

Mark's Gospel - Introduction

Mark's Gospel is perhaps the most important gospel in the New Testament.

Why do I say that?

Well it is agreed by all scholars that it is the earliest of all the gospels to be written down.

Mark is the pedigree of all the gospels.

A close examination of Matthew & Luke makes it clear that they had Mark's account before them as they wrote.

They used his gospel as the basis into which they fitted the extra material that they wanted to include.

So as we read through and study Mark's Gospel, we are touching base with the first historical account of the life of Jesus Christ.

One of the first questions we ask when reading a book is, who wrote it ?

Who was this Mark who wrote the gospel?

The New Testament tells us quite a lot about him.

Mark was the son of a wealthy lady whose name was Mary.

Their house was a meeting place of the early Church. (Acts 12:12)

So from the very beginning Mark was brought up in the hub of Christian activity.

Mark was the nephew of Barnabas, and when Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey they took Mark with them to be their secretary.

(Acts 12:25)

Sadly Mark didn't last very long on the mission trip.

We are not told why, but we do know that it was serious, because Paul refused to allow him to come on his next missionary journey. (Acts 13:13) (15: v. 37-40)

For some years Mark vanishes from history but then re appears in a positive light. When Paul writes the letter to the Colossians from prison, Mark is there with him. (Col. 4:10)

In another prison letter, to Philemon, Paul mentions Mark among his fellow - labourers. (v. 24)

When Paul is waiting for death, near the end of his life he writes to Timothy and requests that he bring Mark with him because he is useful to him for ministry.

(2 Tim. 4:11)

Whatever happened between Paul and Mark was healed and he was the one man Paul wanted at the end.

Where did Mark get his information ?

The value of any man's story will depend on the sources of his information.

The only Biblical information that we have is that Mark was very close to Peter.

We read in 1 Peter 5: v. 13 that he is called my son.

This is not because of Mark being his actual son but because of a close relationship that he had with Mark.

There is historical evidence, not from the Bible but from other credible sources that Mark got a lot of his information from Peter.

A gentleman by the name of "Papias" said this " Mark who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done."

The gospel was written shortly after Peter died in A.D. 65

So what we have in this gospel is most of what Peter preached and taught about Jesus and it is the nearest thing that we will possess to an eye witness account of the life of Jesus.

Basically it is the facts of Jesus' life in the simplest and most dramatic way.

So let us begin at the beginning.

The Title of my message is " Making Connections"

Mark 1 : v. 1-14

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You." ³ "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'" ⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸ I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹ It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ¹² Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him. ¹⁴ Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

1. Connecting Jesus and the Gospel with the Old Testament - v. 2-3.

The first thing that Mark does is to connect Jesus with the Old Testament scriptures.

He quotes from the Prophets Malachi and from Isaiah.

In v. 2 Mark quotes from Malachi 3: v. 1.

In its original context it is a threat.

In Malachi's day the Priest were failing in their duty.

The offerings were second best, the priests were failing in their duties.

The messenger was to cleanse and purify the temple before the anointed one of God emerged upon the earth.

(Mal. 3: v. 2-3)

² "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 launderers' soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

In v. 3 we have a quote from Isaiah 40: v. 3.

In the context of this verse we have an encouragement to God's people that there is someone coming in the future who will be able to make the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth.

It was a positive message of encouragement.

Q. Would you like Jesus to do that for you?

So what we have here from these two Old Testament verses is the promise of somebody who is both able to "Save" but also to be the "Judge".

Mark is so concerned that we really understand that the Jesus of the New Testament is fully connected to the God of the Old Testament.

Through Jesus God is fulfilling the promises that He made in the Old Testament.

God is still concerned about the Holiness of His people,.

He is still going to judge sin, but the saviour from all sin has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin, and Jesus is the answer to the problem of our sin.

Personal Testimony

I remember at the age of 25 being very unhappy with my life. I did not realise at the time that the Holy Spirit of God was convicting and convincing me of my sin.

I went to the doctor for help and he could only prescribe anti depression pills.

I contacted a Christian Counselling organisation and talked with them.

They could not help me with my sin but suggested that I contact a Pastor.

He couldn't help me with my sin either.

I cried for hours in his home and used up a whole box of tissues.

However the following Sunday I went to Church and heard a message from Luke Chapter 15 about the Lost Son. God convicted me that I was the lost Son.

After the service, I cried out to Jesus to help me with the problem of my sin.

He did, He forgave me and surrounded me with his love so much that I wept for another couple of hours and then felt brand new inside.

I can tell you both from the Bible and from personal experience that Jesus is the ONLY person who can help you with your sin. He can forgive you and make you a new person.

