

# The Gospel of Mark (1)

## Background to Mark's Gospel

### What is a Gospel?

A Gospel is not a biography. A biography tells you about what happened in someone's life in an historical context. A Gospel on the other hand is a statement of the faith of the writer. In many ways a Gospel tells us as much about the belief of the writer as about Jesus himself. The word "Gospel" is the Anglo-Saxon translation of the Greek word "Evangel". Both mean Good News. The writers believed they had Good News to tell. That Good News was about what they believed the death and resurrection of Jesus meant.

### Who was Mark?

We believe that Mark was a companion of Peter, one of the closest friends of Jesus. An early Christian called Papias, himself a follower of someone called "The Elder" wrote around the year AD 100:

*"The Elder used to say that Mark, who had been an interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that Peter remembered of what the Lord said and did, though not in order".*

This is probably the Mark that Paul and Peter refer to in their letters and also who Luke refers to as John Mark in Acts of the Apostles. There he's the son of a woman called Mary, to whose home Peter flees when escaping prison (Acts Chap 12 .verses 12-17). Peter probably baptises Mark because he calls him "son" (1 Peter 5 .v13). Mark then accompanies Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12 v25 and 13 v5 and v13). Paul and Mark argue and split up for a while (Acts 15 v37-39) before joining up again (Philemon 24; Colossians 4 v10; Timothy 4 v11).

Later Christian tradition is that Mark worked in Rome, then Alexandria in Egypt where he was martyred (killed because of his faith). Hundreds of years later, in the Ninth Century, his body was taken to Venice where it is buried in St Mark's Cathedral.

### When was Mark's Gospel written?

Mark's Gospel was written about AD 65. That was about thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. That makes it the earliest Gospel, although all of Paul's letters were written earlier. Matthew (written about AD 75) and Luke (written about AD 85) copied most of Mark's Gospel, put it a different order and added some material of their own including two very different nativity stories. John's Gospel (written AD 95 or later) is very different.

### What language was Mark's Gospel written in?

Mark's Gospel, like all of the New Testament, was written in Koine (or Common) Greek. It was the language of everyday life in the Roman Empire. Mark's Greek is often clumsy and sentence construction is often poor. Mark is writing in a foreign language but often includes Aramaic words in the Gospel. Aramaic is the language that, as a Jew, Mark would usually speak – it was the language of Jesus too.

### Where was Mark's Gospel written?

Mark's Gospel was written in Rome during very troubled times. In AD 64 much of Rome was destroyed in a fire. To deflect blame away from the failings of his rule the Emperor Nero looked for someone else to hold responsible. He chose a new religious group, the

followers of "The Way" - or "Christians" as they had been nicknamed – and blamed them. This led to a persecution and many were killed. In AD 65 one of Peter, an original follower of Jesus, was crucified. In AD 67 Paul, another leader of the Christians, was beheaded. They were hard times to be a follower of Jesus and his teachings.

### **How did Mark write his Gospel?**

Mark gathered some of the accounts that were circulating among Christians about the life of Jesus. Among these were some that Peter himself had told Mark. Mark put them together to form a narrative introducing his description of Jesus' death on the cross. He did so in a way that spoke of what he saw around him, a suffering and persecuted community, and what he thought being a Christian involved.

### **Why did Mark write his Gospel?**

The Christians Mark wrote for believed that Jesus was the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed one who would bring about God's rule over all the world. They believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and was active among them. Their problem was that God's Kingdom seemed as far away as ever. Life was hard and they were persecuted. Mark wrote his Gospel to explain how he experienced God working in the midst of so much suffering. We see this background in the main theme of Mark's Gospel.

### **What is Mark's main theme?**

Mark's underlying theme is that of a "Messianic Secret". In his Gospel he shows the truth of who Jesus is unfolding only gradually. From the beginning of the Gospel Jesus' keeps hiding his identity. When the disciples, or others, realise who Jesus is he forbids them from telling anyone. Jesus does that no less than twenty-one times. Throughout the Gospel people, even Jesus disciples, misunderstand him. That happens nineteen times. Jesus words and actions are shown as arousing amazement and fear twenty-seven times.

