

Bible Study

A watercolor-style background illustration. It shows a small boat on a body of water in the foreground, with rolling hills and mountains in the background. The colors are muted and blended, creating a soft, artistic feel. The text is overlaid on this background.

the good news of Jesus.

Mark's Gospel

Trinity Church Brighton
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The Good News of Jesus. Mark's Gospel

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Introduction

Who was Jesus? A great moral teacher? A particularly good guy? A man of uncommon wisdom? A religious guru? There are all kinds of ideas out there about who Jesus was, but the one place we can go to find the real answer is the Bible. At one level, the whole Bible is written to answer this question: laying the ground-work for his arrival, describing what he said and did when he came, and then unpacking the implications of who he was (or more accurately, who he *is*). Yet while this is true of the whole Bible, it is particularly true of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

At Trinity Church Brighton we'll be making our way through Mark 1-8 in term 1. Mark's Gospel, in particular, seems to probe us with the two-fold question: Who is Jesus, and how will you respond?

Mark begins by telling us who he is: Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. But then Mark introduces us to various characters wrestling with his identity and at each point there is an implied question for us: who do we think he is and how will we respond. Demon's cry out in angry fear "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" (1:24). Religious leaders recoil at Jesus' claim to forgive sins "Why does this fellow talk like that?... Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (2:7). Even his disciples were confused and terrified in the presence of such evident power "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (4:41). Time and again the crowds wrestled with the contrast between his humble background and his profound power and wisdom "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Marys' son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?" (6:3). By the end of term 1 we'll get to Peter's climactic acknowledgment: "You are the Messiah!" (8:29) and next year we'll work through the second half of the gospel and come to the final remark of the Roman Centurion at the foot of the cross: "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

So, as we make our way through Mark's Gospel this a good overall question to keep asking ourselves: "Who is Jesus?" And we should expect that the episodes and encounters and miracles and parables have not been recorded as random snapshots but as a growing picture of who Jesus is by unpacking what he came to do and say while repeatedly asking us the follow up question: "How will you respond?"

Sometimes studying the Bible can feel a bit mystifying. It is true that

we can always dig deeper and explore far reaching connections throughout the Bible. However, it's also true that understanding the Bible doesn't need to be complex. To help us work through this we've got a simple tool called "COMA" that is really well suited to using in Mark's Gospel.

To be clear, the name COMA doesn't imply that is how you will feel at the end of the study! Instead, it stands for four simple questions to consider as we read a passage:

C: What is the *context* of this passage? So, we think about what Mark has already told us about Jesus, the details we're given about where he is at this point, or how this 'episode' might relate to the wider story of the Bible.

O: What do we need to *observe* in this passage? What are the details that stand out? What things does Mark seem to highlight? Who are the characters involved?

M: What does this passage *mean*? This might seem like the most obvious question and it's the one we want to jump to, but if we haven't looked closely at the passage in it's context we'll get this one wrong. On the other hand, we could spend hours unpacking all the fascinating detail of the text but there's very little point to that if we're not then considering what God is saying to us through this. Why did God have Mark write this the way he did? What does it mean?

A: How might we *apply* this passage to our lives? (or perhaps we should ask, how might we apply our lives to this passage) This can be quite broad: What does Mark want to shape about what we believe and how we think? What behaviour should change? How would he have us speak with others in light of what we've read? Does this passage teach us things that should impact the way we pray?

Anyone who has done a few Growth Group bible studies before will recognise that these are the kinds of questions that most studies are made up of. But COMA is a really simple tool to help us see that you don't need a bible scholar in your group to have a really fruitful time engaging with God's word, or to think in a very genuine way about that key question: Who is Jesus and how will you respond?

The table below outlines the passages we'll be working through in our Sunday sermons with the associated titles that help highlight the big ideas within each block. You'll find it helpful to read the passage ahead of Sunday, and discuss it further at Growth Group in the following week, asking God to speak to us through his word, not just expecting that to only happen when the preacher stands up on Sunday.

