

**SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY**

**January 2013**

**THEME: The Gospel According to Mark (Part 1)**

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**Series Introduction**

*In the first quarter of 2013 our series focuses on the first part of Colossians 2:6 “As you have RECEIVED CHRIST JESUS AS LORD...” so the selected preaching passages will focus on Jesus from different perspectives.*

*These passages contain various titles for Jesus e.g. Son of God, Lord of the Sabbath, The Holy One of God, etc., leading to the last 2 sermons “Who Do You Say I Am?” and “Good Teacher, What Must I Do?” by which time the congregation would have seen enough of Jesus as Lord to make a commitment or re-commitment, just before Good Friday and Easter.*

*Mark’s Gospel was chosen because looking through past series, it does not seem to have been covered comprehensively. It is the shortest Gospel which deals with the events in Jesus’ ministry chronologically, and should be supplemented by fuller parallel passages from the other Gospels.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Passage</b>
<b>13 Jan</b>	Enter the Son of God!	Mark 1:1-13
<b>20 Jan</b>	The Holy God Who Heals	Mark 1:21-39
<b>27 Jan</b>	The Son of Man Who Forgives	Mark 2:1-17

## 13 January

### Enter the Son of God!

### Mark 1:1-13

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#### ***Introduction***

This 13-verse prologue to the Gospel according to Mark captures the essence of Jesus' identity in a brief and exacting narrative account. The time has come for the words of the prophets of old concerning the Messiah to be fulfilled affirmatively by God himself. The role of John the Baptist as forerunner to history's breaking news is also pre-empted by the OT prophets. Jesus' baptism and temptation introduce readers to the two opposing powers – God and Satan – throughout his earthly ministry. *Who does God the Father say Jesus is?* The answer to this question is significant to Christian discipleship today as we live under the authority of the Son and against the power of Satan.

#### ***For Study and Discussion***

1. According to Mark, what is the Christian Gospel essentially about? (v1)
2. Notice also the stunningly similar confession by the Roman centurion in 15:39 (cf. Matt 27:54; Luke 23:47). Why is this identity of Jesus so central to Christianity that we should take it seriously?

**Why some manuscripts do not have *the Son of God* in verse 1? NIV footnote (a) to v1.** The absence of “Son of God” (v1) in some primary sources may be due to an oversight in copying, occasioned by the similarity of the ending of the *nomina sacra* [Latin for “sacred names”]. On the other hand, however, there was always a temptation (to which copyists often succumbed) to expand titles and quasi-titles of books. Since the combination of B D W *al* [these are references to reliable sources] in support of “Son of God” is extremely strong, it was not thought advisable to omit the words altogether, yet because of the antiquity of the shorter reading and the possibility of scribal expansion, it was decided to enclose the words within square brackets. – Metzger, Bruce M., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: UBS, 1994), p. 62.

**Ponder:** What are some implications if *the Son of God* is omitted altogether?

3. The appearance of John the Baptist [hereafter ‘John’] fulfills an Isaianic prophecy (v3; cf. Isa 40:3) which is preceded by a citation from Malachi 3:1 in verse 2.
  - a. How does Malachi 3:1 describe the manner of its fulfillment? What effect will it have on God's people after 400 years of divine silence?
  - b. John has a forerunner role to the Messiah's coming. What is his responsibility? (v4) How does he see the coming Messiah in relation to himself? (vv7-8)

- c. How did the people respond to John's ministry despite his physical appearance? (vv5-6) What does this suggest about his message and their spiritual need?

**Responses:** We are not the first hearers of John's preaching, neither are we appointed to John's role. Nonetheless, the call to repentance and forgiveness of sins remains today via Christ's Great Commission (Mk 16:15-16). What is God showing you about the spiritual needs of your family, neighbourhood, and world today? How will you prepare them to hear and yourself to preach the Gospel?

