Mark: Background, Themes, the ending of Mark

Alright let’s get started. What we’ll do today is on move on to gospel number two, the second gospel, which we know is the gospel of Mark. So we’ll actually move through it quite a bit more quickly than we did through Matthew. As I said, as we move through the New Testament a number of times we’ll slow down and come down for a closer look. At other times we’ll have a perspective from above and move over and through documents rather quickly. Mark is one of those documents that we’ll move through rather quickly, but still I want to focus on what is distinctive about Mark? How is the gospel put together? What's it doing and what does it say about Jesus? How does the gospel of Mark present Jesus? How does he want us to understand him?

Addressing a future Exam: One word of announcement: you'll notice that next week is week five, so there is an exam coming up on the background material in the Gospels. You can look for that either next Friday or it may not be until Monday. I’ll be able to give you a better idea by Monday of next week, so you can look for exam number one coming up a week from today or the following Monday. I can’t remember what specific day that is. That means also that there is an extra credit review session/discussion session. I said that the way one way you can earn extra credit in this class is to be there for review/discussion sessions that will basically coincide with board exams. I just want to make this clear for those of you that the with ASC, Academic Support Center, connection with them there will be other study sessions for review sessions but those are separate from this class. Those do not count for extra credit. The only sessions that count for extra credit will be the four sections that I will designate and I’ll tell you more about that on Monday but there'll be one of those next week as well an extra credit review agenda depending
on what you want to do. They can use it to review for the exam--that is usually what happens, or to discuss anything related to the classroom material or New Testament but usually if it ends up being a review session for the exam about that will be the thing that is available for extra credit. Therefore you'll get extra credit for how many ever you show up at that. So if you only get one good extra credit for that again I remind you that extra credit does not show up in the exam it will show up the end of the semester in your final grade. So I'll be announcing more about that on Monday as well but there will be an extra credit session next week. You will get more information about that.

Alright let's open with prayer then we'll look at the gospel of Mark. Father, thank you for the weekends, and I pray that we'll find time to rejuvenate and at the same time perhaps catch up in some reading and whatever else we have to do. Lord, I pray now that you'll help us to focus our attention for this class period on the book of Mark. Let us be able to hear it as perhaps it would've been heard, read and understood in its first century context but to be able to bridge the gap to the 21st century and to hear it as your word to us today. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Very briefly for your review, we just finished looking at the gospel of Matthew. We’ve looked a little bit at Matthew's distinct portrayal of Jesus. As I said, it may have been helpful in some ways if the church would've just had one grand gospel of Jesus and combined all four Gospels to give us all the information in one place. Interestingly, the church allowed four very separate and different Gospels to stand because they all have something unique to say about who Jesus is. When you look at Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus, what would you say is unique about the way Matthew portrays Jesus? If you saw a question like this on an exam or something like that, what would you answer? What's so unique about the way Matthew presents Jesus so far? What did Mathew seem to emphasize? How did he portray Jesus as what or who? As a teacher, remember the five blocks of discourse? Matthew wants to portray Jesus as a teacher.

[Student answers.]
That's a very important one, as the Messiah, son of David, but Matthew went on to emphasize Jesus is not only the son of David or Messiah for Jews but also for Gentiles as well. That’s a very key theme in Matthew; along with Jesus as teacher, Jesus is the son of David, the Messiah, in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. He's Messiah and son of David; not just for Jews but for Gentiles as well. Anything else? How else does Matthew portray Jesus? As the new Moses, in the same way Moses led and delivered his people out of Egypt and rescued them; in the same way, Jesus comes as a new Moses, as one greater than Moses to rescue and deliver his people. I think there's one other title we looked at or distinctive feature. He is a teacher. He's the Messiah, the son of David for Jews and Gentiles. He's a new Moses; one who comes and delivers his people. He’s the one who fulfills the Old Testament. Jesus is the climax of the entirety of the New Testament. All the New Testament stories, themes and motifs all find their climax and fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Then I think we said Jesus is also portrayed as the son of God, one who stands in the unique relationship with the Father. So, those are the themes that Matthew particularly emphasizes as he paints a portrait of Jesus Christ.