## ***Outline of Mark's Gospel***

<b>A</b>	<b>Prologue</b>	<b>Chapter 1 vv1 – 13</b>	<i>Jesus the Messiah-Christ, Son of God</i>
<b>B</b>	<b>Galilean Ministry</b>	<b>Chapter 1 v13 – Chapter 8 v30</b>	
	Chapter 1		Summary of what Jesus did and said
	Chapter 2–3		Five stories of controversy
	Chapter 4		Parables
	Chapter 5–8		Miracles
	<i>Chapter 8 v30</i>		<i>Peter acknowledges Jesus as Messiah-Christ</i>
<b>C</b>	<b>To Jerusalem</b>	<b>Chapter 8 v31 – Chapter 13 v37</b>	
	Chapter 8, 9, 10	The Passion foretold	Discipleship
	Chapter 9	The Transfiguration	Discipleship
	Chapter 10	Journey to Jerusalem	Discipleship
	Chapter 11 – 12	Six controversy stories	
	Chapter 13	Jesus foretells the end	
<b>D</b>	<b>Death and Resurrection</b>	<b>Chapter 14 v1 – Chapter 16 v8</b>	
	Chapter 14	The Last Supper	
	Chapter 15	Passion and Death	
	<i>Chapter 15 v39</i>	<i>The centurion acknowledges Jesus as Son of God</i>	
	Chapter 16	Resurrection	

## The Gospel of Mark (2)

### Jesus' Galilean Ministry

#### Parables.

In the pages of the New Testament we can see two very different ways of answering the question "Who is Jesus?" The Gospel writers, including Mark, answer the question by giving us "snapshots" of Jesus in action. They recount incidents in Jesus' ministry, accounts of healings and controversy for example. The other way of dealing with the question is seen in the writings of Paul. Paul had been very influenced by Greek thought and debate, so he answers the question in theological terms with abstract ideas and logical arguments.

These two ways of answering the question aren't just about personal ways of dealing with the issue. The Gospel writers were, like Jesus himself, easterners. To this day the tradition of storytelling is used in the Middle East to explain deep truths. It is a very different way of answering the question compared with Paul's complex arguments.

Jesus himself was a storyteller. Among the stories he told are those we know as Parables. In a Parable the storyteller is comparing like with like. Many of them begin with the words "The Kingdom of God is like....." and then go on to compare it with something from people's everyday experience.

#### ***The Kingdom of God:***

*When we think of a kingdom we think of a country with set borders, a government and a central organisation or structure. At the time of Jesus that was unknown. Back then a king's (or queen's) rule extended only as far as their power or influence spread - the area they controlled.*

*The idea of the Kingdom of God had developed in the two hundred years before Jesus. The Jews longed for a time of God's rule which would bring in an everlasting time of peace and justice. Mark, as a believer in the death resurrection of Jesus, believed that God's Kingdom had come. But he also knew that God's rule was being impeded by human sin; greed, selfishness and self importance. Mark portrays this as part of his "secret". Some people said that, because they were in a suffering world, God's Kingdom must lie in the future. Mark wants to emphasise that it was here already. Others said that the Kingdom of God was for only the chosen few. Mark says that it is for everyone who wants it. For Mark the Kingdom is here but, for a variety of reasons, not everyone has embraced it's rule.*

#### **Mark's Parables**

Mark records 17 parables in his Gospel. Matthew and Luke record many more. Most of Mark's parables are short and just two are extended. The latter are the Parable of the Sower (beginning at Chapter 4 verse 3) and The Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard (beginning at Chapter 12 verse 1). Mark uses the latter to illustrate the conflict Jesus met when he arrived in Jerusalem. But for now we will concentrate on the Galilean ministry.

People sometimes think of Parables as just being about how to behave. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, which is in Luke but not Mark, is a good example. So often

preachers will stress that it tells us to be compassionate to those in need. That isn't its main message. The main message is about who our neighbour is. It's a challenge for us to cross boundaries of suspicion and hate, such as the one that existed between Jews and Samaritans.

