

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING

Try to imagine you'd never heard of Jesus before, until He came to your town. What would you think about someone who did the things He did?

Hear the story afresh and see what you make of Jesus as He bursts on the scene!

QUESTIONS

What is the gist of Jesus' message in 14-15?

Briefly, what does it mean that "the time is fulfilled"? (15)

Briefly, what does it mean that "the kingdom of God is at hand"? (15)

What do we learn about Jesus' identity from this opening summary?

What response is Jesus looking for in 15?

What does it mean to repent? And to believe the gospel?

If God's kingdom is here and calls for a response, what should we expect to see as we read through Mark's Gospel together?

Let's quickly whip through the snapshots Mark gives us of Jesus' ministry.

Summarise the story in 16-20.

What is surprising about it? Can you imagine Jesus showing up at your work...?

What does Jesus call these men to do? How do they respond?

How is this a model of the response Jesus is looking for? (cf 15)

What does this tell us about Jesus?

What's so amazing about Jesus in 21-22?

What does this tell us about His identity?

Summarise the story in 23-28.

What does the unclean spirit think of Jesus?

What amazes the people? How is it different to what we might have said?

What does this scene tell us about who Jesus is?

Summarise the story in 29-34.

What strikes you about the story? What must it have been like to be there?

What do we learn here about Jesus' identity?

CONCLUSION / APPLICATION

Make a list of all the evidence we've seen about Jesus.

How would you answer the crowd's question in 27, 'What is this?'

Are we as amazed by Jesus as the people who saw Him? Why or why not?

How should we respond to all we've read?

Why do these stories mean we should repent?

What specific things need to change in our lives if Jesus is God's king?

What would it look like for us to be "fishers of men"?

Why do these stories mean we should believe the gospel?

Does all of this strike you as good news?

Do you believe it?

Mark 1:14-34



Mark at a glance

Mark's Gospel is a dynamic account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, written by one of His followers. It aims to confront us with the person of Jesus, persuading us of His identity and mission. Having persuaded us, we are challenged to respond to Jesus accordingly.

Mark 1:1 sets up the whole book. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This tells us it is a story about some good news, news which concerns someone called Jesus, who is the Christ (the anointed king promised in the Old Testament) and the Son of God (another kingly term showing unique relationship to God the Father).

This set-up is reflected in the shape of the book. *Mark* is a book of two halves. The first half (1:1-8:29) begins with a declaration from the heavens about Jesus' identity (at Jesus' baptism) and ends with someone (Peter) realising that Jesus is the Christ. The second half (8:30-end) begins with a declaration from the heavens about Jesus' identity (at the transfiguration) and ends with someone (a Roman soldier) realising that Jesus is the Son of God.

Straight after discovering Jesus' identity, the disciples are taught about the need for Him to die (8:31ff). From then on the story focuses on Jesus' march towards His death as the Christ who must go to the cross.

1:14-15 is key in understanding Jesus' message. "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand" means that the rule of God has come in the ministry of Jesus. The correct response to Jesus we should be looking for through Mark's book is to "repent and believe the gospel." That's what Jesus wants from us as we read it too.

Theme Sentence for 1:14-34

Jesus is clearly the long-awaited King... so repent and believe the gospel.

How this passage fits in

The start of chapter 1 introduces us to the Old Testament expectation of a king. Isaiah and John the Baptist prepare us for the arrival of Jesus.

1:14-15 are key to understanding Jesus' mission and those verses drive our whole passage. Through His calling the disciples, His teaching in the synagogue, His casting out of spirits, and His healing of sickness, Jesus shows Himself to be the long-awaited King, coming with great authority to deal with a fallen world. This passage draws attention to people's responses to Jesus. The call is for us to repent and believe, to stop rebelling and side with this King.

Application

- PRIMARY: Repent and believe in the gospel
- SECONDARY: Become fishers of men, i.e. call *others* to repent & believe

[NB]

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Commentary

- 14-15 Jesus doesn't say much in *Mark*. His actions tend to be the focus. So when He does speak those words are really important. These verses are a summary of the kind of things Jesus taught, not a full transcript! So whenever we read in Mark that Jesus taught the people (e.g. 1:21, 39; 2:2, 13; 4:1, etc.) this is the gist of what He taught.

Jesus is "proclaiming the gospel of God". Gospel wasn't a religious word but referred to any significant news which would bring the hearer joy. If a battle had been won in a distant land, someone would come back proclaiming the good news, 'We won! The King is coming back victorious!' Similarly here Jesus is bringing good news about a king.

