

Mark's gospel

Session 4 February 2022

So far:

October:

Key background to Mark – who Mark was, who the Gospel was written to, the mysterious missing ending, the 'street Greek' language used (not frequently used in literature), the relationship between Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospels, why we think Mark is the earliest Gospel, brief summary of all 4 Gospels, the strange beginning – when he says he'll quote Isaiah but quotes Malachi first, Mark is in a rush 'euthus' (and immediately) used 42 times, the possibility that Mark may have been intended to be acted out, so reading it is like reading a Shakespeare play, how Mark tells much from Peter's perspective, how Mark includes some things only Mary would have known And TOP TIP Whenever you see anything from the Old Testament quoted in the New Testament, it is often not just the words quoted which are being referred to – rabbis would quote one part but expect the hearer to know what was before and after – so in effect he's quoting a small part but asking the listener to reference the whole passage (and a look at where Mark does this Which is a mystery as he's writing primarily to gentile converts but seems to assume a knowledge and practise that only Jews would have).

November:

A brief look at the Demoniac in Mark 5 3 days of Jesus' time, just for one man.

An exploration of a small issue with Jesus sending out the disciples in Mark 6 – Matthew and Luke say not to take shoes, but Mark instructs them to take one pair of sandals – were sandals and shoes different? Or in Matthew and Luke, did Jesus send them out barefoot (as priests)? If so, why did Mark (the earliest gospel) say take sandals?

- Was that a later alteration by a well-meaning scribe?
- As Mark's audience was primarily gentile, did he decide not to make an issue of the Jewish 'priestly' significance of being barefoot?
- Is it that 'shoes' (Matthew and Luke) and different from 'sandals' (Mark)?

Ultimately we don't know (one of the many mysteries of Mark) and different people support each of these possibilities.

However, IF the disciples were sent out barefoot (as in Matthew and Luke), what are the consequences for us if we are now being sent out as priests?

5 ways to look at the Bible (all are needed – so complimentary, not competitive):

1. What the text/ words say
2. How the words fit within the context of the passage they are in
3. How the words fit within the context of the metanarrative of the whole Bible
4. What the original writer meant and what the original reader would have taken from it
5. How does any piece of scripture change and direct our corporate and individual lives?

Mark 15.34 – ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani’, ‘My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?’ – a demonstration of the difference between:

- a. Taking just the words read – so God abandoned Jesus on the cross (thus splitting the Trinity)
- b. Realising that he’s quoting ‘the crucifixion psalm’, Psalm 22 written ~1,000 years earlier And that Psalm has 2 halves – (1) what is happening now and (2) the eternal consequences of the crucifixion.

January

Imagining Mark chapter 1 as a play – ‘see’ the stage action.

V22 – ‘bookending’ where 2 verses on authority ‘sandwich’ one on exorcism – an introduction to chiasmic structures – used very frequently in the Bible and in ancient literature, but almost unknown in the modern era.

Some examples of chiasmic structures in Mark and how usually (but not always) the centrepoint is the main point, unlike modern writing where the conclusion is the main point.

A demonstration of how the focus would be different for an Ancient preacher and a modern preacher for some texts. Both points are perfectly valid, but being used to a modern or an ancient way of writing will focus differently.

For example:

Mark 1.4-8 (John the Baptist):

Ancient focus – v6 – John was a prophet

Modern focus – v8 – John will baptise with the Holy Spirit

Mark 2.1-12 (John the Baptist):

Ancient focus – v7-10 – Jesus had authority to forgive sins (something only God can do, and therefore a strong claim that Jesus is God, but without saying it directly)

Modern focus – v12 – Jesus healed the man

Mark 5.1-20 (the demoniac):

Ancient focus – v13 – Jesus had authority over demons and they needed his permission to enter the pigs – again, a subtle claim as that is demonstrating Jesus’ superiority to the powers of evil, and therefore his Divinity

Modern focus – v20 – the man is given his own personal ‘great commission’ to tell everyone in the 10 towns of Decapolis about Jesus

And some details of how the pigs going into the sea may have been an anti-Roman action as wild boar and sea motifs were symbols of the 10th legion which was in Jerusalem in this era and worked on infrastructure throughout the wider area – so likely to be well known and also disliked as a very visible symbol that Israel was occupied and subjugated.

