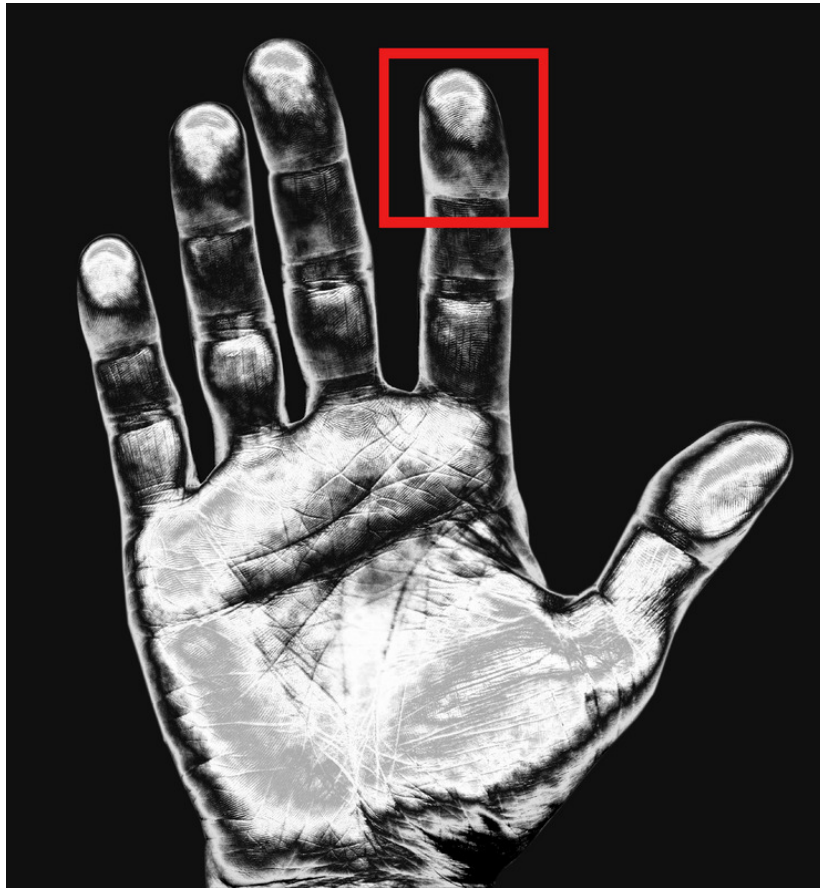


JESUS



Who Are You?

Mark Chapters 1-8

Jesus—Who Are You?

This week we begin a new series on Mark, chapters 1-8. This series is called - 'Jesus, Who Are You?' and it's an important question to ask. In fact there is no more important question to consider in all the world. As people have examined the identity of Jesus, many different answers have been reached. For some, Jesus was a blasphemer and a heretic. For others, Jesus was plain crazy. Others have suggested that Jesus was a great healer and miracle worker. And there are those who have concluded that Jesus was a religious prophet who came to bring enlightenment. Who do you say Jesus is?

Mark's gospel was written between 60-70AD. Early tradition suggests that the author Mark, relied on the apostle Peter to write down this record of Jesus' life. So as we examine Mark's gospel we're reading a very early and well attested document. Moreover, as we examine Mark 1-8, 'Jesus Who Are You?' – is the question that these chapters are precisely trying to answer for us. From the first sentence which is the narrators own voice, through to Peter's stunning confession about the identity of Jesus [8:29], understanding who Jesus really is, is what chapters 1-8 of Mark are all about.

The format of these studies

Part of the way we help each other grow as followers of Jesus is by meeting together to read the bible, discuss it and work out how it applies to our lives. But a good Growth Group relies on willingness and opportunity to share and discuss. Because of this, these studies take on a particular format.

Firstly, we want to encourage everyone to be reading the bible by themselves regularly. Therefore, part of the study each week will involve a section that won't be looked at within Growth Group. This section ('Personal Preparation') will cover the passage in more detail than you could possibly do when you meet. The Personal Preparation is broken up into bite-size chunks so that you can knock them over during the week in around 15 minute slots.

The questions we'll discuss as a group are the 'Group Discussion Questions'. This will give you more time as a group to discuss:

- those bits you found hard to understand
- the theme and thrust of the passage,
- how it applies to your life.

While you'll still be able to participate and benefit if you haven't done the preparation, both you, the group, and the leader who wants to guide healthy discussion, will benefit more from preparing beforehand.