### **Mark Chapter 4: A chapter of parables**

Five of the Parables that Mark recalls are in Chapter 4. These are the Parables of the Sower (vv 3 - 20), of the Light under a Bowl (21 - 23), of the Generous Measure (vv 24, 25), of the Growing Seed (vv 26 - 29) and the Mustard Seed (vv 30 - 32)

The first of these, the Parable of the Sower, is the longest and is also the only one that is explained. The disciples ask for an explanation. Jesus answer seems odd:

*"You have been given the secret of the Kingdom of God. But the others, who are on the outside, hear all things by means of parables, so that, 'They may look and look, yet not see; they may listen and listen, yet not understand. For if they did, they would turn to God, and he would forgive them'". (Mark 4 .11 - 12)*

Mark seems to be saying that, while the disciples are allowed to hear things plainly, others have to have things told in parables. He seems to be depicting Jesus as hiding the truth.

It is likely that this is Mark's technique of explain the difficulty of understanding who Jesus was. In other words it's part of his "secret". We have trouble understanding some of the parables because, like many of Mark's hearers in Rome, we are from the western world where logic and explanation are our way of thinking. In all likelihood those who originally heard Jesus tell the parables understood exactly what he was saying. But Mark is using the "literary device" of a story to explain something else. His agenda is to explain why everyone didn't simply get up and follow Jesus. The "Messianic Secret" again!

Mark is saying "You have to think about this" and "Accepting God's rule will involve you changing your life around!" Superficial people wouldn't take time to think it through. The message of the Kingdom of God, Mark says, is there for all to hear - but people need to make the commitment to listen. If they do the "secret" will be theirs to know.

In reality a Parable is an illustrative story that helps the hearer to understand. Far away from the eastern home of the parable Mark is able to use them more as riddles, preserving the purpose of Jesus for those "in the know".

### **One Parable - Two meanings**

With any parable, as with much else in the Gospels, we need to remember that there are two contexts. Firstly we have to ask ourselves "What did the parable mean when Jesus originally told it?" Then we have to ask "What does it mean for Mark and his audience thirty years later?" The two are not necessarily the same.

Look at the Parable of the Sower. Read just vv 3 - 9. It's full of Good News. A farmer doesn't worry that some seed will fail to grow. The harvest is good; thirty, sixty or a hundred fold! Jesus says God's Kingdom is here, ready for harvest. But when we read the explanation in vv 13 - 20 there's an emphasis on the wasted seed. It's wasted because of all the things that have impeded the Gospel in Mark's day; troubles and persecution (v17), love for riches etc (v19). The Word of God has not born fruit in everyone.

## The Gospel of Mark (3)

### Jesus' Galilean Ministry

#### Miracles

- A West Brom supporter might say, "It'll be a miracle if we stay up this season"
- A mother might say, "It's a miracle he gets to school on time".

Is a miracle something just something that is unexpected or extraordinary? **or**  
Is a miracle something that seems to violate the laws of nature?

We use the word "miracle" in our everyday language but the accounts of miracles in the Gospels refer to events much more extraordinary than those that happen everyday. Three words used for miracles: *teras* = wonder, *semeion* = sign, *dynamis* = power.

#### Miracle Workers

In the Bible it isn't only Jesus who works miracles. The Old Testament is full of them. Even in the Gospels we find references to other miracle workers. e.g. Mark 9 .38-41.

#### Miracles and the Gospel writers

As we have seen in previous weeks each of the Gospel writers recounted events in Jesus' life in a way that served their own purpose. In Mark's case that was to give hope and determination to a persecuted Christian community. This means that sometimes the same event is told with considerable differences. Look at the two accounts of Jesus walking on the water in Mark 6 .45ff and Matthew 14 .22ff.

