

Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

Session Twenty-Six ~ Summary

Session One – Intro

The Gospels are authoritative accounts of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, based upon eyewitness testimony, written to preserve the teaching of the Apostles and their direct experience of Jesus.

Eyewitness testimony of the life and words of Jesus was the foundation upon which the church was built. The church wasn't built upon the Gospels; it was built upon the living, face-to-face verifiable testimony of the followers of Jesus.

Session Two – Who is Mark?

John, surnamed Mark, was the son of (yet another) Mary, in whose home some believers met to pray for Peter's release from prison. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas in their apostolic journeys when these two traveled together. Later, we find Paul again employing Mark's assistance. At the end of his life, Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark to Rome so that he could assist Paul there in prison.

Around the same time, Peter said that one called Mark was with him in Babylon (Rome). Peter called this Mark his son—i.e., his spiritual child through conversion. Most scholars assume this to be the same Mark throughout because there is no historical evidence that indicates there was any other Mark of note in the days of the early Church.

The majority of Biblical commentators agree with ancient witnesses that the writer of the Gospel of Mark is in fact "John, whose surname was Mark," who mainly worked with Paul and also was with Peter, heard his preaching in Rome, interpreted Peter's words, and wrote a gospel primarily based on Peter's testimony.

Session Three – Mark 1:1-13

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." Mark's opening line is a challenge to the entire world order. The Good News is not about a Roman triumph; it is about the establishment of a new Kingdom. It isn't about the birth of the Emperor, but about the coming of the Messiah. The Emperor is not the Son of God; there is a rival claim to divine favour and status. And that rival is Jesus. Augustus is not the beginning of the Good News – Jesus is!

“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Mark’s language recalls Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Psalm 2 celebrates the enthronement of the king to rule over God’s people. “My son” is a title for the Davidic kings of Israel. It is not only a declaration of the relationship between Jesus and God (as Father and Son) but a declaration of Kingship and Messiah.

Session Four - Mark 1:14-45

Jesus announces the good news of God – the Kingdom is come near (“at hand, ready to reach out and grasp.”). The coming of the kingdom of God is central theme in the Gospel. Mark mentions it over a dozen times, in the sermon and sayings and parables of Jesus.

Jesus abruptly appears by the Sea of Galilee and calls unsuspecting fishermen to be disciples. These men show their repentance, their desire “to turn,” by dropping everything to heed Jesus’ call. Their growing belief and understanding - and their struggles to do so - will continue throughout the Gospel.

Jesus demonstrates his divine authority with miracles, which begin to draw large crowds. Jesus points out that, “Preaching is why I have come.” The miracles are drawing crowds, but the message is the point. His quickly growing fame is making preaching difficult, resulting in him asking those healed to be silent.

Session Five – Mark Chapter 2:1-12

Confronted with a paralysed man lowered through the roof, Jesus first forgives the man his sin. He does not declare that God forgives the man’s sin, or pray that God will do so. He forgives the man directly. In technical language, this “assumes the divine prerogative.” Jesus is acting like he himself is God. Healing the man then proves his divine authority, enraging the Pharisees.

Session Six – Mark 2:13 – 3:6

Jesus called people from all walks of life – and all levels of popularity! – to follow him. His goal in reaching out to the sick is to bring about healing and transformation in their lives. Instead of sorting people into classifications, holy and unholy, clean and unclean, righteous and sinner, Jesus gathers them under the wings of God’s grace and love.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is pictured as a faithful attender at Synagogue worship, particularly on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a critical point of Jewish life. While Jesus was critical of the negative legalism which encumbered it, he didn’t dispense with the idea.

Session Seven – Mark 3:7-35

Jesus' popularity now extended throughout the width and breadth of ancient Israel. The downside is that in their eagerness, the crowds threatened to crush Jesus! His movements are becoming limited, and he resorts to preaching from a boat, and in areas further afield.

To share the preaching, Jesus designates twelve from among his followers to preach. He gives them authority over spiritual and physical suffering. The disciples, and his close followers, become his "new family," and establish the community of faith as a primary relationship for all believers.

Session Nine – Mark 4:35-5:20

Jesus will demonstrate his divine power in calming a furious squall, and in casting a "legion" of demons from a tormented man in a Gentile area, thereby beginning his incursion into the Gentile world. His authority over death is established with the raising of Jairus' daughter. The disciples are both astonished and fearful as they come to realise they are in the presence of God, who has authority over nature, over the supernatural, over the Jewish and Gentile world, and over death itself.

Session Ten – Mark 6:1-29

The New Testament explicitly identifies Jesus as "the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee". This small town was the residence of Mary and Joseph and the place where Jesus grew up. The people of Nazareth are amazed at what Jesus teaches and does, but they can't get past the fact that he is simply a hometown boy. They reject him, and Jesus relocates to Capernaum, extending his ministry – and that of the Apostles - to the surrounding villages of Galilee

Meanwhile, Jesus' forerunner John is arrested by Herod Antipas, and is beheaded. Jesus is now alone in his proclamation of God's Kingdom.