Now, what we’ll do today is in addition to looking at the main message and purpose of Mark and unique features of Mark, we want to be alert to: How does Mark portray Jesus? What does Mark choose to emphasize about Jesus that may not necessarily be present in Matthew? Although, there are some overlaps as well in the way that Mark and Matthew treat Jesus. Starting with Mark, the first question asked about the gospel number two or the second gospel is: Who is the author? What you might say is that’s rather easy, it’s Mark because the Bible says it’s “The Gospel according to Mark.” Remember we said that the attribution of authorship to the four Gospels really came with the later church. When Mark originally wrote his gospel, he did not start with the Gospel according to Mark, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He didn't write “the Gospel according to Mark” that was put there by the later church. However, it is meant to reflect I think what is a reliable tradition and a reliable understanding and indication of who the author of it was.

The primary source of our understanding or one of the main sources of our
understanding is a statement by an individual named Papias. Papias, an individual who knew very early on, not long after the formation of the New Testament, and wrote that “Mark was the interpreter of Peter.” So Mark's Gospel is meant at some level to reflect Peters’ preaching and teaching. Mark was an associate of Peter. He’s also mentioned in some of Paul's letters; he’s apparently an associate of Paul as well. So Mark was an associate of Paul and an associate of Peter and perhaps Peters’ interpreter. He’s summarizing at some level and emphasizing what it was that Peter taught and preached.

Why was the gospel of Mark written? I debated whether I should start with this. It would probably be best to save it to the end after we’ve looked at the distinct features of Mark, but it might help us to see the distinct features of Mark if we had an understanding already of the purpose of Mark. Interestingly too, there are a number of church fathers and early church leaders--church fathers are those church leaders that lived from the second to approximately the fourth century A.D. So, roughly up until two or three hundred years after the writing of the New Testament, a number of church fathers seem to associate the book of Mark, the gospel of Mark, with the city of Rome. So most likely Mark is probably addressing a church or churches in the first century. Probably in most cities there would not have been one church; there would've been smaller house churches especially a city the size of Rome. Whether they got together on occasions or not is possible. I’m not sure, but most likely Mark is probably addressing a group of Christians, a church, or house churches in the city of Rome who are struggling. If you remember, Nero, not too long after the gospel Mark is written or about the same time Nero as the Emperor wreaked havoc on Christians and treated them rather cruelly. Christians had a rather hard go of it in the city of Rome, and Mark is probably addressing Christians who are struggling with living out their faith in the hostile environment of Rome. Whether he was addressing Christians who were actually undergoing persecution by Nero is uncertain, but perhaps Mark is addressing Christians or a church living in Rome who are struggling living out their faith in the hostile environment in Rome.

Now, Mark is going to write basically to encourage them to show them that their
struggling. What he’s going to do is show them is the fact that their suffering and struggling is nothing less than at the heart of the gospel. The fact that they are suffering and struggling is basically following the exact same path that Jesus Christ went on as well. So Mark's Gospel is very pastoral. Mark isn't just writing here’s a life of Christ just in case you're interested. Mark is trying to portray Christ and Christ’s life in a way that will address his readers who are struggling with their faith with following Christ in this hostile environment in the city of Rome. Now, Mark writes to encourage them by showing them and demonstrating that it is how Christ’s life was one of suffering and so his readers should expect nothing less.

In fact, the way the gospel of Mark is put together; you'll notice in your notes that it can be divided into three parts. The first 13 verses of Mark are the introduction. They introduce you to the main characters. They introduce you to what the book is about. The rest of the gospel, starting verse 14 into chapter 8 and about verse 30, the entirety of that section of Mark is basically devoted to the ministry of Christ. It just gives you an account of the things that Christ did, and basically the one word that kind of characterizes Christ’s ministry in these chapters is that Christ is triumphant.

I was at a lecture the other day for a candidate for the Biblical Studies department and he showed a number of slides of ancient paintings and portraits of the gospel of Mark, and the gospel Mark was almost always associated with a lion. Often in the first early centuries of the church the four Gospels were often associated with different animals. John was an eagle, and Mark was associated with lion that reflects the first eight chapters of Mark where Jesus is portrayed as triumphant. There's a strong emphasis in this section on Christ’s deity. We’ll see that in just a moment. Jesus performs miracles, he heals people, Jesus forgives someone’s sins and someone says, “No one but God can forgive sins.” So Jesus is portrayed as triumphant. Which this lecture I was at suggested that's why the lion is often associated with the gospel of Mark.