#### Mark's use of Miracles

For Mark the miracles show the power of God working in Jesus. The rule of evil is being replaced with the rule of God. Mark wants to show that;

God's power working in Jesus is:

- Stronger than mental illness (understood as "demons")
  - Mark 1 .23 Man with an evil spirit
  - 5 .1 Man healed at Geresá (and bad news for some pigs!)
  - 7 .24 Daughter of a woman of faith
  - 9 .14 Boy with an unclean spirit
- Stronger than physical illness
  - Mark 1 .30 Peter's mother-in-law (a miracle with other motives!)
  - 1 .40 Man with a skin disease
  - 2 .1 A paralysed man.
  - 3 .1 A man with a paralysed hand
  - 5 .25 A woman with severe bleeding
  - 7 .31 A man who can neither see nor hear (*this is only in Mark*)
  - 8 .22 Blind man at Bethsaida (*this is only in Mark*)
  - 10 .46 Blind Bartimaeus
- Stronger than death itself
  - Mark 5 .22 Jairus' daughter

- Stronger than nature
  - Mark 4 .35 Calming the storm
  - 6 .31 Feeding the Five Thousand
  - 8 .1 Feeding the Four Thousand
  - 6 .45 Walking on the water

## Mental Illness

In the world of the New Testament most mental illness was thought to be caused by evil spirits living inside people. Let's look at the **Man at Gerasa** (Mark 5 .1).

- The man believes he has a legion of demons (*legion* = 6000)
- The man "was too strong for anyone to control" but Jesus' power is greater.
- The crowd are frightened (in awe) when the man appears "normal".
- The man doesn't want the spirits to be cast out of the region.
- The spirits ask to go into a herd of pigs (unclean animals).
- The pigs go into the sea. Jews feared the sea as a powerful beast.
- The man wants to go with Jesus but that would be too easy, Jesus wants him to do the difficult thing and preach to his (former) persecutors.

So what do you think really happened?

## Physical Illness

In the time Jesus physical illness was understood as:

- unclean forces binding people, whereas the Kingdom of God is about freedom.
- suffering as a result of sin.

In the account of the **Paralysed Man** (Mark 2 .1) the story is in two parts. The healing is straightforward but in the middle (vv 6-10) Mark introduces Jesus' conflict with authorities.

If we look at the miracles of the **Man who can neither see nor hear** (Mark 7 .31) and the **Blind Man at Bethsaida** (Mark 8 .22) we see similarities in the two accounts. Jesus uses spittle, each follows a feeding miracle, neither mentions evil possession or a need for faith and each time Jesus asks for silence about what happens.

## Nature Miracles

In the **Calming of the Storm** (Mark 4 .35) Mark wants to bring reassurance to a community passing through stormy times. After all they already know the answer to the disciples' question, "Who is this man?"

In the **Feeding of the Five Thousand** (Mark 6 .31) and the **Feeding of the Four Thousand** (Mark 8 .1) those fed fail to see the significance of the event. In the first it's followed by **Jesus Walking on the Water** and in the second by the **Blind man at Bethsaida**. Why two accounts? God feeds over and over again? Jews and Gentiles?

## Seeing clearly

Let's go back to the Blind Man at Bethesda. Mark uses that account in a specific way. The first part of Jesus' ministry is over and, when this account ends, a new part begins and the eyes of the disciples will be opened as to who Jesus is. Peter will soon say "You are the Messiah". He sees clearly. Here a miracle account has been used almost as a parable. It leads us to the next stage of Jesus' ministry - the Journey to Jerusalem awaits.

## The Gospel of Mark (4)

### The Road to Jerusalem - Road of Discipleship

#### Watershed

The last session finished by looking at the **Healing of the Blind Man at Bethsaida** (Mark 8 .22) and how that account is used to introduce the theme of the disciples finally “seeing clearly” who Jesus is. Peter then makes his own declaration of faith by saying “**You are the Messiah**” (v 29). Jesus himself may have urged secrecy at this point as the title carried the expectation of a political and military leader but instead Jesus predicts his **Suffering and Death** (vv 31 - 33) which Mark will emphasise twice more (9 .30 - 32 and 10 .32 - 34).

Chapter 8 is a watershed, a boundary between the Galilean Ministry (Chapters 1 - 8) and the events that awaits in Jerusalem (Chapters 11 - 16). Linking the two geographical contexts are two chapters in which Mark portrays a journey and also develops the his teaching on discipleship.