Session Eleven – Mark 6:30-56

The ministry of the Apostles has resulted in such crowds that refuge is sought elsewhere – but the crowds follow. Echoing the provision of manna in the desert, Jesus, the New Moses, feeds the 5000, with baskets left over.

Not as obvious, but woven throughout this passage, are parallels to Psalm 23, "The Lord's My Shepherd." Jesus looks upon the people with the compassion of a shepherd; he brings them to green pastures (the area is described as "green grass") and waters (Heptapagon!). He feeds them so they "shall not want;" in his

teaching, he “restores their soul,” and “guides them in the right path.” In providing an echo of the heavenly banquet, he “prepares a table before me.” With so many leftovers (12 baskets), the “cup runneth over!”

Later that day, echoing the earlier miracle of the calming of the storm, Jesus walks on water, joining the terrified disciples on the boat. Moses invoked the authority of God in the parting of the sea; Jesus demonstrates the nature of God by simply walking upon it. Nevertheless, the disciples still don’t fully understand.

Session Twelve – Mark 7

Jesus challenges the laws and traditions known as “kosher.” Jesus criticizes the Pharisees: in their obsession with following the rules, they have lost any sense of what the commands of God are to do: to lead us to peace with God and with one another. Jesus insists that the Pharisees have drifted away from God, accusing the Pharisees of placing obedience to man-made rules over the necessity of loving God, and your neighbour as yourself. The rules exist to provide an external structure for the internal life – but it is that which is found “in the heart” which matters.

Jesus and the disciples leave their home area and go the Gentile region of Tyre. His interaction with gentile woman seeking healing reveals the prejudices of the disciples, and the commitment of Jesus to minister to people of all nationalities.

Session Thirteen – Mark 8:1-34

Another feeding of a multitude, this time in a Gentile area, affirms Jesus’ commitment to all people. Despite all his miraculous works, Jesus is still doubted by his opposition – but by his disciples as well, who fail to grasp the full significance of his identity. A blind man is healed, but regains his sight in stages – a symbol of the disciples’ gradual realization?

Travelling north to Gentile Caesarea Philippi, confronted by the claims of all the rival Pagan gods, Jesus challenges the disciples with the question, “Who do you say that I am?” For the first time, Peter blurts out the answer – “You are the Messiah!”

Jesus begins to teach what this means – the Messiah will suffer and die on behalf of all the people – but will be raised. Peter utterly rejects this plan – this is not what the Messiah is expected to do, according to tradition! But Jesus rebukes Peter, saying the Messiah “Must” suffer.

Session Fourteen – Mark 9:1-29

Taking Peter, James and John with him up an unidentified mountain, Jesus is transformed before them into his dazzling heavenly persona, accompanied by Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus' true nature is revealed. God commands that the disciples listen to his beloved Son, giving his full authority to Jesus. The Transfiguration confirms that the suffering which Jesus predicts he will endure is not incompatible with his glory.

Returning, Jesus angrily confronts the disciples, who are attempting a healing by their own power, without prayer. Jesus continues to demonstrate his divine compassion for those who suffer - healing the young man, despite the father's incomplete belief.

Session Fifteen – Mark 9:30-50

Mark continues his theme of the disciples' failures of understanding and discipleship. This time, they are arguing among themselves as to which of them is the greatest. They are missing the point of self-sacrifice which had, and would continue to, define Jesus' life, ministry, and death: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" - giving up power, status and prestige for the sake of another.

Session Sixteen – Mark 10:1-31

Jesus is again in conflict with the Pharisees, this time concerning the nature of marriage and divorce. Reiterating that Moses allowed divorce as an accommodation rather than as an ideal, Jesus further states that for the husband or wife to remarry would be adultery. This was not recognised in Jewish law, because a man could commit adultery against another man by sleeping with his wife, but there was no understanding of that adultery being against his own wife. The wife is thus elevated to the same level as her and husband in Jesus' law.

Confronted by a man who asks how he might have eternal life, Jesus responds that he must actively follow the commandments, including the sharing of his wealth, which the man is unwilling to do. The kingdom of God is a gift given by God. In order to recognise our need, and be able to really accept God's kingdom, we must, like children, be empty of all that gets in between us and following Jesus.

Session Seventeen – Mark 10:32-52

Jesus leads the disciples and his crowd of followers up to Jerusalem. This is dangerous – Jesus again predicts his death – and the followers are afraid. This is the third time Jesus predicts his death. The first was at Caesarea Philippi, after Peter’s realization that Jesus is indeed the Messiah; the second followed the Transfiguration; and now this, as they are about to make their ascent to Jerusalem.