However, starting in chapter 8 verse 31 the gospel takes a drastic turn. Starting with chapter 8 verse 31 to the end of the gospel, the emphasis becomes Jesus suffering and his
eventual death. What is unique and interesting about this outline? Just look at it on your notes, the division of the gospel, what do you note that's kind of interesting about it? What stands out to you in the way Mark was structured? The two main sections Jesus ministry where he’s triumphant and the rest of it are of equal length. Another way of saying that is about half of Mark's Gospel is devoted to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, so much so, that one scholar said that Mark was basically a passion narrative with an extended introduction trying to highlight the fact that Mark emphasizes the suffering and death of Jesus Christ in disproportion to the amount the other Gospels do. Almost half of Mark's Gospel is devoted to the death and the suffering of Jesus Christ. Starting with chapter 8:31 Jesus begins his march toward Jerusalem, and it's all about his suffering and predictions of his suffering, the fact that he would die. Then, finally, it narrates Jesus’ death in the latter chapters of Mark. Nearly half of the gospel is devoted to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Why do you think that might be? Given what we said about the purpose, why do you think Mark did that? Again you can start to see the gospel writers are not just narrating history. Yes, I think they’re historical, but they're putting together the information in a way that will communicate their theological perspective on Christ. Why might, given the purpose we talked about, Mark devote half of the gospel to the passion, suffering and death of Christ? Right, for Christians who are struggling and perhaps suffering at the hands of Rome to some degree for their faith, Mark would be demonstrating that that's part and parcel of what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus himself suffered. In fact, the two halves of the gospel are both necessary. Mark narrates them both, so that we might say Jesus’ triumph came through suffering. So Mark's readers would triumph as well, but they must go the path of suffering. Even the way Mark has structured his gospel by devoting half of it to the passion, suffering and death of Christ; he's trying to say something to his readers about how they should look at their suffering as well.

Another key theme in the gospel of Mark is that Mark, although it's not the only theme or the main theme, presents Jesus as bringing about or inaugurating a new exodus.
Where he gets that is back in the Old Testament prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah although all throughout his book he presents God's salvation of Israel, and remember, Israel is in exile for their sins and for disobedience. The prophet Isaiah tells the Israelites that God will intervene to deliver them, save them, bring them back and restore them as his people. Interestingly, more than any other prophet Isaiah portrays that deliverance and rescue as a new exodus like the old one back in the book of Exodus. In the same way, God rescued his people under Moses. In the same way, he rescued them from bondage to Egypt. Remember that the Israelites were under foreign bondage and oppression in Egypt. In the same way God delivered them and brought them to the land, God would do that in another, a new and greater Exodus in the future. Now what Mark wants you to understand is Jesus is inaugurating that new exodus from the book of Isaiah. That new exodus, salvation and deliverance that Isaiah promised God would bring is now here; Jesus is finally bringing that about. We saw that theme was present in Matthew as well. Matthew did present Jesus as the new Moses delivering his people from exile, but Mark does that as well. Mark emphasizes also that Jesus is fulfilling this prophetic expectation from Isaiah of a new exodus. Where would God rescue his people, bring about a new creation, bring about their salvation and redemption, and now, Jesus Christ was fulfilling and accomplishing that.

One of the key verses in Mark that you need to be aware of, whether it’s the main verse of Mark and that's why I call it “a” key verse and not necessarily “the” key verse. It seems to capture how Mark wants to present Jesus and may encapsulate and summarize Mark's primary view of Jesus. It’s found in chapter 10 in the suffering section, chapter 10 and verse 45. So Mark 10 in verse 45 summarizes and says, “for the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” In fact, this verse may reflect, now you have to go back to the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah also talks about, not only a new exodus, but this suffering servant motif in Isaiah 53. You remember that text “all we like sheep have gone astray.” That's all in the context of this suffering servant that would suffer on behalf of Israel. Now, Jesus is being portrayed as that, so this verse 10:45 “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life up in
“death as a ransom for the many” may summarize at least one of Marks’ key emphases about Jesus Christ, that he is the suffering servant. He is the one who comes to suffer for his people, and that fits very well, as we saw, Marks’ purpose to address Christians suffering and struggling to live out their faith in the hostile environment of Rome. Now Jesus is portrayed as that suffering servant from Isaiah who comes to give his life as a ransom for many, so remember that Mark 10:45 as a key verse for understanding Mark's portrayal of Jesus Christ.

