

Mark 1:1-15

Background information about Mark:

You can understand the gospel of Mark as dividing into two parts: chapters 1-8, which focus on Jesus' identity as King, and chapters 9-16, which focus on his mission/intention to die on the cross.

The sample study:

It is unlikely that you would get through all of the following material in a study. It is included here to help you as you work through the passage yourself, and think about what would be helpful for your group.

One option is to focus on Mark 1:1-3 as a way of cementing what is absolutely vital for the Christian faith. People often skip this sort of thing because they feel like everybody knows it, but it is always worth it. Paul is a great example of this: he always exhorted the churches he wrote to to remember the gospel, saying 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified', and 'no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.' (1 Corinthians 2:2 and 3:11).

Another is to focus on another chunk of chapter one. In this sample study, I have focused on verses 16-45.

Verses 1 – 3

- *Gospel/Good news*: What does it tell us about what we are going to read in this gospel that Mark tells it is 'good news'?

The 'gospel is news about what God has already been done for you, rather than instruction and advice about what you are to do for God. The primacy of his work, not our work, is therefore the very essence of Christian faith. In other religions, God reveals to us how we can find or achieve salvation. In Christianity, God achieves salvation for us. The gospel brings news primarily, rather than instruction.' (The Gospel of Mark, Leaders Guide, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller, 2005)

- *Christ*: What is conveyed by this term?
 - *Christos* is the Greek term for the Hebrew word 'Messiah'. It means 'the anointed royal one'. The Jews were waiting for a Christ/Messiah who would establish God's rule and rescue them from their oppression.
- *Son of God*: What is conveyed by this term?
 - Divinity! We will come back to this term later on in the gospel.
- Why would Mark start his gospel in this way?
 - Think of all the other possible starting points and what they might have indicated about what was important about Jesus. Why start with this?
- When you think about how you would tell someone about Jesus, where would you start? Would it be similar or dissimilar to how Mark starts?
 - This is a good question to get people thinking about their approach to sharing their faith. What do they consider important and central about Jesus? Mark considers Jesus' identity and mission to be essential, so he starts there. This could be a good starting point for people to tend to muddy things up by starting with creation/evolution debates or other side issues.

To understand more about Jesus and his purpose, the following cross-references might be helpful:

Mark 1:2-3 quotes from two Old Testament books (Mark quotes them as a seamless whole, but actually they are two different quotes).

Check out Malachi 3:1-5:

Things to note about this passage:

- What is the messenger's role? Vv 1-4 Preparing God's people by 'purifying' them spiritually (turning them from sin to righteousness).
 - What connections do you see between this description of the messenger and John the Baptist's ministry (see Mark 1:4-8)
- Who comes after the messenger?
 - The Lord!
- Why does he come?
 - For judgment

Check out Isaiah 40:1-11 (especially verses 3-5):

Things to note about this passage:

- It is a positive message. Notice that it is intended to bring comfort to the hearers (v1)
- It is God himself that the way is being made for
 - When we understand that Mark is using the Isaiah passage to talk about Jesus, we understand that Mark is telling us about Jesus' divinity, amongst other things.
- What does it mean for the 'way of the Lord' to be prepared, and for his paths to be made straight?
 - A way is being made for God to come to his people.
- What are the 'good tidings' (gospel) being announced?
 - God is entering into the presence of the people, to gather and lead them (Isaiah 40:11)
 - How would that be 'good news' to the people who heard it? (Think about the political and spiritual context).

Note then that this good news is *very good*, but it also has an *edge* – it calls for *repentance* (Mark 1:4; 1:14-15 and Malachi 3). How people respond to it determines whether it is *good news* or *hard news* for them.

(It might be good to discuss what repentance means here, if people are not sure).

Another question to add in if you have time:

Why does Jesus say that the kingdom of God is 'near' rather than 'here'?

Hint: Although Jesus is the King, there is something that is yet to happen, before Jesus can say that the kingdom of God has come...

Read Mark 1:16-45

There are lots of things you could talk about in this passage. Perhaps see if people have any questions first.

For time's sake though, it would make sense to just focus on a portion of it.

In this sample study, I'm just going to focus on vv16-20:

Vv 16-20:

According to this passage, what does it mean to 'follow' Jesus?

Some things that people could bring up are:

- Immediate obedience (Simon, Andrew, James and John immediately follow him).
 - A follow-up question could be: Do you demonstrate immediate obedience to Jesus, or are there things you are still hesitating with/holding back on?
- 'Fish[ing] for people' (v17).
 - What does it look like to fish for people? Bringing other people in towards Jesus?
 - **It is important to note that this is crucial to what it means to follow Jesus. They are called to participate in his ministry of bringing people to God.**
 - Why is it that we often think about discipleship (following Jesus) and evangelism (being fishers of men) as being separate?
- Leaving your old life – notice that James and John leave their father in the boat, and Simon and Andrew leave their nets. Jesus has
 - Your group might have an interesting discussion about whether *everything* needs to be left behind or not. People often wonder – should I leave my job and my old friends now that I have become a Christian? What answer would the members of the group give?