



This week at Magdalen Road church we moved to the next section in Marks Gospel as we considered both the identity and the importance of Jesus. We noted that the evidence Mark provides is for **everybody** to consider. Not just a book for those who wouldn't call themselves believers, but as far as we can tell it was a gospel written for Christians to persevere despite persecution. Mark wants us to see that Jesus is worth it and with us in the midst of hardships.

+ We initially considered the big picture **high-level view** of this passage and noted that it consists of four little cameos in and around the Galilee-Capernaum area as Jesus begins his public ministry. It's a geographically and a temporarily tight section. v21 to 38 are almost a 24 hour snapshot sabbath. The theme that unites these four little stories together a peculiar interplay between on the one hand Jesus's popularity and reputation rocketing and yet on the other hand he is seeking (to some extent) to keep it all on the down low.

+ Next we are more slowly move through the four encounters with Jesus at **ground level**. We initially noted that this is the sabbath and next week will see he gets into hot water with the religious authorities because he is not ceasing to work. This week though he just about get away with it as he banished an evil spirit and then heals Simon's mother-in-law.

The fact that it's the Sabbath seems to be why the queue increases at V 32 as the sun goes down so the Sabbath ends and so people bring to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed.

Jesus **begins** in the synagogue because he was the king that Israel ought to be waiting for. He's not fundamentally opposed to religious authorities (rather just their hypocrisy) - in fact at the end of this passage Jesus urges the leper to go to the priest to offer the sacrifices - that were required by the law. There is an initial amazement at Jesus is teaching in the synagogue as he teachers as one who had authority that is - *as we are all rummaging around in the dark in a power cut looking further candles and matches and everyone is blind and you can't see what it's really going* - on Jesus teaches with authority and brings clarity. He teaches as one who can see. In a world of conflicting voices and confusion Jesus is one we can trust.

His authority 'for teaching' quickly transition to authoritative words 'with spiritual power' as we encounter the first miracle that Jesus does in Mark. (Perhaps this gives us a pointer that he would come and do something spiritually significant as he banishes a demon at the beginning and essentially banishes Satan at the end of the gospel). Our western ears might struggle with talk of unclean spirits or the devil but the Bible is very clear but there have always been forces

of evil at work in the world against God. Jesus though has utter authority over them and with a simple word he silences the demon.

The story moves on and there is a real contrast in Jesus's next encounter - he doesn't just deal with one type of person or deal with them in the same way. Whereas it was public at the synagogue so Simon Andrews house it's private. Whereas at the synagogue it was an anonymous man that was possessed, so here it is a woman known to the disciples in bed with a fever. And instead of falling onto the floor with a shriek (!) the mother-in-law rises up and serves them an afternoon meal. Jesus's popularity is rocketing and yet the next morning...

... He's gone. Jesus simply leaves an apparently popular and fruitful ministry so he can pray to God the Father. The key thing here seems to be that Jesus won't fit into our predetermined categories-he's doing things his own way. There also seems to be something going on about the kind of ministry that Jesus will have-not a Ministry of power and glamour but rather one that will end up at the cross. He's not about popularity of platforms but rather his Father's will.

He's not going to be the kind of King they're looking for, he's not going to wear the kind of crown they're hoping for and indeed he is not going to defeat the kind of enemies they were expecting him to and so he heads away to pray.

From there he says he's going to focus on preaching in the nearby villages. Preaching because his kingdom come through preaching - The gospel seed is sewn into peoples hearts the message takes route and lives are transformed. But why the secrecy? The time for openness will come and what is hidden will be revealed but for now until his identity becomes more public it's just for the few whom God has allowed to see.

The final encounter is a conversation between Jesus and a leper - A passage like Leviticus 14 would have to see the kind of hoops the leper would have to jump through for healing to happen and be confirmed: he was to live outside the camp in a place of death and a shout unclean. The priest was to approach him and make a sacrifice of two birds one shed blood and one to fly away to freedom. Then the leper would shave for their hair (almost as if they were a newborn being born again). And finally sacrifices would need to be made to secure atonement and reintegration into the community. And yet Jesus just touches him and he is instantly cleansed. He is then retrospectively to do the sacrifices as he goes to the priests and the welcome back into the community of God's people. Only Jesus can make us clean.

This encounter with the leper is the gospel in miniature-we are the spiritually dead who are on clean and have no right to be with God and Jesus comes and makes us clean.

*He makes the atonement that we need.
He is cut off that we might be brought in.
He becomes unclean that we might be clean.
He is excluded that we might be included.
He dies that we might have life.*

+ We then zoomed in on **the heart level** and considered 4 points to chew on for application

+ 1. Jesus is in charge

There is nothing that can surprise or fox him. Where sins de-humanising consequences have ruined the world, ruined lives and ruined us, so Jesus can come and bring life and order and make us clean. There's nothing too hard for him.

+ 2. Jesus is compassionate

He deals with all kinds of people with all kinds of problems in all kinds of ways. We see Jesus showing compassion and bring life to each one. He doesn't deal with each of us in the same way (and so comparisons are useless!) but rather treats us as individuals, bringing hope. And where perhaps we've stopped praying for things that we've lost hope so we see that he is both powerful and compassionate. Have hope and pray on!

+ 3. Jesus doesn't do things our way

We are far too easily transfixed by the shiny lights of the world. Where Jesus almost sought to lose followers ours is a culture that longs for more. When we seek to put Jesus in a box or reduce him making safe or even controllable, so know that just doesn't work. He sets the agenda and we do not - he doesn't go for the kind of people that we perhaps would, he doesn't use the strategy that we would or doesn't do things in our timeframe and yet he is good and we can trust him.

+ 4. A future is coming

Marks Gospel access something of a trailer for the main event to come. It's a bit like the two minute clip for the next Star Wars film that goes viral as our appetites are whetted. As we see Jesus the King bringing in his kingdom and dealing with death, sickness and Satan so they are in one sense just a glimpse of more to come, they are the pointers that make us long for the new heavens and the new earth. This is not it. The full film is on its way.

Here are a few questions to start your group off

- Where do we see aspects of Jesus' power and authority in this section?
- Where do we see aspects of his compassion and kindness?
- How do you think these verses encourage persecuted Christians to keep going?
- Why does Jesus disappear from public life, why does he then move on to preach in the villages?
- In what ways do we seek to 'control' Jesus? In what ways does he not do things as we might expect?
- Where do we see glimpses of the core gospel message? How did these verses points ahead to the reality of the new heavens and the new earth?