2 Corinthians 5: v. 17 says " ...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.."

2. Connecting Jesus with John the Baptist - v. 4-8.

Having connected Jesus with the Old Testament Prophets, He goes on to connect Jesus and His ministry with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was a great prophet in line with the O/T prophets.

He has now arrived to prepare people for Jesus.

Mark tells us that John the Baptist came to prepare people for Jesus in three ways.

a) Preaching Repentance - If the people would be ready to receive Jesus they must first repent of their sins.

b) Preaching Humility towards Jesus - John the Baptist said he wasn't worthy to stoop down and untie the sandal of Jesus.

The untying of sandals was seen as so humiliating that Hebrew slaves were not expected to perform such duties.

So if the prophet John the Baptist did not see himself worthy of the lowest task, how much more must we be prepared to humble ourselves before Jesus Christ.

If you want to know Jesus as your own personal saviour it is going to involve repentance and humility.

Nobody likes to think that they are a sinner or to even admit their mistakes.

Pride stops us from coming to Jesus.

It was not just the money that stopped the rich young ruler from following Jesus in Luke 18: v. 18-23.

The underlying factor was his pride. He thought he was good enough, by his own good works and life.

However Jesus knew his heart and Jesus knows our hearts too.

c) Preaching that Jesus is able to save through the Holy Spirit.

This statement about Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit must be seen against the background of the O/T promises of a time when God would bestow His Spirit on all people, giving them all special closeness with Him and thereby, the blessing of Salvation.

Ezekiel 36: 22-32 (N.L.T.)

²² "Therefore, give the people of Israel this message from the Sovereign LORD: I am bringing you back, but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name, on which you brought shame while you were scattered among the nations. ²³ I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you

brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign LORD, then the nations will know that I am the LORD. ²⁴ For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land. ²⁵ "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. ²⁸ "And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹ I will cleanse you of your filthy behavior. I will give you good crops of grain, and I will send no more famines on the land. ³⁰ I will give you great harvests from your fruit trees and fields, and never again will the surrounding nations be able to scoff at your land for its famines. ³¹ Then you will remember your past sins and despise yourselves for all the detestable things you did. ³² But remember, says the Sovereign LORD, I am not doing this because you deserve it. O my people of Israel, you should be utterly ashamed of all you have done!

Jer. 31: v. 31-34 (N.L.T)

³¹ "The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the LORD. ³³ "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the LORD. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the LORD. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

The Holy Spirit is not a liquid, and the language of "baptizing" with the Holy Spirit is an image intended both to associate the coming salvation with John's own ministry and at the same time to show the superiority of one to the other by the contrast of Holy Spirit and water.

verse 8 (N.K.J.)

⁸ I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

There is not time to discuss here the different opinions about the Holy Spirit and Baptism , but one thing is clear, you can not be born again without it.

Ready John Chapter 3 makes that very clear.

The Holy Spirit knows when we are ready in our hearts.

He is the one that does the work and no amount of human persuasion will force Him into action.

3. Connecting Jesus with God. - v. 1, 11.

In the O/T the Holy Spirit came upon those whom God had chosen and through whom he was working. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus in this visible way confirms that this is true of Jesus.

God was now working through Jesus.

Jesus is now confirmed as God's Son, actually " beloved Son"

This connects us with Psalm 2 in the O/T and v. 7

⁷ And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

In Psalm 2 God says that His Son will be established as His King, He will rule the earth, He will be the Judge.

However in Psalm 2: v. 12 we are told that those people who put their trust in Him will be safe, they will be saved, and they will be blessed.

This connects the prophecy of Malachi and Isaiah, Judgement and Salvation.

4. Our connection with Jesus - v. 15 (Repent and believe in the Gospel)

So how can we possibly be connected with this wonderful person, Jesus, whose sandals the prophet considered himself unworthy to untie, the Judge of all the earth.

Mark says in v, 15 that the only way to be connected with Jesus and receive His wonderful Salvation and eternal security is by "Repenting and Believing in the Gospel"

Story to illustrate.

The difficulty that some people have in entering into the kingdom of God is like the story of a boy who got his hand caught inside an expensive flower vase.

His upset parents applied soap and cooking oil without success.

Just as they were ready to break the expensive vase as the only way of getting the boy's hand out, the boy cried out, "would it help if I let go of the money that I am holding?"

Sometimes we hold on to things that we consider to be valuable, but to repent, we need to let go and turn from these things to God.

He has a much better life-style for now and eternity.

Q. Will you repent and trust Him today?