Simply Christianity Seminars

In the week of 30 April—2 May, each of the growth groups are encouraged to host a 'simply christianity seminar', over coffee and desert.

This event is all about presenting the simple clear pure message of Christianity. It's an evening when we'll strip away the rituals, myths and dogmas to go back to Jesus himself.

This is an event for your friends, relatives or neighbours. It's all about inviting people you care about into a relaxed normal setting (ie. a home), letting them hear a short simple message and then opening it up for questions.

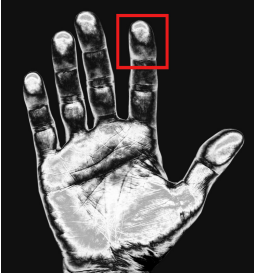
In preparation for this event—think of 3 people you might possibly be able to invite along. Write down their names:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In the first week of growth group you will be invited to share the 3 people you have chosen. Each week there is a suggested prayer point where you can pray for these 3 people.



Study 1: Jesus—The Good News Man

Mark 1:1-15

Personal Preparation 1

In this first study we are looking at only 15 verses. These first 15 verses are jam-packed full of information about the historical/biblical context for why Jesus starts his public life. It opens up our understanding for the rest of the book. So it's important for this week that we do some hard work on this passage.

Read Mark 1:1-15.

1. Mark begins with the statement, '*The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*' The gospel or 'good news' is all about Jesus. Jesus has come to bring something good for Israel and in fact for the whole world. What are the indications in the passage that this good news has been long expected?

When verse 2, says '*written in Isaiah the Prophet*' the quote given is not just from Isaiah. The quote is an amalgamation of: Exodus 23:20; Isaiah 40:3; and Malachi 3:1. Exodus 23:20 speaks of the time of salvation when God promised to send his messenger (an angel) to lead his people through the wilderness to enjoy God's presence and God's promised land. The Isaiah passage speaks of a future time of salvation that takes up the language of that first Exodus experience. **Read Isaiah 40:1-11.**

Notice in Isaiah 40:3 - it mentions the desert (the same setting for Exodus). Where do you find John the Baptist and Jesus? - in the desert. Notice in Isaiah 40:9 – this promised future exodus out of the wilderness is described as 'good news' - a gospel!

2. Mark's introduction links the arrival of Jesus with passages like Isaiah 40 and Exodus 23. With this understanding, what you expect to happen for the nation of Israel, now that the good news has arrived?

Isaiah 40:10 speaks of God's future rule, when his sovereign power will be shown to all. This verse is part of a long line of Old Testament passages that speak of God's kingly rule. Another important verse is 2 Samuel 7:12. These are the Lord's words to King David, '*...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.*'

3. Given the Old Testament promises for the good news of God's kingship, how would a Jew in the 1st century AD take the words of 'the beginning of the gospel' v1 and 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' v15?

As we'll see – Jesus' kingship is displayed in a different way than was expected. And because he is different to what they expected, Jesus isn't welcomed with open arms. In fact, people's responses to Jesus eventually turn very nasty (See 3:20). That is the story of Mark – the long awaited exodus type-salvation has begun, but Israel tragically fails to take up the good news that has arrived. But for now, it is important to realise that Jesus' arrival didn't come out of the blue. In fact it was according to God's *blueprint*.

For Today: Do you ever take Jesus' arrival for granted? How has today's study helped you to not be so blasé about it? As we've seen – with Jesus, we have the momentous, long anticipated, final fulfilment of all the promises of God for an exodus-type rescue, a fresh start for Israel, and ultimately salvation for all the earth. This is very good news!

thoughts. questions. insights

Personal Preparation 2

Mark 1:1-15 contains a number of 'characters' – the Heavenly Father who is behind all of the promises contained in the Old Testament, Jesus, Satan, John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit. In this Personal Preparation, we're going to focus on John. **Read Mark 1:1-8**

1. According to the Old Testament (v2-3) what role does John have?

2. How is John preparing the way for the Lord?

To understand how John is preparing the way for the Lord, **read Deuteronomy 30:1-10**. It is a passage that speaks of future blessing – a time when God's people will be re-united with God. But it also speaks of the need for the people to turn back to God.

3. With Deuteronomy 30 in mind, how is John making ready for the coming of Jesus?

4. It's worth noting that baptism was not new. In Isaiah 1:16, the prophet speaks to the wicked nation of Israel, telling them to be washed clean of their sin. Also, gentile converts (proselytes) were told to wash away defilement in order to be made pure. Here, John is acting as a prophet to all the nation – saying that they are defiled, that they in effect are under judgement and need to be made clean. Do you think Israel of Jesus' day wanted to hear this message? See 1:13-17 to help with your answer.