"The time is fulfilled" refers to the long-awaited arrival of things God had promised, as indicated by quotes from Isaiah in 1:2-3. The big moment begins now at the start of Jesus' ministry.

"The kingdom of God is at hand" is what people were waiting for. God's kingdom refers to His rule rather than a particular nation or piece of land. God rules all things but that rule is somewhat hidden. Other things seem to hold sway in the world and evil still runs rampant. But God promised that His rule would be revealed. A King would come who would rule well, defeat God's enemies, and rescue God's people. Under this king, the blessings of God's kingdom would be made clear.

For Jesus to say that "the kingdom of God is at hand" is to claim that this rule is in some way breaking into the world from then on. We should expect to see a king who does the aforementioned things. We know from 1:1 that Jesus is the Christ, another term for this promised king, so we should be watching Jesus closely to see if the crown fits. As we'll see, the kingdom is here because the King is here.

The only right response to the arrival of this king is to pledge allegiance to Him, turning from whatever else we've been following. That's what Jesus says in 15: "repent and believe in the gospel." Repentance is a change of heart which leads to a change of direction. Belief in the good news that the king is here is more than merely acknowledging it but also embracing it as good news. This is the response to look for in characters throughout Mark's Gospel, as well as in us.

The rest of this section demonstrates Jesus' claim that the kingdom is at hand as we witness His authority in action.

- 16-20 In those days, people might choose a rabbi to follow, sitting under their teaching and being disciplined by them. Jesus turns this around by head-hunting people to follow Him. Simon and Andrew are busy at work when Jesus appears and summons them to follow Him. And they do! The same goes for James and John, who don't just leave their boats and their livelihood but their family too!

This little exchange shows the authority of Jesus to gather people to Him. It also serves as an example of the repentance and belief which He is looking for (15); leaving old priorities behind to follow Jesus.

The call to those who follow Jesus is to become "fishers of men." This means to not only repent and believe for yourself, but to call others to come to Jesus and repent and believe as well.

- 21-22 Jesus taught in the synagogues, presumably teaching that the time is fulfilled, etc. Mark draws attention to the manner in which Jesus teaches, which is with authority. Those who hear Him are "astonished" by how authoritative He is, unlike the scribes whose teaching they are used to. You can imagine why the scribes grew to dislike Jesus!

Jesus didn't need to refer to commentaries and give tentative interpretations of Bible texts. As the author, He could speak with authority. Not only this, but if the message He spoke was that the times were fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand in His ministry, then He was claiming to be the main character of the text too and showing the significance of the current time in God's eternal plan. No wonder His teaching had such impact!

- 23-28 When the King appears on the scene, His enemies are riled and come to the fore. A man with an unclean spirit bursts in and addresses Jesus. He knows who Jesus is (cf 1:34) and asks if Jesus has come to destroy demons like Him. How reassuring to know that Satan's knees are knocking at the arrival of the Christ!

Jesus doesn't answer the unclean spirit's question, but the implied answer is 'yes'. The King *has* come to defeat God's enemies. He will eventually do that in His death and finally do that in His return, but in His earthly ministry He stands against the devil's influence in the world. The at-hand-ness of the kingdom spells defeat for evil.

Jesus shuts the spirit up and casts it out. This amazes the onlookers who comment again on the authority of Jesus' teaching.

- 29-31 Jesus retires to the home of His new-found disciples, Simon and Andrew, where Simon's mum-in-law is sick. In another act of authority, which is remarkable for how matter-of-factly it is recounted, Jesus is able to immediately heal her. She responds to the healing touch of the king by getting up to serve.

- 32-34 We know from 28 that Jesus is getting famous and here the crowds gather to witness this long-awaited King in action. There are many healings and demon-removals, all signs that the King has indeed come.

In 25 and 34 Jesus silences the demons. This is "because they knew him." There are two issues here. One is a matter of testimony – the demons are accurate in their theology (He really is "the Holy One of God") but He doesn't want people to hear it from them! Rather they should observe Him and work it out from a more reliable source.

Secondly there is the issue of timing – it's too soon to get too public about His identity. The crowds are a barrier to His priority of preaching (38). Later Jesus even tells an ex-leper to keep his mouth shut about him in 44, but because the guy doesn't stay quiet, Jesus can't enter towns anymore due to the crowds (45).

In all this we see the kingdom at work. So will we repent and believe?