Date	Passage	Sermon Title
5-Feb-2023	Mark 1:1-39	He came to preach
12-Feb-2023	Mark 1:40-2:17	He came to call sinners
19-Feb-2023	Mark 2:18-3:35	He came to end religion
26-Feb-2023	Mark 4:1-34	He came to bring the kingdom
5-Mar-2023	Mark 4:35-5:43	He came to bring life
12-Mar-2023	Mark 6:1-56	He came to feed his sheep
19-Mar-2023	Mark 7:1-23	He came to shake us up
26-Mar-2023	Mark 7:24-8:21	He came to save all people
2-Apr-2023	Mark 8:22-9:1	He came to die

On the following pages are a few helpful background notes to orient ourselves to the Gospel of Mark. Then we have some sample COMA questions that are well suited to the Gospels and Acts, provided by Matthias Media in conjunction with the great book "One To One Bible Reading" by David Helm. The remainder of this booklet is given over to you to jot down your own notes and thoughts and questions. The final pages have been reserved for recording prayer requests to continue in prayer through the weeks and as a prompt to thank God for answered prayer.

For those who like to dig deeper, here are a few great resources on Mark:

- *Mark For You* (Jason Meyer, The Good Book Company). This unpacks Mark verse by verse but with a strong focus on application.
- *The Message of Mark* (Donald English, The Bible Speaks Today Series). This is an excellent, accessible commentary.
- *The Gospel According to Mark* (James Edwards, The Pillar New Testament Commentary) This is a much detailed commentary for those with plenty of time for reading.

Background notes for the Gospel of Mark.

These notes have been compiled using *New Bible Dictionary* (ed Marshall, Millard, Packer and Wiseman. IVP, 1996) and *Making the Gospels* (Paul Barnett, Cascade, 2019), which are two outstanding resources to have on your shelf at home.

Author:

Like the other Gospels, the original text of the Gospel of Mark does not state who the author is. However, from the earliest days the church has identified John-Mark as the author of this Gospel.

We first meet Mark as a young man in Acts 12:12, when Peter sought refuge in Mark's family home. Mark later becomes an assistant to Paul (Acts 13:5) before travelling with Barnabas (Acts 15:39). Mark subsequently spent more time with Paul who would send him on to Colossi (Col 4:10) and then later ask for him to travel from Ephesus to re-join Paul in Rome (2 Tim 4:11). At this time Peter was also working in Rome and it is evident that Mark and Peter had a deep bond and worked closely together (1 Pet 5:13).

Church historians recognise three important early church writers who refer to John-Mark having written this Gospel as a record of Peter's teaching. The briefest is perhaps the most clarifying, coming from Irenaeus, who wrote in the second century AD. He states that Mark was written "when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there... After their departure Mark, Peter's disciple, has himself delivered to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching" The significance of this is that what we read in Mark is the eye-witness accounts of Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples. As we read the gospel various features reflect this such as the vivid detail of various scenes (eg. the cushion in 4:38, the green grass in 6:39). We can be assured of its historical reliability and the relational richness of what we read of Jesus in Mark.

Date:

It is widely recognised that Mark is the earliest gospel to have been written, probably completed around the time of Peter's death in the early 60s – about 30 years after Jesus' resurrection. As early as this is, the connection with Peter's teaching ministry highlights that the accounts that Mark is based on are even more closely related to the time of Jesus..

Key Features:

Of the four Gospel writers, Mark is unique as the only one who titles his work as a 'gospel' (1:1). Remembering that Mark wrote while with Peter in Rome, this appears to be a deliberate use of the word 'gospel' that the Romans used to describe the 'good news' of the victory of Caesar. We then realise that Mark's opening verse is even more pointed when we remember that Rome worshipped their emperor as a son of the gods: Mark presents this as *the* gospel of Jesus, *the* Son of God, as opposed to any alternative ruler. There are further threads of this bold claim running through Mark, such as the details he includes in the account of Jesus freeing a demon possessed man from a group of demons named Legion (a term for a Roman military unit), and when he highlights that it is a Roman Centurion who acknowledges Jesus as the son of God at his crucifixion. Written in Rome, this is a gospel to introduce the world under Roman rule to the one who has the ultimate rule. And while we may not live under Roman rule, the implication that Jesus reigns over all rulers is just as relevant today.

