



The Gospel of
MARK
Who is Jesus?

Devotional Guide

September 13 - November 15, 2026

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: PART 1

Who is Jesus?

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THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Introduction

The Gospel of Mark is fast moving and direct. It's by far the shortest of the Gospels. Jesus is constantly on the move...calling disciples, teaching crowds, healing the sick, and confronting leaders while pushing boundaries. Throughout the work, Mark invites his readers to wrestle with two questions, (1) Who is Jesus? and (2) What does it mean to follow Him? During the Fall, we're focusing on the first question. We'll return to Mark's second question in the Spring of 2027.

The intent of this devotional is to provide additional information that we might not cover on Sunday morning, as well as giving some food for thought for personal and/or small group reflection. Each week will include Scripture reading, a central idea, reflection questions and a guided prayer. I'd encourage you to read the Scripture for each week BEFORE coming to church on Sunday morning, however any time is okay.

I'm leaning heavily on three commentaries for this series (NT Wright's *Mark for Everyone*, Ronald J. Kernaghan's work, and David E. Garland's practical and theological commentary), though Pastor Faith and I will likely use other commentaries on Sunday mornings as well.

The logo of the "Winged Lion" that we're using for this series is based on an ancient Christian tradition that associates each of the four Gospel writers with one of the four living creatures described in Ezekiel and Revelation. The lion became the symbol for Mark, partially because of the phrase "the voice crying out in the wilderness" that we find at the beginning of his Gospel. If you'd like to look into the four symbols further, search "Tetramorph" online.

Mark is the Gospel I've preached on most sparingly (I've never done it start to finish), so I'm excited to take a closer look at it with you all!

Journeying with you,



Week 1: *Good News Starts Here*

Scripture: Mark 1:1-15

The beginning of Mark's Gospel looks different from the other three. He begins with a declarative statement, **“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God...”**

Before Jesus says a word or performs a miracle, Mark tells us this story is *good news*...and that good news is completely connected to the person of Jesus. N.T. Wright notes that Mark's whole goal was to invite the reader “to sense the shock of the new thing God was doing.” And yet, that “new thing” didn't arrive out of thin air. Mark quickly turns from the shock to a prophet reminding readers of Israel's past, a prophet in the wilderness.

Jesus joins John the Baptist in the Jordan; we see a dove and hear a voice. Then Jesus himself heads to the wilderness. He returns and announces that the Kingdom of God has come, saying, “Repent and believe the good news!” In fifteen short verses, Mark covers A LOT!

Reflect:

1. What stands out to you most about Mark's introduction?
2. Make a list of the statements in these fifteen verses that help us answer the question, “Who is Jesus?”
3. If someone were to ask you, “Who is Jesus?” How would you answer?

Pray:

Holy God, be with us as we begin this journey through Mark. May we see Jesus more clearly, understand who he is more fully, and discover again why his life and message are such good news. In his name we pray, Amen.



Vittore Carpacci, The Lion of St Mark. 1516

Week 2: A New Authority (Part 1)

Scripture: Mark 1:16-39

Mark doesn't slow down after introducing Jesus. Right away, Jesus gets to work. Simon and Andrew leave their nets; James and John, their family business and their father. We don't get much of an explanation. Jesus calls; they follow. The emphasis seems to be less on the story of the people Jesus calls, and more on the authority of the one who is calling.

Jesus' new disciples follow him into Capernaum. They watch him teach, confront an unclean spirit, and heal the sick. Then, they're left looking for him when he gets away to pray alone. In their first few days with Jesus, their apprenticeship begins to take shape.

In *The Great Omission*, Dallas Willard writes,

The greatest issue facing the world today with all its heartbreaking needs is whether those who are identified as Christians will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ steadily learning from him how to live life in the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.

Apprenticeship isn't a concept we often connect to discipleship, but it's a good word to describe it. Discipleship isn't simply about belief, it's also about action...it's learning to live in a different way.

Reflect:

1. What stands out about the way Simon, Andrew, James, and John respond when Jesus calls them?
2. What do you think of the three definitions Dallas Willard connects to discipleship (student, apprentice, practitioner)?

Pray:

Lord, help me to be your apprentice, learning from you each day. Show me how to truly follow you in all things. Amen.

Week 3: A New Authority (Part 2)

Scripture: Mark 1:40-3:6

In week 2, we saw Jesus' authority in full display. That theme continues this week. Jesus heals, invites a tax collector to follow him, and sits down for a meal with people the religious leaders of his day despised. Again and again, Jesus pushes boundaries and redefines faithfulness.

His authority asks readers to rethink what we know and believe about forgiveness, belonging, holiness and Sabbath. Some are threatened by Jesus' authority, others are amazed. Mark invites us to think about authority in a new and different way.

