

INTRODUCTION TO MARK - This is an easy Gospel to read. There is little background information given or needed. Mark just begins with the main actors and action of his story. He tightly focuses on Jesus, telling us how Jesus feels and what Jesus does. “Immediately” is one of Mark’s favorite words. The book was probably written for a Roman audience that would appreciate and understand power and a Man of decisive action.

1 - John the Baptist seems to have intentionally chosen by his lifestyle and clothing to identify himself with the Old Testament prophets, rather than trying to be part of the “religious establishment” (**verse 6**). Jesus then bursts on the scene, changing men’s lives (**verses 17-27**), and teaching without any mention of rabbinical traditions or precedents but with His own authority (**verse 22**). He quieted demons (**verse 25, 34**) because such could only give Him an undesirable recommendation. No one wants to be commended by a demon! Some puzzle why Jesus asked people not to tell about His great work (**verses 44-45**) but when this leper violated Jesus’ request the Lord could hardly move around and Jesus’ wisdom is vindicated.

2-3 - These chapters introduce the two controversies that dogged Jesus through out His ministry: separation with sinners (**2:17**) and the Sabbath (**2:23ff, 3:1-6**). The key to the controversy in **2:24ff** is to remember that Jesus and His apostles were not violating Moses’ Law but rabbinical traditions about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by asking why they don’t condemn David, who really did break God’s law (**verse 26**), and why with their traditions they destroy the Sabbath’s real intent (**verse 27**)? Chapter three continues these controversies, and we meet the Herodians (**verse 6**). This was a political party dedicated to keeping the Herodian family in power. Strange bedfellows for the straight-laced Pharisees indeed! Don’t get lost in Jesus’ discussion of an unforgivable sin (**verse 29**). This is simply the sin of the hard heart that refuses all evidence, and will not repent. A heartfelt concern about having committed this sin would of itself show that one has not done so!

4 - Verse 2 introduces Jesus’ favorite teaching method: parables. Jesus told parables to gain and hold people’s interest, as well as to sift the casual hearer from those truly interested in His message (note **verses 12 and 25**). So Jesus urges His listeners to use their ears to really hear, to really listen (**verse 9**). Mark concludes the powerful message of Jesus with a powerful miracle (**verse 39**), leaving us, the readers, asking “Who can this be?”

5 - This chapter introduces three hard cases which would impress Mark’s audience with Jesus’ jaw-dropping power. The demon-possessed man always brings out questions about Jesus sending demons into the pigs (**verse 12**), why He would do that and why they wanted to go there. The truth is we don’t know, and aren’t told because it is not important to the purpose of the story. We need to get our eyes off the pigs and look at the man who was healed. We also need to note that if you ask Jesus to leave (**verses 17-18**) He will! In **verse 19** we get a change of strategy, as Jesus usually forbids this (see 1:44). But this area was heavily Gentile, which may account for Jesus allowing this man to become His messenger. **Verse 41** contains Aramaic, the common language of the common man in Palestine. Mark translates it for his readers, showing us that his intended audience was not Jews in Palestine.

Applications from This Week’s Readings

Jesus had no interest whatsoever in placating the religious establishment or perpetrating their stifling man-made traditions that they bound as if they were from God. Examine yourself and your own ideas about how to worship and live as a Christian. Ask yourself “Do I bind what God has not? Am I stifling God’s ways with my self-made traditions?”

Week 2 - Mark 6-10

6 - Some are confused by **verse 5’s** lack of miracles, but it is not Jesus suffering a “power outage,” but a lack of faith in the crowd (note **verses 3 and 6**). Their faithlessness limited Jesus’ work because they didn’t bring more to Him to be healed! The sad story of John the Baptist is inserted now by Mark. **Verse 17’s** Philip is not the Philip of Luke 3:1 but another relative named Philip. Herod Antipas was visiting him in Rome, met Herodias and talked into her running away with him. John the Baptist reproved them for living in adultery (**verse 18**), and it cost him dearly. The chapter concludes with two more illustrations of Jesus’ power. **Verse 37** speaks of denarii. It was a day’s wage, meaning that this is eight to ten month’s of pay! **Verse 48** says it was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m.

7 - Again Jesus and the Pharisees tangle. Jesus sternly rebukes all their human traditions, derived from long debates by various rabbis, which end up neatly nullifying God’s law. **Verse 11** tells how they got around caring for parents by simply saying “I’ve dedicated those funds to God’s work.” It appears that one didn’t even

have to give those monies to the Temple then, but could just say “they are dedicated to God,” freeing him to change his mind later (after his parents were gone). What sophistry! We are not used to a Jesus who appears unwilling to help (**verse 27**) but we cannot hear His tone of voice or see the twinkle in His eyes. Is He testing this woman’s resolve and faith? In **verse 33** Jesus takes special care to let this deaf-mute man know what He is doing.