Mark is also unique in his portrayal of Jesus only visiting Jerusalem once. However, if we read carefully, we see many indications that this is a deliberate emphasis on the particular journey of Jesus to Jerusalem for his crucifixion. This shapes the overall structure of the book. Chapters 1 through 10 describe Jesus' ministry in the north of Israel, with the specific mention of his deliberate journey to Jerusalem in 10:32, which is then the focus of the action for the remainder of the book. Unlike the other Gospels there are no encounters with the risen Lord Jesus, just the puzzling report of the angels in chapter 16 that concludes with such an abrupt ending in verse 8 that the reader is left hanging, wondering "How would I respond to news like this?" It seems that this ending was so abrupt and seemingly incomplete that well intended scribes in the early church added other anecdotes to fill out the picture!

Mark is also the shortest of the four Gospels. However, rather than being a mark of inferiority, there is a sense that in Mark we are reading the account that Peter had preached in countless sermons from Jerusalem to Rome and everywhere in between. And as 2 Peter 1:15 suggests, here it is in writing, recorded for our benefit, that this announcement of who Jesus is may be remembered through the centuries, prompting readers like us to consider how we too will respond to this good news of King Jesus, the Son of God.

COMA questions for the Gospels and Acts

Context

- What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes?

- What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?

- Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?

- Is there a conflict or high point in the passage?

- Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?

- What surprises are there?

Meaning

- Are there any 'editorial' comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening?
- Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn?
- What does the passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there some attitude you need to change?
- What does this passage teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 1:1-39 *He Came To Preach*

Sermon notes for Sunday February 5

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 1:1-39 *He Came To Preach*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 1:40-2:17 *He Came To Call Sinners*

Sermon notes for Sunday February 12

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 1:40-2:17 *He Came To Call Sinners*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 2:18-3:35 *He Came To End Religion*

Sermon notes for Sunday February 19

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 2:18-3:35 *He Came To End Religion*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 4:1-34 *He Came To Bring The Kingdom*

Sermon notes for Sunday February 26

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 4:1-34 *He Came To Bring The Kingdom*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 4:35-5:43 *He Came To Bring Life*

Sermon notes for Sunday March 5

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark Mark 4:35-5:43 *He Came To Bring Life*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 6:1-56 *He Came To Feed His Sheep*

Sermon notes for Sunday March 12

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 6:1-56 He Came To Feed His Sheep

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 7:1-23 *He Came To Shake Us Up*

Sermon notes for Sunday March 19

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 7:1-23 *He Came To Shake Us Up*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 7:24-8:21 *He Came To Save All People*

Sermon notes for Sunday March 26

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 7:24-8:21 *He Came To Save All People*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

Mark 8:22-9:1 *He Came To Die*

Sermon notes for Sunday April 2

What I learned about who Jesus is:

One way I want to respond to him is:

Mark 8:22-9:1 *He Came To Die*

COMA Reflections:

Context:

Observation:

Meaning:

Application:

End Of Term Reflection

Having come to the end of our time in Mark's Gospel for this year, take a moment to reflect on our last few months in God's word.

What has God been teaching you?

How have you been encouraged or challenged to see who Jesus – either as a reminder or perhaps for the first time?

How have you grown in Christ?

What are you thankful to God for?

What are some changes that you would like to make in light of what we have learned from Mark? Aim for 1 or 2 that are specific enough that you can put them into action in the next few weeks.

How have you seen God answering prayer in your group?

Having seen more of who Jesus is, who is one person you want to pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with? In addition to praying, what is one specific action that you can take towards this goal?

Prayer Points

Prayer Points