Reflect:

1. Which of Jesus' actions in these verses surprises you most?
2. What does Jesus care about most in these stories? How do his words and actions reveal those priorities, and what should we learn from them?
3. Why do you think Jesus' actions inspire amazement in some people and anger (or opposition) in others? What can we learn from these passages about responding to people who are open or curious about Jesus today as well as those who are resistant?

Pray:

Excerpt from "Thoughts in Solitude" (Thomas Merton)

My Lord God...I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire...Therefore, I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Amen.

Week 4: *The Leader*

Scripture: Mark 3:7-35

As Jesus' popularity grew, people came from all over to see him. He paid attention to the large crowds, but also focused in on the twelve disciples. The twelve point back to the tribes of Israel and signal that Jesus was doing more than building a loosely connected group; he was building a purposeful tight-knit family. N.T. Wright sees the calling of the twelve as a sign of "Israel's long-awaited restoration." He also reminds us that, in Jesus' day, family relationships were central to how people understood themselves and their place in the world.

Throughout the early chapters in Mark, the tension between Jesus and the religious elite continues to grow. His immediate family doesn't quite understand what was happening either. And yet, ironically, the impure spirits we read about in Mark 3:11-12 were keenly aware of his identity. The crowds, Jesus' family, the religious leaders, and the impure spirits are all trying to answer the "Who is Jesus" question. Mark provides multiple answers to the question and invites us, the readers, to consider our own answer.

Reflect:

1. One of the questions we ask when a person becomes a member of WPC is, "Who is Jesus Christ to you?" How would you answer that question? Has your answer changed during your lifetime?
2. There's a lot to consider in Mark 3:20-34, especially when it comes to family. How might Jesus' understanding of family change or challenge the way we grasp family relationships?
3. What does this passage reveal about Jesus's leadership style?

Pray:

Holy God, help us trust where Jesus is leading while finding our place in the family he is forming. We pray these things in his name, Amen.

Week 5: *The Teacher*

Scripture: Mark 4:1-34

Jesus was constantly teaching. In this section we see Jesus use ordinary images (seeds, soil, and a lamp) to teach about the Kingdom of God. But his parables aren't simply illustrations; they're an invitation to lean in and pay attention...to explore what's beneath the message.

They are also designed to elicit some sort of response. Ronald Kernaghan writes, "Parables are a way of teaching that requires a response from the listener. A simple hearing is not enough." Jesus wasn't interested in sharing information about God (i.e. parables were not lectures); he was interested in inviting his followers to participate in what God was doing in the world. Today, we'd likely consider most of his teaching a call to action.

Reflect:

1. Who's the best teacher you've ever had? What made them great?
2. What's the difference between teaching and preaching?
3. What makes an illustration or story memorable?
4. Imagine you were there when Jesus shared these parables. Which one would have resonated with you most? What would it have prompted you to do? Which of the parables resonates with you the least? Why?

Pray:

Gracious God, give us ears to hear what you have for us today. Open our eyes to see the places where your Kingdom is at work around us. May we have the courage to participate in what you're doing in the world each and every day. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Week 6: *The Deliverer*

Scripture: Mark 4:35-5:43

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” The question the disciples ask at the end of Mark 4 gets directly to the question we’re asking throughout this series. The stories that follow give us a bit of an answer.

After Jesus conquers the storm, he restores a haunted man, heals a suffering woman, and raises a girl from the dead. David Garland points out that each of these stories shares a situation where there was a threat to human life that people were powerless to overcome themselves...and Jesus delivers them.

Some would say these are stories about faith and doubt, but they’re really stories about the relationship between faith and fear. The disciples are afraid; the people who encounter the restored man are afraid; the healed woman approaches Jesus with “fear and trembling”; and Jairus hears Jesus say, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” The stories don’t necessarily tell us that our fears are invalid or unimportant. They simply invite us to remember we’re not alone as we face them.

Reflect:

1. What do the fears in each of these stories have in common? How are they different?
2. In each of these encounters, Jesus confronts something people are powerless to overcome on their own. Where do you feel powerless right now?
3. What’s the most difficult part of remembering that “we’re not alone” when we’re afraid? What are some practices we can adopt to remind ourselves of that truth?

Pray:

Lord, remind us that, at all times and in all seasons, you are with us. May we be aware of your presence today. Amen.

Week 7: *The Rejected*

Scripture: Mark 6:1-29

There are three movements that hold this section together. Jesus is rejected in Nazareth (6:1-6), Jesus sends the twelve out knowing they will also be rejected (6:7-13), and John the Baptist is rejected and ultimately killed (6:14-29). N.T. Wright connects the rejection to the expectations that many people had, writing, “The kind of kingdom Jesus was talking about was not the sort of kingdom his contemporaries wanted to hear about.”

Jesus’ identity as one who is rejected extends to his followers. We see this elsewhere as well (see Matthew. 10, John 15:18-25, and Acts 5:17-42).

Mark seems to emphasize the reality that following Jesus faithfully doesn’t guarantee we’ll be understood or accepted.

