

# The Gospel of Mark: A Beginner's Guide to the Good News

## Introduction & Chapter 1

- **Opening Prayer**

*Eternal God, you inspired your servant, the one we call Mark, to write the good news about Jesus. May your Spirit now inspire our reading, hearing, and discussion of these ancient words, so they become for us new and living words that make us more faithful followers of the one we call your Son, Messiah, and Lord. Amen.*

- **Video [11:22]**

- What understandings of the Gospel of Mark did you bring to this series?
- Given what Levine says, why might this Gospel be one that is recommended as a good starting point for those just approaching the Christian faith?
- Is the *public* nature of the sacrament of baptism important to you, and if so, why?
- Isaiah and Mark have different emphases, as if they place the comma differently:
  - Isaiah: "...a voice is crying out, in the wilderness prepare the way..."
  - Mark: "...a voice is crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way..."
  - How are these messages more appropriate to their respective listeners?
- What would the implications be if we reverted our branding from "Christianity" to "The Way"?

- **Mark 1:1-11**

- Have class member read aloud
- What are some of the things that stand out for you from these verses?
- Up until reading chapter 1 in Levine's book, what had been your impressions of John the Baptist?

- **Chapter 1 – The Good News Begins**

- How does the story of Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness impact your view of the larger story told in the Gospel?
- Jesus started his ministry calling some unlikely folks to be his apostles, including fishermen and tax collectors.
  - Whom do you think Jesus would initially call if he was starting his ministry today?
- [17] "What do we do in communal or personal worship that could be misunderstood?" [*Levine poses this in the context of Jesus and his disciples' actions being misinterpreted, as with their lack of fasting, dining with sinners, or picking grains on the sabbath*]
- Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-8)
  - In each of the sowing scenarios, identify who/what is symbolized:
    - On the road, snatched up by birds
    - On rocky soil, sprang up and then withered due to no root
    - Among thorns, rose up but was choked
    - On good earth, each seed bearing 30, 60, or 100-fold
  - Why is this presented with such confusion about what the seed and soil represent?
- [21] Mark and Matthew differ in the way they present Jesus explaining his teaching in parables:
  - Mark – "So that seeing, they may see and not know, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they turn, and it be forgiven them."
  - Matthew – "*Because* seeing, they may see and not know, and hearing they may hear and not understand, ~~lest they turn, and it be forgiven them.~~"
  - Why do you think Mark presented it this way, and why did Matthew rewrite it?
    - [24] "*The parable, when it does the work of parables, will continue to provoke, to comfort, and to caution.*"
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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References for material:

- [\*The Gospel of Mark: A Beginner's Guide to the Good News; Leader Guide; DVD\*](#)  
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*Italics* imply important points or example answers the leader can convey

# Chapter 2

- **Opening Prayer**

*Holy God, you have always called your people to holy living – proclaiming your mighty acts, bearing witness to your truth, and offering our whole selves to your service. By your Spirit, may these stories of the community Jesus gathered and sent yield new insight into how to live as your faithful people today. Amen.*

- **Video [11:53]**

- When are you “busiest being Christian”?
- What is your reaction to Levine pointing out that while John the Baptizer was buried by his disciples, Jesus is entombed by a “stranger” (Joseph of Arimathea)? *Joseph is actually believed to be a secret disciple of Jesus*
- Levine answers her own question of “Who is responsible for capital punishment [including the killing of Jesus]” with: “We all are.”
- In Levine’s synopsis of Jesus’ response to the ritual practice of washing hands before eating, she says Jesus is implying “Do not change the tradition of the elders”
  - What traditions do you think should not be changed?

- **Chapter 2 – Restoring Purity and Wholeness**

- Early in the chapter, Levine points out the “cluelessness” of Jesus’ disciples in not understanding his message.
  - What do you think about this apparent cluelessness?
- Levine discusses Jesus sending his disciples out to evangelize two by two.
  - What advantages do you see in sharing faith in pairs?
- [33] What is your reaction to Jesus apparently saying to not waste time with communities who do not receive them?
- In reading the Bible story of Salome, how have you considered the nature of Salome’s dance?
  - Lascivious or otherwise?
- Read Mark 7:33-36
  - Why do you think Jesus directs those he healed to not tell anyone? *Levine suggests it is because Jesus knows this will incur the notice of the authorities – and not in a good way*
- [48] When Jesus talks about food not being the thing that defiles, but rather what comes out of a person [Mark 7:14-23], Levine states that it is not a statement of making all foods clean, as Mark claims in 7:19
  - Why do you think Mark included this but Matthew did not?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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# Chapter 3

- **Opening Prayer**

*God Most High, we honor you as “Most High” and we pray that we remember always that you are also here with us. We ask that you grant us new perspective for this class, by the power of your Spirit – both for our own sakes and for the sake of him who said he came not to be served but to serve, that we may serve him more faithfully, Jesus, Son of Humanity. Amen.*

- **Video [9:30]**

- What do you think Jesus was referring to when he talks about the “Kingdom coming in power”?
- Why do you think the original gospel written by Mark did not include Jesus’ resurrection?
- *The Metamorphosis* by Obit
- Compare the Gospels to Greek and Roman literature of the time.
  - How are they similar?
  - How are they different?
  - Do you see Mark and the other Gospel authors as trying to one-up their Greek and Roman counterparts?
- In what ways can you empathize with the father who says “help my unbelief”?