#### Journey to Jerusalem

In Mark's Gospel the actual journey to Jerusalem is contained entirely within Chapter 10. Mark indicates the movement towards Jerusalem at several points in the chapter:

*“Jesus left that place, went to the province of Judaea, and crossed the River Jordan”* (v.1)

*“As Jesus was starting on his way again”* (v.17)

*“Jesus and his disciples were now on the road going up to Jerusalem”* (v.32)

*“They came to Jericho”* (v. 46)

*“At once he was able to see and followed Jesus on the road”* (v.52).

#### Discipleship

In this central part of his Gospel Mark develops his teaching about discipleship. All of Jesus' predictions about death and resurrection are in this section as to are instructions about the cost of discipleship. The section starts and finishes with healing of the blind.

#### *Summary to Mark's section on Discipleship*

- 8.22 **Jesus heals a blind man** at Bethsaida
- 8.27 Peter proclaims Jesus as Messiah but is unaware of the implications.
- 8.31 **Death and Resurrection foretold.**
- 8.34 Following Jesus means taking up the cross. That could mean death.
- 9.2 Jesus' glory seen. Peter still doesn't understand suffering must come first
- 9.17 A boy is healed. His father is a true disciple as he longs to increase his faith.
- 9.31 **Death and Resurrection foretold.**
- 9.33 Who is the greatest? But discipleship is about humility.
- 9.38 Mark uses this account to answer “Who belongs in the church?” Inclusiveness.
- 10.2 Conflict with religious leaders, this time about divorce.
- 10.13 Discipleship may involve a childlike trust.
- 10.17 A man can't meet demands of discipleship. Wealth may be a stumbling block.
- 10.32 **Death and Resurrection foretold.**
- 10.35 James and John want preferential treatment. But discipleship is about service.
- 10.46 **Jesus heals a blind man** called Bartimaeus who then follows them on the road.

## Arrival in Jerusalem

The arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem is the event we recall every year on Palm Sunday. Mark's account of the events can be found in Chapter 11 verses 1 - 10.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. He doesn't do that simply because he's worn out by the journey. He makes a deliberate action to obtain a donkey and then ride it. More than half of Mark's account of **The Entry into Jerusalem** concerns the appropriation of the donkey in question. It clearly is important, but why?

Jesus knows where his disciples can find a donkey. This isn't an example of "sixth sense" or "fortune telling", Jesus has clearly arranged this by sending someone else ahead of the disciples mentioned by Mark. But why a donkey?

In Matthew's Gospel the following is quoted:

*"Rejoice! Rejoice, people of Zion!  
Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem!  
Look, your king is coming to you!  
He comes triumphant and victorious,  
but humble and riding on a donkey"*

Zechariah Chapter 9 verse 9

Zechariah doesn't mention palms at all. This leads us to ask the question as to what is happening when Jesus enters Jerusalem and who are this crowd awaiting him?

As to what was happening one suggestion is that Jesus actually entered Jerusalem on one of the Jewish feasts (Feast of Dedication or Feast of Tabernacles) that involved people carrying branches in a procession. As they did so they recited (what we know as) Psalm 118 v 26 "*Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord*". The branches were actually called Hosannas and were gathered outside the city and carried in. That sounds very much like the scene that Mark describes. Note also that palms weren't part of the Zechariah passage, they weren't an expected part of any claim to be Messiah.

This of course poses problems about timescale and historical accuracy. To counter this we need to remember that the Gospels don't try to be historical timescales but rather statements of faith and belief in who Jesus is.

Another question surrounds the reaction of the authorities. There simply isn't one. This is Jesus whom they have already been in conflict with arriving in Jerusalem, and seeming to be greeted by throngs of people proclaiming him as Messiah. We'd expect some reaction.

Maybe Jesus was tagging onto a procession that was already happening. If that's the case then Jesus action may have been a statement just for his disciples and other followers. Maybe it's been vested with such an importance in hindsight. maybe that was Jesus' intention all along. Whatever the explanation it's important to realise that the Entry into Jerusalem isn't portrayed as the beginning of the final conflict that follows. In Mark's Gospel the account ends in anti-climax. Jesus merely goes to Bethany and, presumably after returning the donkey, spends the night there.