Mark 5.21-43

Jairus’ daughter brought back to life and the ‘interruption’ caused by the woman with haemorrhaging

1. Demonstrating that this story is also chiasmic
2. How Jesus reverses the polarity of contamination – as a rabbi, he should have purified himself after being touched AND after touching the dead body (probably why the Good Samaritan story has a Priest and Levite – they would have been made unclean if they’d touched the almost dead man – their religious piety was more important than the man’s welfare). However ... rather than THEM infecting HIM ... HE infected THEM – with health and life respectively.
3. And that is our calling – go out into the world and infect it! With holiness, healing, compassion, peace, all the attributes God commands of us.

And finally in January A couple of examples of people showing the whole of Mark’s Gospel to have a chiasmic structure so all of these little chiasmic passages are set within a huge overall chiasmic book ... which was the biggest reason why people changed several hundred years ago from thinking of Mark as a ‘street-Greek’, ‘country bumpkin’, unsophisticated piece of literature to ... a very sophisticated, very clever and very well designed book.

And now

February

First A more thorough demonstration of Mark's structure ... which enables us to guess at what the missing ending would have been like.

Followed by

Provocative questions from Chapters 2 and 3 was Jesus a rulebreaker (and therefore a sinner And if that is the case, would his death be meaningless)? Or have I missed something? 😊

And did Jesus not know his history? – did he make an elementary History GCSE mistake – or was he giving a 'slam-dunk' message in a very clever way?

The whole of Mark as chiasmic:

Remember the notations – A,B,C, D on the way 'up' the pyramid until the central point Then D', C', B', A' on the way 'down' the pyramid.

AND In subsets – looking only at B A chiasmic structure within the 'upward' B would have B1, B2, B3, B4 etc and on the way down would have B4', B3', B2', B1'.

So Key question (1) 'in this analysis of Mark's chiasmic structure, where is the greatest point Mark is making?' the central point in the chiasmus.

Note – scholars have different opinions on exactly where the chiasmic elements are – so what follows is slightly different from the 2 examples which I showed you last month AND whilst all scholars will have the centrepiece of the chiasmic structure in almost the same place – there is not universal agreement of exactly the central verse (remember, verses were an addition by Stephen Langdon approx. 1200 AD).

Note also a chiasmus (A,B,C etc) within a chiasmus (C1, C2, C3 etc) within a chiasmus (C'1a, C'2b, C'3a) and NOW we see why Mark is so sophisticated and complex!

A 1:1-13. Promise of Pentecost: "... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (1:8)

A1 Wilderness. 'A voice in the wilderness.' 1:2-4

A2 Baptism. Of the masses. 1:5

A3 Teaching / Holy Spirit. "He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit". 1:6-8

A2' Baptism. Of Jesus. 1:9-11

A1' Wilderness. 40 days of testing. 1:12-13

B

B1 1:14-20. The kingdom of God arrives – Galilee.

B2 1:21-28. Cleansing a synagogue in Capernaum.

B3 1:29-45. The fruitfulness of Jesus.

B4 2:1-3:12. Five controversies.

B5 3:13-35. Society turned upside-down.

B6 4:1-34. Central teaching: The victory of God's kingdom.

B7 4:35-41. A life-threatening situation – a stormy Sea of Galilee.

B8 5:1-20. The defeat of Satan – Christus Victor.

B9 5:21-43. The resurrection of Jairus's daughter.

B10 6:1-6. Going home – to Nazareth.

B11 6:7-32. Disciples sent out to minister.