- **Chapter 3 – Sacrifice, Ransom, Prophet, Messiah**

- Why does Jesus admonish the disciples and the blind man against speaking of what they see?
- What links do you see between Elijah and Moses? *Moses represents the law; Elijah represents the prophets; Jesus is the fulfillment of each*
- Why couldn’t the Disciples heal the demon-possessed boy?
- Why does Jesus welcome the children when others push them away?
  - In what scenarios are we guilty of pushing children away?
- Why did Jesus have to foretell his death to the disciples multiple times?
- When is silence a sign of faithfulness? When is it a sign of faithlessness?
- How are doubt and unbelief different?
- What does “Jesus’ death is a ransom” imply to you?
- How might you or might you not consider wealth as a blessing from God?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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# Chapter 4

- **Opening Prayer**

*Merciful God, you love us too much to demand unthinking, unfeeling obedience. You command us instead to love you with heart, soul, strength, and mind. As we enter provocative and challenging stories from Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, may your Spirit guide us to receive your word in new ways and equip us to do your will with renewed commitment. Amen.*

- **Prepare for the Video and Discussion**

- Read Mark 11:12-25
- Read Mark 12:1-9

- **Video [10:16] and Chapter 4 – Fig Trees and Tenants** (combine discussion of both this week)

- Story of the Fig Tree

- Has the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree bothered you in the past?
- Do you agree with Levine that the tree is an allegory for the eventual destruction of the Temple? Why or why not?
- How would the meaning of the story have changed if Jesus had miraculously made the fig tree provide fruit?
- What was Jesus implying when he talked about you being able to cast a mountain into the sea if you believed it would happen?

- Parable of the Landowner and the Wicked Tenants

- What has been your impression of the landowner in the parable of the wicked tenants?
  - What would you have thought the landowner would have done?
  - Which aspects of the landowner suggest attributes of God to you, and which do not?
- How does the parable speak to you today?
- [104] Levine states it's an easy step to charge Jews as Christ-killers if they are the tenants and Jesus is the Son in the parable. She also says many interpret the parable as God disinheriting the Jews and replacing them with Gentiles. She clarifies that she doesn't want to take either of these steps.
  - Have you drawn either/both of these conclusions as you've read this parable in the past?
- In the video, Levine talks about "resistive reading" as a way of pushing back when an author is trying to manipulate you.
  - Do you find yourself adopting this practice or do you typically just follow the lead of the author?
- Why do you think the Bible gives us stories that include so much destruction?
- Can you provide examples of favorite authors who have "disturbed" you?

- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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# Chapter 5

- **Opening Prayer**

*God who was and is and is to come: We do not know the world's future, or even our own, but believe you are sovereign over all the ages. May your Spirit guide our reading and discussion in this time together, that we may be better able to live today in faithful anticipation of the time to come when your Son, our Savior, will gather us to himself. Amen.*

- **Video [10:40]**

- How important is apocalyptic scripture to you?
- What would the Bible be like without it?
- Why do you think so many are caught up in nailing down *when* the apocalypse will happen?
- What do you expect the Second Coming of Jesus to be like?
- What historical events come to mind when you think of “abominations of desolation”?

- **Chapter 5 – The Little Apocalypse**

- [109] Levine notes that liberal churches find Jesus' apocalyptic speech in Mark 13 to be “alien if not icky” while conservatives find it “comforting”
  - Why might this be?
- Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, which was a significant desolation at the time
  - Are there similar buildings today whose destruction you would consider equally impactful?
  - What do you think about Levine's suggestion that Mark may have put this prophecy on Jesus' lips, with the event already having taken place by the time of his writing (practicing “vaticinium ex eventu” or prophesy-from-the-event)?
- Jesus frequently chooses not to respond directly to questions like “Tell us when.” Instead, he chooses to refocus the questioner's concerns. Levine points out that politicians are good at this.
  - Can you think of examples?
  - How do you typically react to this approach?
  - In what ways might it be helpful?
- For Jesus, it's not about “when” but about “how” we should live with the expectation of these end times
  - In what ways do you live differently with the knowledge of a coming apocalypse?
- What events of today cause you to think of apocalyptic predictions? *e.g., Levine suggests storms caused by climate change*
- What are your favorite End-of-the-World movies?
  - Why do you think we are drawn to apocalyptic and dystopian films?
- In Mark, Jesus says that the elect will be gathered from the ends of the earth
  - What meaning do you draw from this?
  - In what form do you see this taking place?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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# Chapter 6

- **Opening Prayer**

*God of life and death, your beloved Son Jesus poured out his blood for many and was raised to new life, but too often we respond with betrayal, denial, fear, and silence. May your Spirit lift our minds and hearts to new understanding of and openness to the good news. May the time we spend with Mark's Gospel now make us better readers and especially better disciples, ready to go and tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.*

- **Video [11:59]**

- When you watch TV, movies, or theater, are you more attracted to evil characters than good?
  - Why do you think this is?
- Do you think Judas is a redeemable character?
- Do you consider Judas a betrayer if Jesus knew ahead of time that he was going to betray him?
- Why didn't Jesus stop Judas from betraying him?
- What do you think about Mark's Gospel ending with the empty tomb and leaving it to the reader to fill in what comes next?
  - Is this more or less powerful for you?
  - Do you feel the same way about movies that leave you hanging?  
(examples: The Birds, Inception, Gone with the Wind, Total Recall, Cast Away)

- **Chapter 6 – Judas Iscariot and the Naked Young Man**

- Do you think, deep down, Jesus' disciples knew he was going to die, or were they missing the point all along?
- What do you think was Judas's motive for handing Jesus over?
- [135] Levine writes "I wrestle with the idea that anyone is predestined to do evil."
  - To what extent do you think our being good or evil is based on choice rather than external influence?
- What have been your past impressions of the naked young man who flees the garden of Gethsemane?
- Why do you think Mark included him in the story?
  - If the young man symbolizes something, what does he symbolize to you?
- Other reflections?

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