The day that follows sees Jesus renew the conflict with the religious authorities but this time there's a big difference. He takes his challenging teaching into the Temple itself. It's a challenge that they can't now ignore.



## The Gospel of Mark (5a)

### Controversy

Mark's Gospel frequently mentions controversy. Mark wants to depict -

- Jesus being involved in the same disputes that the early Church was involved in.
- the misunderstanding about who Jesus was led to the Scandal of the Cross
- that the stubbornness to understand is part of the evil to be overcome.

The controversy episodes fall broadly into two main groups, each containing five accounts:

#### Group 1 - Galilean Controversy

Mark 2. 1 - 12	Controversy over healing and sin <i>"The Son of man has authority on earth forgive sin"</i>
2.13 - 17	Controversy over eating with outcasts <i>"I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts"</i>
2.18 - 22	Controversy over fasting <i>"Do you expect guests at a wedding to go without food?"</i>
2.23 - 28	Controversy over Sabbath-breaking <i>"The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath"</i>
3. 1 - 5	Controversy over Sabbath breaking <i>"What does Law allow? Help or harm? Save or destroy"</i>

Mark's depiction of Jesus has God's power to *forgive sin*; has a mission to *invite outcasts (sinners)* into the Kingdom; his presence should be a source of *joy and celebration*; he is *above restrictions of Law* and his purpose is to *liberate people and bring life*.

This is radical teaching and the authorities can't accept it. They plan to kill Jesus (Ch 3.6) and they send alarm calls out to Jerusalem for help (3 .22).

There are then a few controversies outside the two main groups. They are a *Controversy over the source of Jesus' power (3.22-30)*, a *Controversy over religious observances (7.1-23)* and one over *"proof" of who he is (8.11-12)*. Then comes the *dispute about divorce* we looked at last week (10.2-12). Then the scene shifts to Jerusalem.

#### Group 2 - Jerusalem Controversy

In this section note how the disciples are only observers. The previous section had concentrated on discipleship. Now they are silent witnesses as Jesus is centre stage.

Mark 11.27-33	Controversy over Jesus' authority The authorities try to catch him out: <i>"What right have you....?"</i>
12.13-17	Controversy over paying taxes The authorities try to catch him out: <i>"Should we pay taxes?"</i>
12.18-27	Controversy over rising from death The authorities try to catch him out: <i>"Whose wife will she be?"</i>
12.28-34	Controversy over the most important commandment. The authorities try to catch him out: <i>"What is most important?"</i>
12.35-37	Controversy over the identity of the Messiah

These controversy episodes are arranged around the **Parable of the Vineyard Tenants** (12.1-11) directed at the authorities. They respond by wanting to arrest him.

## The Cross

The second group of controversies are a series of confrontations that provide the background for the final events leading up to the cross. Mark tells us that:

*The chief priests and teachers of the Law....kept looking for a way to kill him" (11.18)*

### The Anointing at Bethany (14 .3 - 9)

- Ordinary people are devoted to Jesus, and he has compassion for outcasts (sinners).
- Jesus' head that is anointed as in the coronation of a King (Messiah = anointed one).
- Mark emphasises it is the Messiah being hunted down (vv1-2) and betrayed (vv10-11)

### The Last Supper (14 .12 -31)

*The Passover as a Jewish Feast*

- The greatest Jewish festival held at full moon in the month of Nisan (*Mar/Apr*).
- Commemorates the escape of the Jews from slavery in Egypt (*Exodus 12 - 17*).
- Pilgrims flock to Jerusalem for the week long festival. "*Next year in Jerusalem*".
- It begins with with the Passover Meal.
- It was frequently surrounded by turmoil as the country was occupied by Rome.

*The Meal from the later Christian context*

- Very few details of the Passover Meal are included - not important to Mark.
- The early Christian Church emphasises two aspects of the Last Supper:
  - It's ritual aspects that were recalled in the Eucharist (*cf 1 Cor 11. 24-25*)
  - It's role as a farewell meal. Luke and John include a Farewell Discourse.

### Jesus in agony (Mark 14.32-41)

The setting is Gethsemane ("oil-press"). Jesus' agony contrasts with the disciples calm sleep. Peter may have told this account against himself. He is "Simon" again rather than the rock of strength that "Peter" implied. Jesus prays a prayer for times of distress.

