in one sentence the main message of this passage.

Mark - Study 3a: When Jesus Speaks

1. His message

- (a) What did Jesus come preaching?
- (b) What is the good news? Is this good news? Why is this good news? Could it be bad news? For whom is it good news and for whom might it be bad news?
- (c) The word “kingdom” could also be translated “realm” or even “empire”. What are some things that characterize or identify a kingdom?
- (d) Why are the words “repent” and “believe” associated with this good news? Why is repentance necessary in order for the good news to be good?

2. Follow Me

- (a) Describe the grammatical tone of Jesus’ statement to Simon and Andrew, James and John. What are other possible grammatical structures that he did not use?
- (b) What was the career/lifestyle change that Jesus told Simon and Andrew, James and John to make?
- (c) Describe the emotions, feelings, and considerations of Simon and Andrew, James and John when they made the decision to make this career and lifestyle change. What would it take for you to make a similar change? What does this tell us about Jesus?
- (d) What were Simon and Andrew, James and John doing before their decision to follow Jesus? What were they told they would be doing after their decision? What did they do immediately after this decision? How do these connect?

Mark - Study 3b: When Jesus Speaks

3. At the synagogue
 - (a) What were Simon and Andrew, James and John doing when they were told to follow Jesus? How does this relate to what Jesus was doing with them in the synagogue?
 - (b) How did Jesus' teaching compare with what the people were accustomed to? (cf. Jer. 23:29-30)
 - (c) Explore some of the implications of the phrase "Have you come to destroy us?"
 - i. Who is "us"? Who is the "we" in the previous phrase?
 - ii. What are the implications of the word "destroy"? (Is this good news or bad news?)
 - iii. What is being established or delineated by this statement?
 - iv. Commentary: A modern day understanding of this possession could be addictions and dependencies that totally enslave a person. Compare the experience of the demon possessed person with withdrawal for a heroin addict.
 - (d) pg. 2 line 8-9 and pg. 2 line 14-15 are very similar but yet different? What similarities do you see and what differences do you see? How do you account for the differences?
4. At Simon's mother-in-law's house
 - (a) What does it mean "they spoke to Jesus about her"? (Try to imagine the context. What do the followers know about Jesus at this point in time?)
 - (b) Describe Jesus' actions. In particular, what is the "tone of voice" in the phrase "He came to her and raised her up" ?
5. Summary: What are the common to each of these four scenarios? (Look for common words and ideas)
 - (a) Jesus spoke. How did he speak?
 - (b) What was the response?
 - (c) What is common about the before/after in these events? Compare this to the word "repent" used by Jesus in his announcement of the good news.
 - (d) What is being established?
 - (e) How does this relate to the good news? What does this tell us about the territory of the kingdom of God (four things)?
 - (f) Give names to the four territories of the kingdom of God announced by these actions of Jesus. (Read Mark 12:30 for comparison.)
6. In the evening
 - (a) What is the point being made that the sun had gone down?
 - (b) There is a common element to what Jesus told the demon possessed man in the synagogue and the demon possessed people outside Simon's mother-in-law's house? What is it and what is the implication of this command? What does this imply about the people who were not demon possessed? (Avoid the temptation to speculate on why Jesus made this command, beyond what the text actually says.)

Mark: Study 4 - Cleansing the Leper

1. Make a list of all the first time words used in this section (pg. 3. lines 11-20). What does this suggest about this section?
2. Leprosy in the Old Testament appears to be a different disease than what we call leprosy (Hansen's disease) today. Its defining characteristics are specified in Leviticus 13. What are some of the features of leprosy? (highly infectious and highly feared, spreads through contact, no known remedy, leads to significant disfiguration, open and deep sores, leads to quarantine and isolation.) What is this a picture of?
3. What was the priests' role in leprosy? What does this imply that the priest cannot do?
4. List the characteristics (i.e., attitude) of the leper's approach to Jesus.
 - (a)
 - (b)
5. There is a new word that is used here 4 times. What is it and why is this choice of new word significant? What is the picture being painted here?
6. How does the leper's statement about what Jesus could do compare with what the priests could do?
7. What did Jesus do and what was the effect of this? In what ways does this represent a reversal of the normal? (See Hag. 2:10-14 for a hint)
8. How often (do you imagine) priests had been requested to follow the ceremony in Lev. 14? (Maybe 2 Kings 5, but probably not.) What was the purpose of Jesus' command about going to the priest?
9. What is the relationship between what Moses commanded and the good news?
10. Write a one sentence summary statement of what is communicated in this encounter. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Mark: Study 5 - Forgiving the Paralytic

