# What is Mark’s understanding of the person and work of Jesus and how is this ‘good news’ for today?

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Mark’s Gospel is believed to have been written, early. Probably in the late 60s or early 70s (Boxall, 2007, p. 104) or possibly as early as the mid to late 50s (Bayer, 2011). It was probably written in Rome. This is reported by the Church Fathers and 1 Pet 5:13 may be taken as supporting it (Swift, 1970). Galilee or Syria/Palestine have also been suggested (Boxall, 2007), though mistakes about Palastinian geography make this less likely. It seems clear that it was intended for a Gentile audience. This was also frequently mentioned by Church Fathers (Bayer, 2011) and is implied by translations of Aramaic provided explanation of Jewish customs, translation of Latin to Greek and Semitic speech forms suggesting Palestinian traditions (The St Padarn Institute, 2015). If written in Rome, the intended audience would be local Gentile Christians. The author, clearly not an historian or theologian (Telford, 2003), is generally believed to be the John Mark, a relative of Barnabus (Col 4:10), who was a writer for the Apostle Peter accompanied him, and Peter is seen as the source of most of the material. Again, evidence for this comes from Church Fathers, in particular Eusebius, and the treatment of Peter in the text is taken as evidence (Bayer, 2011). Perhaps given this source, and despite the audience, the text does expect of the reader the ability to recognise and interpret the many Old Testament quotations and allusions (Telford, 2003). In particular the understanding of the person and work of Jesus is based heavily on Old Testament promises.

The text is a narrative, the author acts as a narrator at times and takes the reader through the period of Christ’s ministry leading to the climax of his death and resurrection. This is supported by the “road” or “way” motif, starting with preparation by John the Baptist (1:1-8), travels in Galilee (1:14-8:27), the journey from Caesarea Phillipi through Galilee to Jerusalem and to suffering & Death. Throughout, Jesus is the central character, but an understanding of his identity and purpose is only conveyed implicitly, by the way that the story unfolds (Hooker, 1991).

Throughout, Mark portrays Jesus as a full but complex and unpredictable character and probably his is the most “human” of the Gospel presentations (Telford, 2003): needing his sleep (4:38) and food (11:12); marvelling at disbelief (6:6); showing compassion (8:12), indignation (10:14), anger (3:5), harshness (8:33), impatience (9:13) and vindictiveness (11:13-14) and finally showing distress and sorrow in the Gethsemane (11:33-34). Jesus is fully human.

Particularly through the “Galilee” part of the story (1:14-8:27) the narrative tries to demonstrate authority and power through recounting deeds. Jesus demonstrates power over nature, particularly in calming the storm (4:35-41) and walking on water (6:48); over sickness in healing many (specific examples at 1:29-31, 5:25-29, 7:31-36, 8:22-25); over demons (3:22, 5:1-13); over death (5:21-24, 35-43). In 5:30 the narrator tells us that Jesus felt power had gone from him when the woman touched his garment. All these cases include some demonstration of faith, at least in coming for help. He refuses a sign to the Pharisees who show no change of heart (8:11-12). He shows power and authority to teach (1:21-22 and frequently after 8:22); He shows power and authority to forgive sin (2:1-12). He shows authority to challenge laws and traditions (challenging the Sabbath - 2:23-8; and eating with unrepentant sinners - 2:15). These demonstrations of power and authority suggest or evidence that he is indeed the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises of one sent by God, of the Son of God. The emphasis on deeds would be expected to appeal to a Roman audience (Swift, 1970) and would suggest at least the servant aspect of the expected “suffering servant” (Is 52:!3-53-12). His ministry is “authenticated by might works” (Swift, 1970).

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Suffering

Son of

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At four critical points we have direct evidence of the divinity of Jesus. In 1:11 we have the voice proclaiming him as “my beloved Son”. The narrator tells us that Jesus saw the heavens being torn open: it is not clear whether onlookers also so saw this. At the turning point in the story, as the group starts out for Jerusalem, Jesus asks “who do people say I am?” (8:27). This would seem to come as a result of the “hidden Messiah” and enigmatic quality, leading to speculation and confusion and perhaps it can be seen as the intention to provoke this question in hearers. Peter has reached the understanding: “You are the Christ”. Peter declares him to be the anointed one from God. Shortly afterwards, selected disciples witness the transfiguration(9:2-7) and hear the voice. Finally, at the moment of death, the curtain of the temple is torn in two. This is not explained but from an understanding of Jewish tradition, it can be interpreted as Christ’s death opening a direct path, without intermediaries, to God for all.

<<< Not seen the “suffering” bit of “servant” >>>

In the introduction and

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