That’s a little bit about the how the gospel is put together, but I want to focus more specifically like we did in Matthew. What are some of the key themes of Mark? What does he emphasize besides the new exodus from Isaiah that we saw Jesus as suffering or an emphasis on his death--his suffering? What else does Mark emphasize that you don't find emphasized in the other Gospels or not to the same extent? Again, we saw that Matthew presents Jesus as the new Moses. He presents him as a teacher. He presents him as the son of David and the Messiah for Jew and Gentile, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the old covenant Scriptures. How does Mark present Jesus? The first thing is along with this theme of suffering; it would be incorrect to only focus on his suffering alone because Mark does devote half of his gospel to Jesus’ ministry where Jesus is portrayed as triumphant and victorious. The first thing to say about Mark, more than any other gospel is he seems to maintain and emphasize a balance between Jesus humanity and his deity. Mark wants to portray Jesus as both divine yet at the same time a human being. That fits perfectly with Mark's goal to show Jesus as both triumphant as God, but he's also a human being who suffers for his people. That fits his message to demonstrate to the readers that they would triumph, but they must go in the path of suffering first of all addressing Christians’ suffering and struggling with their faith in the hostile environment of Rome.

Mark portrays Jesus in a balance between his humanity and his deity. There's plenty of emphasis on Jesus’ deity. For example, one of the clearest indications of this is very early on in the gospel in the chapter two and verse five. This is one of the miracles that Jesus performs early on in the gospel. This is where Jesus is teaching in a house, and these
individuals have someone who is a paralytic, who’s crippled. They carry him in on a mat because it's so crowded that they can’t get him in house, so they carry him on the roof and lower him down and Jesus addresses him and says, this is chapter 2 verse 5, “when Jesus saw their faith he said paralytic, the paralyzed man, ‘son your sins are forgiven.’ Some of the scribes,” remember the scribes we talked about those experts who were responsible for recording and studying the law, Old Testament, “are sitting there questioning in their hearts why does this man speak in this way, referring to Jesus, it is blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Well, they got that part right. By forgiving sins Jesus is taking upon himself a prerogative that belongs only to God, and the scribes correctly understood that in forgiving sins he claims to be God. Mark has this balance between Jesus’ deity, as the one who like God alone, can forgive sins. Then he'll turn around and say, but the Son of Man came not be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. That balance between Jesus’ humanity and his deity fits perfectly what Mark is trying to do in addressing readers who are suffering and struggling to live out their faith in the city of Rome.

There may be a couple of other things that I need to emphasize. One of those is that Mark may also, though I don't think its main thing he's doing, but he may also be reacting to this idea in the first century world of what was often known as a divine man, that is, a conception of Jesus as some kind of supernatural miracle worker. Perhaps, Mark also wants to tone that down by showing that no, Jesus is not just a supernatural miracle worker, some divine man, he's also a suffering human being as well.

Furthermore, another thing I need to emphasize is that Mark often portrays Jesus as claiming to be the Son of Man. The question is what did he mean by that? In fact, throughout all the Gospels in a sense that will broaden out, and we’ll talk a little bit about all the Gospels, but Mark in numerous places refer to Jesus as the Son of Man or has Jesus calling himself, the Son of Man. What does he mean by that? Usually, what we've done and there's a long tradition of associating Son of Man and Son of God, so that Son of God refers to Jesus’ deity the fact that he's God. He stands in unique relationship with God, and Son of Man is a reference to Jesus’ humanity. How many of you have heard it that way? I've
always been taught that way. There are even a couple hymns we sing that indicate that. Again, Son of Man means Jesus is human being; Son of God refers to the fact that he was God.