C

- C1** **a** 6:33-44. The feeding of the 5,000.
- C2** **b** 6:45-51. Jesus walks on water.
- C3** **a'** 6:52. Bread and hardened hearts.
- C4** 6:53-55. Jewish masses come to Jesus for healing.
- C5** 6:56. Jesus goes to the Jewish masses to heal.
- C6** **a** 7:1-5. A question on eating with unwashed hands.
- C7** **b** 7:6-13. Traditions (personal and corporate).
- C6'** **a'** 7:14-23. The answer to eating with unwashed hands.
- C4'** 7:24-30. A Gentile woman comes to Jesus for an exorcism.
- C5'** 7:31-37. Jesus goes to the Decapolis and heals a man.
- C1'** **a** 8:1-9. The feeding of the 4000.
- C2'** **b** 8:10-12. Pharisees ask for a sign.
- C3'** **a'** 8:13-21. Bread and hardened hearts.

—

- *C8** 8:22-26. A blind man healed. (Jesus sent him home)

D

- D1** 8:27-30. Who is Jesus? Peter's Confession: He is the Messiah.
- D2** 8:31-33. Jesus's cross: Jesus's 1st prediction of death and resurrection.
- D2'** 8:34-38. Our cross: 'Take up your cross and follow me.'
- D1'** 9:1-13. Who is Jesus? The Transfiguration: He is the Son of God.

C'

C'0 9:14-29. A young boy exorcised – “all things are possible”.

C'1 a 9:30-32. Jesus’s 2nd prediction of death and resurrection (servanthood implied).

C'2 b 9:33-34. Disciples desire greatness.

C'3 a' 9:35. Teaching on being a servant.

C'4 9:36-37; 38-42. A child and Jesus “Do not hinder”v39.

C'5 9:43, 45, 47-48. On removing hands, feet, and eyes.

C'6 a 9:49. Salted with fire – personal purification.

C'7 b 9:50a. Don’t lose your saltiness (personal and corporate).

C'6' a' 9:50b. Salt and peace – maintaining relationships.

C'5' 10:1-12. On divorce – “two shall become one flesh ... let no man separate”.

C'4' 10:13-16. Children and Jesus – “Do not hinder”.

C'0' 10:17-31. The rich young ruler – “all things are possible”

C'1' a 10:32-34. Jesus’s 3rd prediction of death and resurrection (servanthood implied).

C'2' b 10:35-41. John and James desire greatness.

C'3' a' 10:41-45. Teaching on being a servant.

—

***C'8** 10:46-52. A blind man healed. (Followed Jesus)

B'

- B'1** 11:1-11. The kingdom of God arrives – Jerusalem.
- B'2** 11:15-19. Cleansing the temple in Jerusalem.
- B'3** 11:12-14, 20-25. The fruitlessness of the temple.
- B'4** 11:27-12:37. Five controversies.
- B'5** 12:38-44, 14:1-11. Society turned upside-down.
- B'6** 13:1-37. Central teaching: The destruction of the temple.
- B'7** 14:12-72. A life threatening situation – the Garden of Gethsemane.
- B'8** 15:1-47. The crucifixion of Jesus.
- B'9** **Partially missing.** 16:1-8. The resurrection of Jesus.
- B'10** **Missing.** Going home – to Galilee.
- B'11** **Missing.** Disciples sent out to minister – the Great Commission.

A' Missing. Pentecost: Baptism with the Holy Spirit! ... probably following the same order as A at the beginning, maybe:

The world (juxtaposed with the wilderness of chapter 1) ... **baptism ... teaching / Holy Spirit ... baptism ... The world.**

Key question (2) 'does this suggestion of what would have been in the missing ending seem reasonable?' ... of course, we'll never know for sure – it's missing!

And now some really strange mysteries did Jesus commit a crime and did he get his elementary history wrong? or is something else going on?

The sabbath trilogy:

2.21-22 – Jesus is making NEW wine, not just patching up the old clothes/wineskins

2.23-28 – Cornfields – the disciples were rulebreakers – Abiathar High priest – or was he?

