

# PCF Study Guide - Mark's Gospel

*This study guide is an accompaniment to our Sunday sermon series to give the opportunity for all of us to truly study Mark's gospel from cover to cover over the coming few months. Please do use this alongside your Mark's Gospel journal so that you can continue to take notes and refer to previous weeks as you go!*

*The passages are broken down into weekly sections. Sometimes it is a short enough passage that you could do this in one sitting, other times you might want to study over 2 or more occasions as your schedule allows. Allow at least 15 mins to do this study.*

*This guide can be used for personal study or together with others! Why not use this as a chance to deepen relationship with others in our church family? Go for a coffee and tackle one of the week's together! My suggested approach below is amended from the Discovery Bible Study resources. You can access the full guide here (<https://www.dbsguide.org/>)*

## 1. Pause

In quiet prayer take a moment to invite God to speak and remind you of His presence. Remember - This is not an academic exercise, it is an opportunity to grow closer to the living God!

## 2. Reflect

Think back to what you have read before, what you have noticed and noted down in previous days/weeks. Allow this to form your time of prayer.

## 3. Read

Read through the introduction to this week's passage, then read the passage slowly. Afterwards, see how well you can recall the events of the story you have just read, without looking at the words on the page. (This is an exercise in taking in the big picture).

## 4. Look

Read again. What do we learn here about God, Jesus and/or the plans of God?

## 5. Look again

Re-read and consider what this passage reveals about humanity. How do people interact with Jesus? What does Jesus speak into or confront?

## 6. Look inside

What does this reveal inside us? What encourages or challenges us?

## 7. Look out

What does this passage mean for those we interact with that don't know Jesus? How can I share this story or the message of it in my daily life?

**8. Finally, respond.** Commit to take to heart what you have reflected on, and note down what stays with you. Finish in prayer to invite God to equip you, to comfort where we need comforting, strengthening where we feel a conviction to change, and giving boldness to share.

## **Weekly Passages**

### **W/C 12th Jan | Mark 1:16-43 (Jesus ministry begins)**

In this short section we read of the calling of the Disciples, driving out an impure spirit and healing many in the crowds who come to him, Jesus ministry really does begin with a bang! There is a lot to be said for the authority and presence of God that Jesus carries in this opening section. He calls disciples and they drop everything to follow, He calls out an impure spirit (in the temple of all places!) and it has to respond. He heals many of sickness and disease as the large crowds appear. There is power in Jesus proclamation and we will see this demonstrated more and more as we read each week.

### **W/C 19th Jan | Mark 2:13-22 (Jesus begins to be opposed)**

We are only into chapter 2 and already Jesus actions are causing a stir! He is eating with tax collectors and his disciples aren't observing the expected Jewish custom of fasting. Both of these actions alert the Pharisees, who have been deeply conscious of the external activities of God's people. In fact, they believed that careful observance of the laws was the very thing that would usher in the Messiah's return. With that in mind, Jesus' behaviour reveals much about their motivations and assumptions.

### **W/C 26th Jan | Mark 3:7-35 (Jesus popularity increases!)**

The crowds are gathering in larger numbers, and they are following Jesus expecting to proclaim him as King. They would even be willing to take up arms to overthrow Roman rule. Jesus silences the spirit who shouts out his royal status, and acts in a way which even confuses his relatives. With all of this attention, we see plainly that the crowds and leaders try to make Jesus fit into their boxes and begin to accuse him when he doesn't match their expectations. He remains unwavering in His mission all through this. As we read this section of scripture it might be worth considering whether we might find ourselves among His relatives in this story. How easily can we begin to form an image of Jesus that fits our expectations of Him, rather than what is revealed of him on the pages of scripture.

### **W/C 2nd Feb | Mark 4:1-25 (Jesus teaches the crowds)**

On Sunday we reflected on the parable which comes after this passage, but this week we take some time to reflect on 3 other parables Jesus teaches the crowds. Parables are the primary way that Jesus uses to teach about the Kingdom of God - God's rule and God's ways. Unlike a lecture (or a 3 point sermon!), each parable instead uses story to help us to understand something deeper about the ways of God and draw us into the story. Each parable contains a powerful message and parables are an important teaching style which Jesus uses. He employs it both positively and critically. At times parables expand our vision for God's Kingdom. On other occasions he uses them to unpick the wrong expectations that the crowds have both of His coming and of the Kingdom of God.