4. Interestingly, verse 9 tells us that the sinless Jesus comes to John also to be baptized. Read the parallel passage in Matthew 3:13-15 for additional details.
- a. Why is Jesus' identification with John's baptism important? What significance does it carry? Consider also 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.
- b. Notice the triune fellowship of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in this occasion. What is God the Father's own testimony concerning Jesus? (v11)

**Responses:** In view of John's and God's testimonies concerning Jesus, who do you say he is? How should you relate to him?

5. After Jesus' baptism, he is driven by the Spirit deeper into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Unlike other gospel writers, Mark does not record other details of this episode.
- a. Compare and contrast the account of Jesus' temptation in Mark with Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. What do you observe as distinctively Markan? Consider the 'desert' and the 'wild animals' in the realm of Satan.
- b. What is Mark emphasizing about the nature of Jesus' life and ministry? Do you expect our life and ministry as his disciples to be any different?

### ***Discipleship Pointers***

**Jesus Christ is the beloved Son of God who has authority and power to save sinners from Satan's temptations and destructions.**

- Jesus' identity as God's Son spells authority and power to carry out the Father's mission – we must trust him and submit to him;
- Jesus identifies the need of humanity for repentance and forgiveness of sins – we can

therefore entrust ourselves to him;

- Jesus' baptism is followed with wilderness testing that signals the nature of his life and ministry and therefore also of Christian discipleship – we must accept trials as part of being identified with Christ our Saviour.

***Family/Group Moment***

- Water baptism is the outward and public testimony of one's inward repentance towards God for the forgiveness of sins. Have you made such a public testimony of God's saving grace? If not, why not?
- If you were asked, "Who is Jesus? How should we relate to him?" How would you answer these questions?

**20 January**  
**The Holy One Who Heals**  
**Mark 1:21-39**

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***Introduction***

Jesus' deliverance of the demon-possessed and his healing of the sick were occasions when he demonstrated his divine power to the amazement of many people. So who exactly is this Jesus who had delivered and healed? Even the evil spirits and demons know and declare who Jesus truly is. Do you know exactly who you have believed in as the person of Jesus? What exactly are you also telling others about him? The strengths and weaknesses of our Christian discipleship have a lot to do with who Jesus really is to us.

***For Study and Discussion***

**1. Jesus teaches authoritatively in the synagogue (1:21-22)**

- a. Research and find out (using a Bible dictionary, etc.) who the scribes in Jesus' time were and what they did, etc. Share your findings.
- b. In what way is Jesus' teaching in the synagogue distinctively different from the scribes' teaching? What does this confirm about Jesus' identity in view of Mark 1:1?

**Notes:** Rabbis and scribes usually appeal to the chain of tradition of the elders in their expositions and decisions. They are hardly authoritative in the prophetic sense of compelling and commissioning hearers to act under divine sanction. This is the evidence of the Spirit working to convict the hearers alongside the Son who teaches.

**Examine:** To what extent do you submit to God's word as authority over your life? What are some areas in which you have denied his lordship?

**2. Jesus casts out an unclean spirit, heals Simon's mother-in-law and a multitude of others (1:23-34)**

- a. Who does the man with the unclean spirit [in fact the spirit itself] identify Jesus to be? How does Jesus deal with the situation? What is it about Jesus' words and deeds that amaze those in the synagogue?
- b. What do the disciples expect of Jesus by telling him about Simon's mother-in-law who is ill? What might it suggest about their understanding of Jesus' identity?
- c. Many sick and demon-possessed are also brought to Jesus after sunset when the Sabbath is over (vv32f). What is Mark's purpose in highlighting that Jesus did not permit the demons to speak (v34b)?

**Notes:** It is interesting that the demons know who Jesus truly is. He is not merely a remarkable teacher, a powerful exorcist or an effective healer. In fact, the reaction of the unclean spirit to Jesus in verse 24 – “What do you want with us... (NIV)” or “What do we have to do with you... (NAS)” – is a common combative expression in the OT (see e.g. Judg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 1 Kgs 17:18)

**Examine:** What have you been praying about recently? How do you desire God to answer your prayers? Who is Jesus truly to you as reflected in your prayers, or even disappointment with unanswered or ‘no’-answered prayers?