That's only partially true. Son of Man, most likely that title Son of Man comes for the most part comes out of the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, particularly Daniel chapter seven. Listen to what Daniel says, “As I watched” first of all Daniel has a vision of four beasts--these four hideous looking beasts. The fifth thing he sees after he sees these four beasts, he sees something else, and here's what it is. He says, “and I watched and thrones were set in place and an ancient one” or the ancient of days, clearly God “took his throne; his clothing was as white as snow, his hair in his head like pure wool, his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed from his presence” etc. “The court sat in judgment and books were opened and I watched them because of the noise of the arrogant words of the horn from one of those beasts and I watched and the beast was put to death.” Then he says, “I watched and I saw one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven and he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him, to the Son of Man, was given dominion and glory in kingship that all peoples and nations and languages would serve him. His dominion is an everlasting one that shall never pass away and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.”

Now, I ask you, does that sound like a human being to you? This Son of Man who comes in the clouds of heaven and an eternal, everlasting kingdom. He can just go up to the throne of the Ancient of Days and receive an eternal everlasting kingdom. Does that sound like a mere human being to you? I would suggest that “Son of Man” is just as much a title of Jesus deity as it was his humanity. Sometimes Jesus could turn it around and say, yes, this Son of Man from Daniel 7; this exalted heavenly being from Daniel 7 sometimes he’s portrayed as suffering in the gospel of Mark. It was a word or phrase “Son of Man” was a title that Jesus’ uses. He could refer to the fact that he was in fact this Son of Man, this divine heavenly being who would receive an eternal kingdom from Daniel 7. Then he
could turn around and say the Son of Man is going to suffer and die. So, it's a phrase he could use often for his own purposes, but the point is, do not think that “Son of God” means deity and “Son of Man” the means humanity. It's not quite that easy. Son of Man from Daniel 7 is just as much a title of Jesus’ deity. Son of Man from Daniel 7 refers to that heavenly being who will receive an eternal kingdom that’s certainly more than just a title of his humanity.

Another interesting feature of Mark, the first one is a balance between Jesus’ humanity and deity which, as we've seen, fits Mark’s purpose very well; to encourage suffering, struggling Christians. Another interesting emphasis in Mark, that’s not exclusive to Mark but it’s certainly emphasized, is what has often been called the messianic secret or the secret Messiah. What I mean by that is: when you read through Mark numerous times you see that Jesus will do something and someone will say, “you are the Christ” or Jesus will ask someone, “who do you say that I am?” They’ll say, “you are the Christ”, and he'll say “don't go and tell anyone.” Why does Jesus do that? That's not a very good evangelistic strategy that they may get it right “yes, you're the Messiah” and then he says well don’t go telling anyone. I thought this news was to be spread to all the nations, and now Jesus goes around and tells people not to tell anyone who he is. Scholars call that “the Messianic Secret” or, I say, “the Secret Messiah” that Jesus is basically trying to keep it hush-hush. He doesn't want it spread.

Why do you think this is the case? Why would Jesus tell people not to tell everyone who he was? Okay, so part of it would be because the full understanding of who Jesus had not come, his is full Messiah-ship would not come until after his resurrection that would demonstrate the true nature of his Messiah-ship. Part of it was that he hadn't entered fully into his reign as Messiah until his death and resurrection. That is probably one reason. I think that's one of them.

Okay, probably to avoid misunderstanding, you’re right. To go back to some of the political history we looked at; most Jews’ conception of the Messiah would be one who was going to come and wipe out the Romans. Here’s our King who is going to rule with an
iron scepter. Didn't Isaiah chapter 9 say that, “unto us a son is born. A child is given. He will sit on his throne and rule forever.” Here is that Messiah who will rule over Israel's enemies meaning he's going to wipe out the Romans; but Jesus does not offer that kind of a kingdom. Jesus does not yet come as that kind of king. He comes first to suffer and die for the sins of the people.