Reflect:

1. Why do you think the people of Nazareth can recognize Jesus’ wisdom and power and, somehow, still reject him?
2. What does Jesus’ willingness to send the Twelve into places where they’d face rejection tell us about his mission and kingdom?
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote about “the cost of discipleship.” On a basic level, it’s the idea that following Jesus requires giving something up or, at some point, facing difficulty. What is the “cost of discipleship” for us today? Why is it both difficult and important to talk honestly about those costs?

Pray:

From Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*

“O God, early in the morning I cry to you. Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you; I cannot do this alone. Amen. ”

Week 8: *The Provider*

Scripture: Mark 6:30-6:56

The contrast between the meals in Mark 6:14-29 and Mark 6:30-44 is jarring. In one meal we see Herod throwing a party for the powerful and self-absorbed, celebrating death. In the other, we see Jesus with a crowd that's hungry. David E. Garland points out that Herod's feast ends with John's head on a platter, while Jesus' feast ends with twelve baskets of leftovers. It's hard to not see two competing kingdoms...one marked by power and death, and the other by compassion and abundance.

Mark writes that the crowd was like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). He sits down with them, feeds them, and teaches them. We see echoes of Psalm 23 in his actions, with a shepherd leading sheep into green pastures and providing for needs. In so many ways, this is what the Kingdom of God was about. This is what Jesus' identity was about.

Yet, after the meal, the disciples don't quite see it. They didn't understand what Jesus was doing with the loaves (6:52). They saw him provide, but for whatever reason, weren't able to connect his actions with his identity.

Reflect:

1. Contrast the values expressed in Herod's Feast and Jesus' meal. Where do we see those competing values in our world today?
2. Why do you think Mark describes the crowd as "sheep without a shepherd"? What would be a similar image or illustration in our culture?
3. What is the significance of Jesus inviting the disciples to give the crowd something to eat, instead of just doing it himself?
4. The disciples saw what Jesus did but struggled to connect his actions with his identity. Where do we make the same mistake today?

Pray:

Holy God, thank you for providing what we need. Amen.

Week 9: *The Disrupter*

Scripture: Mark 7:1-8:21

This section begins with Jesus challenging commonly accepted ideas about cleanliness. The Pharisees are concerned with what goes *into* the body (eating with unclean hands). Jesus turns it around and talks about what comes *out of* our hearts. N.T. Wright highlights this wasn't just a minor disagreement about religious etiquette; it was a discussion about a flawed system of faithfulness.

The theme continues as Jesus enters Gentile territory, healing and feeding once again. Ronald Kernaghan argues that the emphasis in this part of Mark is that Jesus continues to provide for those who weren't viewed by most as people in the "in crowd."

The disciples are still wrestling with what it all means...Jesus' identity, their role, God's Kingdom. At the end of this section, it's almost as if Jesus is frustrated with them ("Do you still not understand?"). They were still trying to fit Jesus into a conventional category, or at least one they could comprehend. Jesus wasn't just disrupting those who opposed him. He was also disrupting the assumptions of those who were closest to him.

Reflect:

1. Reflect on the idea of cleanliness. What's the difference between a tradition that helps us follow God and one that might get in the way? How can we tell the difference?
2. How has your belief or understanding about Jesus changed over time?
3. Sometimes we critique the disciples ("They were WITH Jesus; how could they not understand?!"). Why is it easier to recognize other's blind spots than see our own? What helps us recognize ours?

Pray:

Lord, help us to be open to what you have for us. Amen.

Week 10: The Messiah

Scripture: Mark 8:22-9:1

The verses we're exploring this week are a pivotal moment in Mark's Gospel. Peter's declaration in Caesarea Philippi, sandwiched between the two-stage miracle in Bethsaida and Jesus' rebuke of Peter, reminds us that discipleship isn't a linear journey.

N.T. Wright draws a parallel between what happens with the blind man in Bethsaida and the disciples. The man goes from complete blindness, to seeing people who look like trees "walking around," to eventually seeing clearly. Peter sees something the others don't when he declares, "You are the Messiah," but his vision is still blurry. He knew Jesus' identity, but he doesn't yet understand the depth of his claim. Wright calls this sort of journey a "two-stage process of illumination."

This section also reminds us that titles matter (some more than others). Jesus' rebuke of Peter makes it clear that they only matter if we grasp the reality and meaning behind them. Peter's declaration is correct, but his understanding is incomplete.

Reflect:

1. How much does a title really tell us about a person?
2. N.T. Wright compares the disciples' understanding to the blind man slowly gaining his sight. What evidence do we have that the disciples are beginning to "see" Jesus more clearly? Where is their vision still blurry?
3. What should we learn from Jesus' rebuke of Peter?

Pray:

Triune God, help us to see you more clearly and understand you more fully. Be patient with us when our vision is blurry and our understanding is incomplete. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, *The Messiah*, Amen.