3.1-6 – restored shrivelled hand

A trilogy of stories (Stephen Langton presumably didn't realise they were a trilogy a few blips in where he put the chapters, but am glad he did it! ... eg Gen 1-2 blip)

Also note Chiastic structure, so Mark is pointing us to the middle part of the 3.

Part 1: new clothing and new wine. Mark chapter 2.

²¹ “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. ²² And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

So Jesus is not just patching up the existing religious and political infrastructure – he's bringing in a whole new thing.

Part 2a: the cornfields. Mark chapter 2.

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

So (a) are the disciples breaking the law? (b) is Jesus breaking the law – even if he wasn't actually picking corn, he was OK about his disciples doing so, so complicit.

Part 2b: the answer. Mark chapter 2.

²⁵ He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

BUT – if you read the story, Abiathar wasn't the high priest – it was his son Ahimelek.

1 Samuel 21 (just the parts for this argument included for brevity)

21 David went to Nob, to **Ahimelek the priest**. David answered Ahimelek the priest, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

⁴But the priest answered David, “I don’t have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”

⁵David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men’s bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!” ⁶**So the priest gave him the consecrated bread**, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence

- **Did Jesus get his history mixed up and confuse Ahimelek with Abiathar? – that would have been a GCSE ‘fail’ and Note No-one ‘corrected’ him – neither in the discussion nor any scribes who copied the Gospel.**
- **How did the Pharisees understand Jesus' answer?**
- **Does it matter that David was acting in a deceitful manner according to the story in 1 Samuel 21? The bread belonged to the High Priest and his descendants (Leviticus 24:9) so David essentially stole it.**
- **Gleaning was clearly permissible but the question was whether it counted as work for the purposes of the Sabbath law.**

Usual ‘modern answer’ is from the next part of Mark chapter 2: ²⁷Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” And so, the implication that Sabbath law isn’t central and Jesus/Disciples/we/Jews/early Christians are not really under obligation to obey it fully.

How does that answer fit with Matthew 5.18 “until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” ? Note: this Mark 2 incident obviously happened BEFORE the crucifixion Which is potentially argued as the ‘accomplished’ (‘it is finished’).

1. One argument is that God's (or the 'Son of Man's') intention with regard to the Sabbath law trumps obedience to the 'letter of the law'. Jesus explains the Sabbath "was made for man" (i.e. to bless him) not the other way round so if a man breaks

the Sabbath law to avoid harm coming to himself, he is more in tune with God's intention than if he keeps the law to his harm (as an illustration, a starving man who works on the Sabbath for food does not displease God though he breaks the law).

2. Another argument is that the Law is concise about the Sabbath (Lev 23, Deut 5) and makes a general statement not to work. Plucking grains on your neighbour's property was permitted by the Law (Deut 23). Reading the Law at face value, the disciples were not breaking Biblical law, but Rabbinical Law – the Rabbis specific application, interpretation and clarification of Biblical Law.

However there MIGHT be a subtle subtext Theologians certainly do not agree on this.

3. If gleaning DID count as work – is this yet another subtle way of pointing out that Jesus was now appointing the Disciples as priests (who DO work on the Sabbath) within his new order ... see the verses in Mark chapter 2 immediately before: ²¹ “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. ²² And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.” (and therefore also appointing US as priests)?

So Possibilities and we don't really know if any one is a clearer answer than the others – another mystery of Mark.

However, none of that deals with Jesus seemingly getting the names of the High Priests wrong So what does?

If Mark is cleverly constructed, and as this part follows on as an answer to the cornfields incident, and if option 3, about the Priestly function and Jesus appointing the disciples as 'priests' in his new order of things, is a relevant answer (they can all be relevant – inclusive not exclusive) then the answer has to be something about Priests!

Part 3: healing on the Sabbath. Mark chapter 3.

³ Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. ² Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³ Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

⁴ Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

⁵ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

Part 1 – making things new

Part 2 - a priestly interaction

Part 3 – healing on the Sabbath