One of the reasons might also have been, I think you're exactly right, Jesus Messiah-ship would not be fully understood until after his resurrection. To avoid misunderstanding and again if you go spreading the word around “here is Messiah” people might come for the wrong reason thinking here’s our deliverer who will basically unseat the Romans from their rule. For that reason Jesus would frequently tell people to remain silent, so as not to be misunderstood as to what kind of a Messiah he was, because he comes first and foremost to suffer and die for the sins of the people. That would be the already. Remember, “already but not yet”? The “not yet” is when he comes with the iron scepter to rule and set up his kingdom and defeat his enemies. The “already” or the first time Jesus comes to offer himself as the Messiah; he comes to suffer and die for the people.

Alright, another important theme, much like Matthew, in Mark there is an emphasis on disciples and discipleship, so there’s an emphasis on this group of followers that Jesus puts together who he will train and prepare to carry on his ministry. However, there’s an interesting twist in Mark. When you compare Mark and Matthew, Mark seems to portray the disciples in a little bit more negative light. The disciples in Mark are over and over again are portrayed as just not getting it. They’re obtuse. They misunderstand. They fail. They don't have faith. They just don't quite get it. The disciples are portrayed that way over and over again in Mark's Gospel against Matthew where they still have problems getting it sometimes, but when you compare the two it's not that Matthew portrays them in a better light, it's just that Mark seems to portray them in a lesser light than, for example, Matthew does. He has them misunderstanding. He has them just not getting it and not having much faith. Again, one could ask the question: why would Mark do that? Why would Mark portray the disciples and emphasize their failure to understand, their failure to get it and
their weakness and their lack of faith? Why would Mark do that?

Go back and think about the purpose why Mark's writing, the background of who Mark's writing to. In light of that why might Mark portray the disciples in a slightly more negative light? Again, they just don't get it. They don't understand. They fail to understand it. They don't believe. If the disciples closest to Jesus stumbled and struggled then certainly that is meant to encourage Mark's readers who likewise are struggling and may think that they’re failures in their faith and show them no, that even Jesus’ disciples struggled as well. So, even Mark’s portrayal of the disciples is probably meant to reflect the struggles that Mark’s readers are going through as well.

Another important theme in Mark is the emphasis on good news or Gospel. The very first verse opens with this at the beginning of the Gospel or the good news depending on what translation you have. Mark is the only one of the four Gospels to actually call his book good news or a Gospel. Now, that may not necessarily be a reference to the kind of literature but more the content. Mark is the first gospel and the only one of the four Gospels to call his book “good news” or a “Gospel.” Furthermore, Mark includes the word gospel, or a form of the word “Gospel” or “good news” seven times. Whereas, I think Matthew has it four times, and I can't remember, Luke might have it once or twice. Especially given the fact that Mark is so much shorter than the other Gospels, Mark includes that word seven times which suggests there’s something important about it.

Now, what is important about that word? We’ve taken that and made it a rather technical term. To us, the “gospel” means the message about Jesus Christ dying on the cross for my sins. I need to tell everyone, so they’ll believe in Jesus name and have eternal life and forgiveness of sins. That's certainly true, but what does Mark mean by that term? Where did he get it? There are two important backgrounds and you have to understand that goes back to our survey of the political and historical climate leading up to the New Testament. Even writers that would've been thoroughly Jewish, such as Matthew, in their thinking and orientation would not have escaped the influence of Roman rule and Greek language and culture. Even they would've been affected by it to some extent, and
sometimes I'm convinced an author in the New Testament will often use terminology that actually has a point of contact with both the Greco-Roman world and the readers and would also appeal to the Jewish world as well. The word “gospel” is a good example of that.

First of all, the word “gospel”, where Mark got it, the word “gospel” or good news was not just a Christian word that Mark or Paul or someone else made up. That word already occurs in the Old Testament, and it goes back to the prophet, which one did you guess? The prophet Isaiah or you say Isaiah.

I always have to explain myself. I went to school and did my post-graduate work in Scotland, and that's how they pronounced Isaiah. It just stuck with me. I still say it that way, so I'm sure that’s the correct way if that’s the way they say it in Scotland. It has to be right.