1. Review: What is leprosy a picture of, and what is cleansing a picture of?
2. What are some of the new words that are used in this section (pg 3 line 20 - pg. 4 line 15)?
3. What is paralysis a picture of? Notice some of details that Mark includes in his account of how the paralytic is brought to him. What is this a picture of?
4. The scribes' question: Was the scribes' question reasonable or unreasonable? (As an exercise, imagine someone coming to you and telling you that you do not need to pay your credit card bill this and there would be no late fees or interest charges. What questions might you have?)
5. Jesus asked a question about which is easier to say to a paralytic. Which is easier to say and why?
6. What is the gist of Jesus' argument? By telling the man to rise up, what does he verify? How does this address the scribes' question, and what does this tell us about Jesus?
7. Jesus' command to the paralytic contains the same greek word as used in Mark 16:6. What is this word and what is its significance?
8. Summarize the picture that is being painted here. What does this tell us about Jesus? What does this "parable" tell us about the power of forgiveness?
9. How do the stories of the leper and the paralytic connect?

Mark: Study 6 - Feasting on a Fast Day, or Fasting on a Feast Day?

1. Jesus had the ability to perceive what was in peoples' hearts and to understand their needs.
 - (a) What need did he see in the scribes?
 - (b) What need did he see in the four pallet bearers?
 - (c) By extension, what need did he see in the paralytic?
2. The call of Levi. What does his name imply? What does his occupation imply? How does this relate to previous encounters of Jesus? What are some of the implications of the call of Levi?

Mal. 3:1-3 "The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. "
3. Why's of the "wise". Two "why" questions asked by the scribes of the Pharisees:
 - (a) Why are you eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?
 - i. What is the problem with eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?
 - ii. Who did Jesus choose to be with and why? What was their need?
 - iii. This answers the question of why Jesus came. Why did Jesus come?
 - iv. With this in mind, what was the reason for the eating and drinking at Levi's house? (Hint: What had just happened to Levi?)
 - (b) Why are you not fasting?
 - i. What is the significance of fasting?
 - ii. When is fasting appropriate and when is it not appropriate? Why is it inappropriate for Jesus' followers to be fasting and why were they feasting instead?
 - iii. What do fasting, old clothes and old wineskins represent? What do feasting, unshrunk cloth, and new wineskins represent? What is the common theme here?
 - iv. What is the outcome of sewing a new patch onto old cloth or putting new wine into old wineskins? How does this apply to the good news?
4. How is the story of the calling of Levi similar to the story of the cleansing of the leper?
5. How is the story of the calling of Levi similar to the story of the paralytic?
6. Summarize what this tells us about Jesus and what this tells us about the good news?

Mark: Study 7- Sabbath Rules

1. Walking in a Field

- (a) What were the disciples doing that caught the attention of the Pharisees? What was the Pharisees' objection? In what way was this action "unlawful"? See Deut. 23:25, Ex. 34:21.
- (b) What law, whose law, whose kingdom is this?
- (c) How does Jesus justify their actions? What law was violated on behalf of David and his men? (See 1 Sam. 21:1-6, Lev. 24:5-9) What does this justification demonstrate about the intent of laws and lawfulness?
- (d) What does it mean that the Sabbath was made for man?
- (e) Jesus claims authority over the Sabbath with the word "so", or "therefore". How does this claim follow from the previous statement, i.e., what is the logic behind this "so"?

2. The man with a withered hand

- (a) What is the symbolism of the man with a withered hand? How does this connect to the previous episodes?
- (b) What is the main issue associated with Jesus' question?
- (c) This text has the only mention of Jesus' anger in all of Mark's writings (in fact, in all of the four gospels). What made him angry? What does this have to do with the good news? How does what made Jesus angry relate to previous things He has said?
- (d) The word "destroy" is used in this passage. Where else in Mark's writings have we seen the word destroy and in what context? What is the implication of the word destroy? What are the implications of their collusion with the Herodians? Why did the Pharisees want to destroy Jesus, and what does this have to do with the good news?

3. What is the common issue in these two incidents and how does this help us understand the good news?

4. Give a summarizing sentence for these two incidents.

5. For application: There were three "why" questions relating to things Jesus and his disciples! were doing. What were they? In what ways are we doing or not doing these things? In what ways (attitudes, actions, opinions) do we give evidence to hardness of heart?