The timing of the predictions is not accidental; first, after Jesus’ identification as Messiah, he explains what Messiah really means; the second, after the revelation of his full glory, shows that to suffer and die does not imply the lessening of his glory; and now, at the onset of his journey to Jerusalem, to show that what is to happen is not accidental, but intentional. It must happen.

Jesus sums up his teaching and purpose: *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Session Eighteen – Mark 11:1-11

The Palm Sunday procession is a form of “street theatre” – Jesus is re-enacting the coronation of Solomon, showing he is the true successor, the long awaited Son of David. The crowds he brought with him from Jericho ensure his safety from the Temple officials.

Session Nineteen – Mark 11:12-33

Beginning with the puzzling “cursing of the fig tree” and the “overturning of the tables,” Jesus continues to illustrate the impending end of the Temple era, which had become an exclusionary national shrine, not an international beacon of welcome and hope. Salvation now shifts from the temple to Jesus and his death and resurrection. Faith in him will become the way to God, not the sacrifice of animals in the temple.

The Temple and the sacrificial system existed as the place where prayers would be heard by God, and where forgiveness could be both given and received. Jesus teaches here, quite radically, that this will be done through faith, prayer and mutual forgiveness, rather than through the sacrificial system. God will hear the prayers of all people, not just the priests!

Session Twenty – Mark 12:1-17

Jesus teaches in the Temple using parables. A vineyard parable highlights the corruption of the Temple system, and its impending destruction. A new Temple is coming with Jesus as the cornerstone: it will be a Temple of Faith.

The Temple officials are determined to kill Jesus, but are prevented by the crowd. Seeking to trap him with a charge of sedition, they ask him about paying taxes. Jesus' response "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, not only avoids the trap, but affirms that we, who bear the image of God, belong entirely to God.

Session Twenty-One – Mark 12:18-44

The Sadducees challenge Jesus' teaching that there is a Resurrection. Jesus responds that God is the God of the living, affirming the afterlife; nevertheless, the Resurrection life will be different from our present existence.

Asked about the commandments, Jesus responds that the most important is to "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*" *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* *There is no commandment greater than these.*"

The questioner responds that this is "*more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.*" Again, the Temple system is made secondary!

Jesus commends a widow for her paltry offering, which represented all she had. The true measure of our devotion is in proportion to our situation and our resources.

Session Twenty-Two – Mark 13

The chapter predicts the invasion of the Roman army and the devastation wrought in the country, within a generation of the listeners. Christians are advised to flee when the signs point to its imminence. False Messiahs will arise; the church will be persecuted; but the faithful will persevere. The church is to, "Watch! Remain alert! Be about the Master's business! Continue to faithfully share the Gospel to all the corners of the earth! Ultimately, despite the difficult days ahead, God is in control! Jesus will return!"

Session Twenty-Three – Mark 14:12-31

While sharing the traditional Passover Supper, Jesus will change the words and the meaning to point to himself as the sacrifice which brings deliverance – not from slavery and bondage to Pharaoh, but from slavery to sin and bondage to death. Jesus' sacrificial death is a covenant-making event. It marks a new act of redemption and begins a new relationship between God and the people — one that supersedes the old. It creates a new community gathered around his table.

Jesus predicts the disciples will abandon him – even Peter, who protests. The meal ends with the group making their way to the Mount of Olives.

Session 24 – A Special Presentation on Mark 14, 15

The “Stations of the Cross” are explained as a tradition which retraces the events of the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. The actual location of the events of that night, from the Last Supper through the entombment of Jesus, can still be traced with great confidence, despite the many changes in Jerusalem over the centuries, culminating in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which encloses the area of Golgotha and the Tomb, as demonstrated by even very recent archaeology.

Session Twenty-Five – Mark 16

The surprising short ending to Mark – the women go to the tomb discovering it to be opened; an angel tells them Jesus, who was crucified, is risen! They are to tell the others. The women flee the tomb, trembling, “ecstatic,” and afraid.

This abrupt ending could be deliberate, but could also be the result of a longer ending which was lost; or perhaps the message is that we need to overcome our fear and proclaim the Resurrection to others as faithful witnesses.

Nevertheless, there are two additional endings which had likely been added in later years, and not found in the earliest manuscripts or the writings of early Christian teachers.

A shorter ending: *“Then they quickly reported all these instructions to those around Peter. After this, Jesus himself also sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.”* This “summary statement” ending reflects a later form of Christian testimony than the language of Mark.

A longer ending of eleven verses seems to be a collection of verses and events from the Gospels John and Luke and the Book of Acts.

Epilogue:

I encourage everyone who participated in this study to go back to the beginning of Mark and re-read it, chapter by chapter, with the handouts provided. Read each chapter through in your own Bible, and only then go to the notes for clarification. Allow God to speak to you afresh, and to really set the words of the Gospel into your mind.

The title of the study was, “Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.” How has Mark’s presentation of Jesus allowed you to meet him in a new way? The wonderful thing is, you can do so again and again! Thank you for your participation, and God bless you.

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