Remember, we said Isaiah talks about a new exodus where God, like he did in the original Exodus, is taking the people out of Egypt. He portrays Jesus as inaugurating a new exodus. He talked about a new creation. God is restoring his people and entering into a new covenant. That is the good news; the gospel that the book of Isaiah talks about. What Mark’s doing by using the word “gospel” or “good news,” isn't just a new term; he's showing that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of restoration and salvation. This is a term that goes back to the Old Testament, and by using “good news” he's doing something similar to what Matthew did by showing that Jesus is the fulfillment. This good news is of deliverance and God's kingdom ruling over all things, the new creation and a new covenant with his people. That good news from Isaiah is now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, so I'm convinced the first readers of Mark would, when they heard the beginning of the gospel would've gone back to the beginning of Isaiah and said, “Okay now we understand what that is.” Now, the promised deliverance and restoration of God's people and God’s rule over his people and the entire earth is now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

However, we said that often times the New Testament authors would use vocabulary that had resonance in more than one world, not only the Jewish world and
literature, but also the Greco-Roman world, so for example the word(s) “good news” or “gospel” was also a word used in association with Emperor. For example the birth of the Emperor would be proclaimed as good news or the gospel using that same exact word(s). Other events surrounding what the Emperor did or something in connection with Emperor would be good news or the gospel. It's also possible, if these are Christian readers living in Rome, when they heard the “good news” this may be somewhat of a subversive claim that the gospel, now the true good news, is not associated with Caesar but of someone who asserts that it is the person of Jesus Christ. The true good news centers around not what Caesar does but centers around what Jesus Christ is now going to do and has done for his people. That word for Mark is an important one, but it is also, not only summarizes what his book is about, from the standpoint that it probably resonates with two different backgrounds, both the Jewish from Isaiah the prophet and also a Greco-Roman world of the good news associated with emperor or something to do with the emperor.

The last thing to look at in Mark is, but before we do, I want to talk a little bit about how Mark ends. Any questions on what Mark emphasizes? You can start to get a picture of what Mark’s doing. How he put his gospel together. What he’s trying to emphasize especially the themes of triumph, suffering, and how he's accomplished that through what he emphasizes.

I want to talk briefly about how Mark ends. If you open your Bible, virtually whatever translation you have, I would like to be able to skip this because it’s so overt, and you're confronted with it as soon as you get to the end of Mark that you wonder what is going on. Now, if you have a Bible and you open it to Mark Chapter 16 the very end. You'll note that the last few verses, almost the last chapter, are put in brackets in your Bible. Then almost all of them have a footnote under those brackets. Mine begins, this is verse nine of Mark chapter 16: “After he arose early in the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom he had cast out demons. But she went out and told those who had been with him while they were mourning and weeping but when they heard he was alive and that he had been seen by her they would not believe it. After this he appeared in
another form to two of them etc. etc.” You have this reference to Jesus appearing to different people starting Mary Magdalene. Then it ends in verses 19 and 20, so then “the Lord Jesus after he spoke to them was taken into heaven and he sat down at the right hand of God. Then they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by signs that accompanied them.” That's the end of the gospel. However that section that I just read to you, and I think in just about every English translation is put in brackets. Then it has a little footnote and says: “some of the best and oldest manuscripts do not have this ending.”

Now, what are we to make of that? Where did Mark end? In other words, if we take out the section in brackets here's how Mark ends. “So, they,” [referring to the women that go to the tomb after Jesus dies, he’s placed in the tomb.] Then all it says is: “the women go to the tomb and the on the next day,” Sunday, and it's empty. Then it says: “So they went out and fled from the tomb for terror and amazement seized them, and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid.” End of story. Now what kind of way is that to end the gospel? So the question is this ending you have in brackets in all your Bibles. Then a footnote somewhere that says this ending is not found in some of the oldest and best manuscripts. What are we to do? Where did Mark end? Did he end it at verse 8?

That’s a rather strange way to end the gospel with women going into the tombs and then because of fear they don't tell anybody. I mean is that a way to end the gospel? Did Mark write these verses, 9 to 20? Is that the correct ending? Certainly, we have to have an ending. Certainly we can’t end with these of these women running out of fear and not telling anyone. You have to have closure. You have to have to Jesus appearing to people and you have to have the message spread that Jesus is raised. Then Jesus ascending to heaven and you have to have the gospel spreading like you do in Matthew with the great commission.