### Arrest and Crucifixion (Mark 14.43 - 15.41)

- A crowd arrives led by Judas and **Jesus is arrested (14.43-52)**
- **A trial is convened by the Sanhedrin (14.53-65)** during which Jesus is asked, "Are you the Messiah?" and replies "Yes, I am". The secret is out!
- Mark portrays Jesus as Messiah being deliberately rejected by the authorities.
- Jesus is more than a political Messiah, he claims to be "Son of God". Blasphemy.
- **Peter denies Jesus three times (14.66-72)**
- **Jesus taken before Pilate (15.1-15)**. Only Rome could impose the death penalty.
- Pilate asks Jesus if he is "King of the Jews", Jesus is silent, Pilate suspects Jesus is innocent and attempts to free him.
- **Soldiers mock Jesus (15.16-20)** by giving him a kingly robe and crown of thorns.
- **Jesus is crucified (15.21-31)**. The account is very impersonal and may not be an eye-witness account. Fulfillment of scripture is emphasised in that: Jesus is given a drink (v 23), soldiers throw dice for his cloths (v24), he shared the fate of criminals (v28) and bystanders mocked him (v29-32). *See Psalms 22 and 69 and Isaiah 53.*
- **Jesus dies (15.33-41)**. The words "My God, my God, why did you forsake me" are from Psalm 22, a statement of trust and confidence in God. The Temple curtain being torn in two is symbolic of the barrier between God and the world has been removed.
- **Truly this man was the Son of God (15.39)**. The climax of the Gospel when for the first time a person, a Roman Centurian, recognises who Jesus is.
- **Jesus is buried (15.42-47)**. The emphasises is that Jesus was dead and buried.

## The Gospel of Mark (5b)

### The Meaning of Jesus Death

Mark's Gospel has been described as a Passion narrative with a long introduction. It reached a climax with Jesus' death and then, in very scant detail, talks about a Resurrection. It then ends with the disciples fleeing the empty tomb:

*"for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid"* (16.8)

For Mark the death of Jesus is simply the inevitable fate of a spokesman for God in a wicked world.

Mark shows the world how it is. People give lip service to God but, when God's spokesman arrives making demands that threaten their way of life, they kill him. Mark emphasises that Jesus death isn't a defeat, but rather the cost of being faithful to God. In a context of a suffering and persecuted Church that is a very powerful message indeed.

Mark emphasises that Jesus was not just God's spokesman but God's Son. The Parable of the Vineyard Tenants perfectly sets up the context of what is to come - Jesus' death.

Mark calls his followers to be as faithful to God as Jesus was. In Mark's view **Jesus did not die in their place to save them from dying**. Rather Mark is calling Christians to be faithful to the point of death themselves.

God's Kingdom can only come about the costly way. Mark's is a demanding Gospel.

### The Resurrection

What happened after Jesus was buried?

The four Gospels each have different accounts of the empty tomb and there are also descriptions of Jesus being seen afterwards. The original form of Mark's Gospel, as detailed above, contains no resurrection sightings. It also rests on the evidence of two women, whereas ancient law demanded the evidence of two men.

Just before the end of the Gospel a young man in the tomb tells the women, *"(Jesus) is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him"* (16 .7) See also 14.28. Mark wants to emphasise that, even in the midst of apparent failure, when the disciples had failed to be faithful, God still wanted them to be part of his journey. In this verse they are invited all over again. The Resurrection is clearly a new beginning, a new part of God's Kingdom.

Ten years before Mark wrote his Gospel, Paul wrote these words:

*"If Christ has not been raised from the dead then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe".* (1 Corinthians 15 .14)

### What sort of reality is the Resurrection?

Some will say it is a physical reality so real that, in a later age, it could have been videoed. Others will say that the accounts are more like poetry or drama, with the writers seeking to describe a reality deeper and more meaningful than physical things can express.

All Christians would however agree that Jesus' death was not an ending, but a beginning. Jesus lives on in the life of his people. We are called to be part of his risen life.