### 3. Jesus prays alone and aligns his priorities with God’s mission (1:35-39)

- a. What does this episode tell us about the main purpose of Jesus’ earthly ministry?
- b. What lessons can we draw from Jesus’ example of (i) setting aside time (“very early in the morning”) to be alone with God, (ii) praying to God?

#### ***Discipleship Pointers***

**Jesus certainly has the divine power and authority to heal the sick and cast out demons, but his primary purpose on earth is to preach the good news of salvation.**

- Jesus’ words have divine power, e.g. his preaching in the synagogue, his rebuke of the unclean spirit.
- We are saved to serve. There should be no “pew-warming” Christians.
- It is utterly important for us to determine God’s will for us and obey it, and not let the “urgent” or even the “seemingly good” distract us from his will.

#### ***Family/Group Moment***

- Parents are natural role models – they may not even know it, but as they regularly spend time alone with God and his word, their children will see and experience the evidence of spiritual growth from their parents’ lives.
- What practical steps may we take to instil in our children a love for God and his word?

**27 January**  
**The Son of Man Who Forgives**  
**Mark 2:1-17**

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***Introduction***

This Jesus who forgives sins – who is he? The action and words of Jesus demand a response; even more so when Jesus himself declares who he truly is. These people cannot be passive spectators watching miracles happen before their very eyes. These miracles and teachings demand a response to who Jesus is, both then and now.

***For Study and Discussion***

**A. Jesus heals a paralytic man (2:1-12)**

1. Where is Jesus at this point of his journey? (v1) Who are the key characters in this healing passage?
  
2. What is Jesus doing? (v2)
  - a. What is the men's intention in carrying the paralytic man? (v3) Do you think what they have done is dangerous and risky? Why did they do it?
  
  - b. In the minds of the men who brought the paralytic, what did they expect Jesus to do? Instead, what did Jesus say and do? (v5)
  
  - c. Why did the scribes think that Jesus was blaspheming? (v7)
    - i. Which is easier to do – forgive sin or miracle-healing? Why?
  
    - ii. What was Jesus' purpose in performing the healing? Who does Jesus claim himself to be? (vv9-11)
  
    - iii. What was the reaction of the crowd? (v12) Did the crowd truly understand what was going on before their very eyes?

**B. Jesus calls Levi (2:13-17)**

1. Where does Jesus go next? (v13) Why does the crowd follow him?
  
2. Who does Jesus call? (v14) What is his reaction when Jesus calls him?

3. Levi threw a banquet for Jesus and invited many “sinners”. This resulted in a criticism from the scribes and Pharisees (vv15-17).
  - a. What was this criticism?
  - b. What was Jesus’ response? (v17)
  
4. Verses 1-12 point out that Jesus performs miracles to substantiate his claim to be able to forgive sins. Verses 13-17 point to the purpose of Jesus’ ministry, to be a physician to the sick (v17). Who would you conclude Jesus to be?

### ***Discipleship Pointers***

**Jesus has authority to forgive sins and reconcile sinners to God because he is truly God the Son.**

- When Jesus announced that the paralytic’s sin is forgiven, this is an act of reconciliation between the paralytic and God, and the central message of Jesus’ ministry, to reconcile sinners to God. Let Jesus be the reconciliation between you and God. Commit all aspects of your life to him.
- Eating with those who do not follow Moses’ laws was a controversial issue even in the early church (refer to Galatians 2). Are there practices in your spiritual walk that require rethinking; such that they might alienate non-believers or cause young Christians to stumble?

### ***Family/Group Moments***

- These stories are a great introduction to Jesus. The style of writing by Mark is fast and action oriented, much suited to the world we live in today. Use this to create your own narration of who Jesus is, and be ever ready to tell it to friends or family members who have yet to believe in Jesus.
- These stories about Jesus are easy to tell to children. Why not use this passage to discuss who Jesus is with them?

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