But, think about it this way; isn't it as possible that this ending was written by a well-meaning scribe that thought that very thing. Think how can Mark end with verse eight? That's not a proper way to conclude the gospel. It ends in defeat with these women,
because of fear, not telling anyone. They run away in fear and don't spread the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. What way is that to end the gospel? So, most likely a well-meaning scribe, as Mark was being copied and transmitted for later generations, probably looked at Mark and said that's not a proper way to end this gospel. I'm going to give it a proper conclusion, so he wrote 9 through 20 that includes Mary telling people, Jesus appearing to people, the message spreading and Jesus ascending to heaven.

Well, that raises an interesting issue. How do we account for the way Mark ended his gospel? Why would he end that way? Some have suggested, Mark actually did write a conclusion, but it got lost somewhere. Whether the dog ate it or someone ripped it off. What happened? Something happened to Mark’s ending. It actually had an ending, but it got lost after verse 8. That's possible, but there's simply no evidence that actually happened. The only evidence we have is that the gospel apparently ends at verse eight. We can ask, “Why would Mark have ended his gospel like that?” Why doesn't he end it like Matthew did with Jesus appearing to the disciples and saying, “go and make disciples of all nations and I will be with you to the end of the age”? Or Luke’s reference to Jesus ascending to heaven and appearing to different people after his resurrection. Mark has none of that. Mark ends with failure. Mark ends with the failure of these women to go out because they're afraid. They don't go out and do anything. Why would Mark end that way? I can't imagine that Mark thought Jesus didn’t appear to anyone.

I can't imagine that Mark didn't know what happened especially if he’s associated with Peter and was Peter’s interpreter. I can't believe that Mark did not know that Jesus appeared to people and the message got out and Jesus ascended and he told his disciples to spread the gospel to all nations. Certainly, Mark knew something about that, but why do you think he ends the gospel the way he does? Why does he end so abruptly with the failure of these women to go, and it’s not the fact they’re women. Why does he end with the failure of his followers to go out because of fear? They're afraid, so it ends they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. End of story. Maybe he was tired of writing, just stopped there, and forgot to conclude it. Why do you think he would make that point about this kind
of gratuitous picture of Christians who are afraid? Again, think in terms of the overall purpose of Mark. Why would he emphasize that Christians are afraid and do not spread the gospel because they are fearful to do so, emphasizing their failure to do that? Again, think in terms of what's going on in Mark. What did we say was the overall purpose? Who is Mark writing to and how might this fit that?

Isn't that most likely the situation the readers of Mark are in? If they are struggling and feel that they are failures then this is simply a way of addressing his readership. In the same way the events surrounding Jesus resurrection relate, his followers still failed and didn't get it. It's another way of encouraging the struggling community that Mark is addressing. However, I would suggest it's not only failure. If you back up to verse six and seven, as the women approach the tomb they find this figure, this brilliant shining angelic type figure in the tomb, and the figure says to them, “do not be alarmed.” It's interesting as it’s what they didn't do. “Do not be alarmed. You're looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has been raised. He is not here. Look there's the place where he lay, but go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you.” Interestingly, there's still an emphasis on Jesus’ presence and his promise as if Mark wants to balance the failure of his disciples with the promise and presence of Jesus. That despite the failure of the disciples God's promise will still prevail. God’s promises will prevail, and Jesus still promises his presence. It’s as if he's still waiting for them in Galilee in the gospel. So it does end in failure because again this is reflecting the situation of Mark’s readers. They feel like failures that are struggling with their faith and struggling living their lives in Rome. Now, Mark portrays the disciples even at his resurrection in the same way, but at the same time balances that with the promise of his presence and the fact that God's promises would indeed be fulfilled.

Any questions about Mark? Some of your Bibles may have a shorter ending to that consists of only a verse or two. Same thing, some manuscripts of Mark don't have the long one; they have the shorter one. It was probably an attempt to give Mark a proper conclusion, but I'm suggesting Mark may have deliberately ended at verse 8 because of the
reason he's writing.

Have a good weekend. We’ll see you next week.

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