***Note: We move slightly out of sync with the Sunday passage for the next few weeks now, but in doing so we'll ensure that we can cover the whole of the Gospel.***

### **W/C 9th Feb | Mark 6:1-44 (Faith, Doubt and Provision)**

This section of scripture covers 3 significant moments. First we find that Jesus realises the people who knew him growing up don't have faith in him and he struggles to demonstrate his power amongst them. Immediately after, we read of the beheading of John the Baptist and the raw destructive power available in the hands of Herod as he hosts a gluttonous feast and executes John in the middle of the multi-day party. There is much we can reflect on in the big picture of these stories together. As we consider the wrestling of those who question him... perhaps Jesus seems to human? As we reflect on the raw power of Rome, some struggle to see how Jesus could truly be the one to rule over even Herod and the power of Rome. The Christian witness, both in the times of Jesus and in current day, can too readily embrace raw worldly power as the

means to “achieving” Kingdom values or national ethics. However, Jesus does not offer that path to us here.

There is wonderful resolution in the third section to our readings this week. Jesus demonstrates what Godly power looks like, as he feasts with the crowds through miraculous provision of food. He truly does have authority unlike any other!

### **W/C 16th Feb | Mark 7:1-8:33 (What is unclean?)**

You might want to read this section of scripture over 2 sittings, but they belong together and when we read them together we gain a fuller understanding of each section. Try to follow the thread through these summaries.

The Pharisees challenge Jesus and his disciples again - this time because they haven't fulfilled the laws around cleaning their hands. In this interaction we gain an insight into the problem that Jesus identifies in the religion of the day. It's all about who is in and who is out, with great importance on the externals and very little importance given to the internals. “These people honour me with their lips but their hearts are far from me”.

In the next section Jesus encounters a woman who is - by nature of her ethnicity - “unclean”. On surface reading, this feels an uncomfortable dialogue with a Greek woman desperate for Jesus' help, and Jesus appears to echo the sentiments of the Pharisees in the dialogue - and suggest she is not a child of God because of where she is from. She plays along with the back and forth and Jesus sees that she truly has faith in him and heals her daughter. What was going on in this section? The next 2 events help unfold this further.

Jesus then travels to a Gentile region (a nation of people who were not allowed into the Temple by nature of their origins) and begins to teach and heal those who are not classed as “children of God” by nature of the fact they are from the Decapolis - a Greek region.

Finally, we have the feeding of the four thousand. Jesus is ministering to a crowd who do not have Jewish origins. This is a miraculous feeding of this group of folks who were “out” and “unclean”. There are some commentators who suggest that the number of baskets left over in this miracle (7 left over) is also significant - heralding the fact that Jesus coming is not just for one nation, but for all of creation (7 = calls us back to the 7 days of creation in Genesis 1).

We see therefore that Jesus is working to reveal to his Disciples that God's Kingdom is not contained within the walls of Jerusalem but the coming of Jesus is for the whole world.

### **W/C 23rd Feb | Mark 9:14-Mark 10:16 (who is in and who is out)**

We take up the reading this week which follows after the greatest revelation of Jesus true nature - the Transfiguration and Peter's proclamation. Jesus is the Messiah, fully God and fully human. Now that the Disciples, and we as readers, know this to be true, Mark's Gospel now moves slowly towards the climax of Jesus journey in the Gospel - which is the cross. There are some challenging moments in this section of scripture, and it might be worth reading over more than one sitting. A key theme is that people continue to miss the point about why Jesus has come and he increasingly calls out their unbelief.

See phrases: “If you can heal”. “We told them to stop healing in your name”, “When is it ok to divorce”, “keep the children back”.

All these questions seek to determine - who is in, how do we stay in the good books, and who isn't worthy?

In the centre of this section of scripture Jesus gives a stark warning about causing people who believe in Him to stumble (9:42-50). Many read this passage of scripture in isolation as a warning to teachers to teach right doctrine (which still has some validity and this point is made by Paul in His letters). However, in light of the context around the passage, it would seem Jesus is primarily

hammering home the point that faith in Him is the only way to be saved. There is no other way to gain God's approval or draw lines about who is in and who is out. And woe to Him who tries to convince someone with genuine faith that they ought to redraw lines based on their own merit and judge who has yet to make the mark. This remains a challenge to us as followers of Jesus, in this divisive time of history.

### **W/C 2nd Mar | Mark 10:46-52 (Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus)**

In this shorter reading, you might want to return to the same story on multiple occasions and prayerfully engage with the passage. It is an encounter with Christ which is worth meditating upon and even, if you feel comfortable doing this, visualise yourself in the story. Consider the perspective of the crowds and from the perspective of Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus prayer has been prayed by some traditions on a daily, moment-by-moment basis since the fourth Century. "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, *a sinner*." (Italics for added words not originally in the text). Perhaps this could become your prayer in the little moments of each day?