8 - We have had 5000 fed, but the disciples don’t fully understand Jesus’ power so Mark gives us all another illustration by telling of the feeding of the 4000. For those seeking more signs can help, but for those with closed hearts no sign will be given (**verse 12**). Why Jesus heals the man of **verse 22** in stages is unknown to us. It is clear that Jesus does not want His disciples telling the world He is the Messiah (**verse 30**) until they understand what being the Messiah means: He will be killed and rise again (**verse 31**).

9 - The chapter begins with the key promise of **verse 1**. It doesn’t matter how folks want to define the “kingdom” it is clear Jesus thought it would come shortly. Any teaching that has the kingdom to be something yet future is therefore obviously flawed. **Verse 7** makes the point of the Transfiguration: Jesus is of primary importance. We may not ever grasp all that happened there but we can get that. Moses and Elijah probably represent the Old Testament (the Lawgiver and the Great Prophet) but Jesus is the One who matters now. That is why John the Baptist came as His forerunner (**verse 13**). We may wonder why the disciples could not handle the demon possessed boy of **verses 17-25** but Jesus tells us: they were intimidated and lost their faith. What was needed was prayer that restores faith and power (**verse 29**). So much is made of the unknown man in **verse 38**, particularly if one tries to rebuke false teaching. Yet this man is not a false teacher for Jesus approved him! If Jesus rebukes false teaching, wrong religion and hypocrisy (and He does!) then His disciples can and must follow His example. **Verse 50b** probably references purity.

10 - The teaching on divorce and remarriage is remarkably clear (**verses 1-12**). While much has been made about exceptions the tenor of Jesus’ teaching is simple: if you are married, stay married! The rich man of **verses 17-22** ought to surprise us. In Jesus’ day the belief was that the rich must be very righteous for they had been so blessed. Jesus shows how such blessings can get in the way of really serving God - a warning we do well to consider carefully. **Verse 37** shows a very carnal view of the kingdom. This was a consistent problem with Jesus’ audiences. **Verse 38** uses “baptism” to speak of an immersion, but not in water, but in suffering. Jesus tries to counter their mistaken view of the Kingdom with the “serve first” teaching of **verses 42-45**.

Applications from This Week’s Readings

An emphasis in these chapters is Jesus doing the most incredible and amazing things. Meditate on the power of Christ. How can you have more faith in Him? How does seeing His great power help you feel more safe and secure knowing He will help you and answer your prayers?

Week 3 - Mark 11-15

11 - Mark now begins the last week of Jesus’ life. On Sunday Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph, hailed as the Messiah (**verses 9-10**). On Monday He curses a fig tree that promised fruit but did not deliver (like the Jewish nation), and then stops the use of the temple as a marketplace (**verses 12-17**). We need to be careful with **verse 23’s** statement about faith. First, the apostles indeed had done much that seemed impossible, like walk on water and cast out demons. Second, other passages inform us about prayer and what we should ask for, and that needs to be factored in to all we believe about prayer.

12 - This is one of Jesus’ sharpest and clearest parables. Israel was often compared to a vineyard (see Isaiah 5:1ff), so the meaning here is easy to grasp (**verse 12**). Jesus deals with their “impossible” questions easily (**verses 13-27**), but they cannot handle His (**verse 35**)! Jesus quotes Psalm 110 where God says to David’s master (or Lord) “Sit at the place of prominence.” But how could that be? David was the greatest king. The Messiah would be his son. How could the son be greater than the father, especially when that father was David? Jesus is pushing them to recognize that David’s son would be Divine and so be a greater king than even David. However, they don’t see it. Do we?

13 - This chapter is the subject of so much speculation and controversy. Yet if we simply look at the questions the disciples asked (when will the Temple be destroyed, **verses 1-4**), and remember that they didn’t understand that Jesus would leave so had no basis to be asking about a Second Coming, we will come out just fine. Watch how the chapter repeatedly addresses Jesus’ listeners. Whatever this is about they would see it, it would happen in their lifetimes, they needed to be warned, and they needed to be ready (note **verse 30**). **Verse 14** uses the term “abomination of desolation” but Luke has “armies” letting us know exactly what this is about: the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70. Some get lost in the language of **verses 24-27** but it simply judgment language from the Old Testament prophets (see Isaiah 13:10-13; 19:1ff).

14 - Mark shows Jesus in control of everything, including the timing of His death, despite what the chief priests wanted (**verses 1-2**). **Verses 8-9’s** praise should give every disciple determination to imitate this