John has taken on the role of a prophet come to herald God's judgement and the need to repent in order to receive forgiveness. John is a prophet in the vein of Elijah who spoke a word of condemnation to Israel in the 800s BC. John even wears clothes like Elijah! (2 Kings 1:6-8).

5. How does John explain that he is not the one to bring in the fulfilment of God's promises for blessing and salvation?

For Today: John the Baptist is a person in the New Testament we can easily forget. How important is John? How would you explain his role?

thoughts. questions. insights

Personal Preparation 3

As mentioned in the previous 'Personal Preparation', there are a number of 'characters' in the story. This time we're going to focus on the Holy Spirit. **Read Mark 1:1-13.**

1. According to John, what makes the one coming after Jesus greater than him? (v7-8)
2. What do you think it means to be baptised with the Holy Spirit?
3. As we've seen right through these Personal Preparation sessions, the gospel of Jesus Christ involves fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. And it's exactly the same with the Holy Spirit. **Read Ezekiel 36:24-28.** According to Ezekiel 36, what does the Holy Spirit do in a person?
4. How necessary is it to receive the Holy Spirit in order to receive the forgiveness of sins that John talks about?
5. What do we learn about the Spirit in v12?

For Today: Give thanks for the baptism of the Spirit that people receive when they repent and believe in the gospel.

thoughts. questions. insights

Jesus: The Good News Man, Group Discussion Questions

Read Mark 1:1-15

What were the issues raised, questions posed or new insights you had as you read Mark 1:1-15 this week?

In the Personal Preparation, we've focussed on the Heavenly Father, John the Baptist, and the Holy Spirit. It's time to focus on the one who Mark's Gospel is all about.

1. Mark 1:1-15 mentions gospel/good news 3 times. From the passage and drawing on the background we've learned in Personal Preparation this week, what is the good news?

2. In this introduction, Jesus is given two titles – the Christ (Messiah or the Anointed) and the Son of God. **Read Psalm 2** to see how both these titles are used of the one person. What is this figure like in the Psalm? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who rules with strength and might. All kings will submit to Him. But if we are to understand Jesus as presented in Mark, we need to understand the path of humility and submission that Jesus took in order to be the ultimate King over all. For this we need to look at his baptism and temptation in the wilderness.

3. In v7 John speaks of the greatness of the one to come. We've already seen that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Do you now find it surprising what happens to Jesus in v9? Why?

4. Why do you think Jesus allowed himself to be baptised?

It's important to realise that at the time of the Exodus, God calls Israel his son. See Exodus 4:21-22. God wants his son (Israel) to be free from captivity so that his son (Israel) can worship Him in the wilderness. And when Israel finally is freed and goes to Mt Sinai in the wilderness, they are told to wash themselves and be consecrated to God so that they could properly worship Him. See Exodus 19:10-11.

5. From your knowledge of Exodus, when the Israelites are in the wilderness, do they worship God as they should have? What happens?

6. When Jesus goes into the wilderness, what happens? v12-13.

7. What is similar and what is different between Israel and Jesus?

With Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness, he is acting out the drama of the Exodus experience. All that Israel was called to do, Jesus is now doing, but perfectly. In the baptism and in the temptation, Jesus the Son is submitting to his Heavenly Father and fulfilling the role that Israel, the son, should have had. Unlike the nation of Israel, he is completely obedient to God's will.

8. From your knowledge of Mark's gospel, how does Jesus ultimately demonstrate his obedience and submission to the Father?

9. From what we've looked at – in Personal Preparation and with Group discussion, what does it mean when Jesus says of himself, '*The time has come, The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*'"

10. Why is it good news for you?

Pray

- Firstly, share with the group—the 3 people you are hoping to invite to your groups 'Simply Christianity' seminar on 30April-2May.
- Give thanks that our God kept his momentous promises to Israel - for salvation and blessing, for the King to come and establish his rule.
- Praise Jesus that he is the King and ruler, but for our sake he took the path of submission and obedience.
- Pray that _____ would repent and believe in Jesus and know this good news.



Remember

- There is a 'Presbytery Visit' this coming Saturday, 9 Feb, 1015pm. This is where representatives from other Presbyterian church on the northside learn about the work at mpc & eatons hill. You would be most welcome to come and help give an accurate picture of how things are going at freshchurch.