Hear Jesus question to you in each day - what do you want me to do for you?

### **W/C 9th Mar | Mark 11 (Jesus arrives in Jerusalem)**

In this well known section of the Gospels - often read out on Palm Sunday - Jesus enters Jerusalem to great celebration and fanfare. Shortly after His arrival, his authority and intentions are questioned yet again. Jesus remains true to His mission, whether being celebrated by the crowds, or witnessing the corruption of temple taxes, or being questioned by the religious rulers. The outworking of all of this is that the leaders fear Jesus even more, and commit to their plan to kill Jesus in the midst of these events.

Take time to really sit with the reality of these events sitting back to back. All of what we are reading this week occurred in the space of 24 hours.

### **W/C 16th Mar | Mark 12**

The religious rulers are now set on killing Jesus, and at the beginning of our reading this week the parable of the Tenants is Jesus way of calling out the religious leaders plan in front of the crowds. They are the Tenants, He is the beloved son. What follows is a last series of attempts to undermine Jesus in front of the crowds so that the leaders can justify grabbing him there and then! Herodians and Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law all take their turn to try to catch him out.

From v35-40 Jesus then takes some time to respond, and warns against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

V41-44 is a powerful example of hypocrisy on display, as leaders demonstrate their wealth in the giving of offerings, while a poor widow gives everything she has. Some commentators suggest that even the fact of this widow being in a situation of poverty is itself a visible demonstration of the religious leaders neglecting what truly matters - to care for the widow, orphan and stranger. Much time can be spent analysing the different traps set before Jesus in the readings this week - and we can make many parallels to following Christ today. What is worth highlighting at birdseye view is that Jesus unsettles the religious elite both on the left and on the right and provides a path forward even on thorny topics that were hotly debated at the time (e.g. taxes to Rome!).

If you have time, on a separate occasion read through 12:41-44 on its own. Imagine you are seated with Jesus as He watches the demonstrative giving of offerings at the Temple. Perhaps even allow yourself to imagine being a bystander - likely very impressed (I probably would be!) as the famous, accomplished and wealthy show everyone in their midst their achievements and great wealth. Then, reflect on where Jesus' attention is resting. On the quiet, sacrificial gift of the widow. Sit with Jesus own judgement of the situation and allow Him to speak to you through it.

## **W/C 23rd Mar | Mark 13 (The Destruction of the Temple)**

Mark shifts writing style at points in this chapter in a way that can easily confuse us! It is known as “apocalyptic” - using symbolic imagery (as opposed to literal description) to communicate a deeper prophetic meaning. Apocalyptic writing often portrays judgement using dramatic language to hit home the seriousness of the events to come or current events. In this apocalyptic section of Mark, Jesus prophesies the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (which occurs in 70AD) as judgement on God’s people who have rejected him. Consider the contrast between the disciples in the first few verses marvelling at human constructions and creativity, and Jesus own judgement of the same spaces.

In this chapter Jesus does also point towards His own return and references the fact that His rescue will come even as judgement is proclaimed. I’m sure in AD70 the disciples were asking the question “is this the moment Jesus will return?!” As the world around them seemed to be crumbling. People likewise ask the same question through these crisis moments all through history since then.

Mark 13:32-37 provides a helpful framework as we live as followers of Jesus in our time in history. No-one knows the hour of Jesus return, but we must remain alert and live as though he might return even as we read this text in this moment!

Whether we live to see Christ’s return or not in our time in history, we must remain alert and close to Jesus in our daily lives. Reflect on this passage both within the context of Jesus sharing it 2000 years ago, and within our own context today.

## **W/C 30th Mar | Mark 14:12-72 (The Last Supper, Gethsemane and Jesus’ Trial)**

As we approach Easter weekend, it is fitting that our readings this week occur in the lead up to Jesus death and resurrection. If you can, take the Last Supper, Gethsemane, and Jesus arrest and trial as three separate sittings, to allow time to really dwell in the reality of Jesus’ last meal with his friends, his wrestling with the Father in the garden, and his betrayal and trial amongst the religious leaders.

## **A Final Note**

Well done!! You now have a journaled Mark’s Gospel. Over Easter why not take some time to read through your notes and highlight the key learnings or places you have been aware of God speaking to you as you have studied scripture this term.