

## Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

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There is nothing more urgent than a 911 call. You call 911 and it better be taken seriously.

Last year a 911 operator Crenshanda Williams was arrested and charged after allegedly hanging up on what could have been thousands of 911 callers,

The 43-year-old had been placed under police investigation after her supervisors noticed that she had an abnormally large number of calls that lasted less than 20 seconds.

Can you imagine calling with an urgent matter and someone hanging up on you? It could be a matter of life and death!

The gospel of Mark is just that. A matter of life and death.

And just like a 911 call, Mark's gospel has an urgency to it that's hard to ignore.

Its as if he is breathless, trying to get the information out as quickly as he can in this book of 16 chapters. **Mark urgently tells us in his style and voice, that we need to get to know who Jesus is.**

One of the reasons the tone of **Mark** is so urgent is its historical context. It **was written right around the time of a great fire in AD 64 that destroyed 2/3 of Rome** – and this fire was probably set by NERO – a terrible Roman emperor - who wanted to clear the land for his own building project. He tried to make the fire look like an accident, but he actually had people hired to set the blaze.

So much was destroyed in that fire – peoples homes, peoples lives...and then right after that a horrific persecution erupted against the Christians and Peter and Paul both died in that persecution.

So in this context Mark wrote his gospel quickly and urgently trying to get the word out at a time of great hardship in AD 64.

The headlines to Mark's gospel if there had been any would have said...

**URGENT! URGENT! URGENT!** Read all about it while you can...This gospel is a quick, fast-paced account, unencumbered and simple.

**If Mark could have texted his gospel he probably would have** – again because he kept it short, simple, to the point...he probably would have used emojis too to shorten it if he could

have; Mark is written mostly in the present tense and you know what one of his most common words is? Immediately...the word ***immediately this and immediately that runs through Mark like a refrain*** – Also the word “**and**” is used all the time to string phrases together....as if a breathless child is talking... And this happened, and that happened, and then the next thing happened...

Ever hear a child talk like that stringing phrases together with breathless excitement or concern after something has happened that you weren't there to see? That's a little like how Mark is written. And this...and this...and this...

Now Mark, was very young when he followed Jesus, maybe 16 or 17 – and he wasn't one of the twelve disciples so he really didn't know firsthand a lot of what happened in Jesus' life.

So you ask then....*how could he write this all down?* This story of Jesus' life – how could he know what happened if he wasn't there?

Well guess who Mark's mentor and friend was? It was Simon Peter. In fact we read in 1 Peter 5:13 that Mark is like a son to Peter. Peter writes the following:

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.

Babylon was code for Rome – so Peter is writing probably about a church in Rome. Remember this is during Neros persecution. And then the close relationship with Mark is mentioned.

**In Mark there are many more references to Simon Peter than in the other gospels**, so we know that Peter was Mark's source...Peter told Mark the stories and teachings of Jesus and Mark wrote them down.

Its kind of humorous, but we have some other early documents from that ancient time that tell us that Peter thought it was a waste for Mark to write all this down. The phrase is actually “**He (Peter) didn't think much of it**”.

But I am so grateful Mark did write all this down, aren't you?

It just shows how different gifts work together in different ways. Peter was always preaching. And Mark was a writer...he didn't preach. He wrote...and wrote...so we could hear about Jesus thousands of years later.

Another reason for Mark's fast paced gospel probably has to do with who Peter was – as the eyewitness source as we said for much of Mark's material!

Peter was impulsive, always rushing around, jumping out of boats, making bold declarations, proclaiming often what he didn't understand – at least before the Holy Spirit came on him.

So perhaps also that's another reasons why this gospel has this breathless sort of frenetic pace to it. It could have been how Peter related all this information to Mark. If it was a dictation it could have well been how Peter spoke given his impulsivity – with lots of “ands” and “immediatelys”

Another characteristic of Mark is that it is the gospel that speaks the most about Jesus' emotions. And that's interesting, since this is such a short gospel, that Mark would spend the time to let us know how Jesus was feeling. In this gospel we hear that Jesus rebukes, gets angry, frustrated and also his guts are wrenched with compassion for the sick. Jesus is not just a placid meek and mild figure in Mark. He has different moods and different reactions.

Jesus is very human in Mark's story.

Finally, there is something called the “Messianic Secret” in Mark. Its something you can talk about in Adult Education. But you will find in Marks gospel is that so often after he heals someone or does something wonderful Jesus tells people....”Shhhh!”

That's what you say when you don't want someone to say something, right?

### **Jesus tells people over and over again in Mark...**

“**Don't tell anyone who I am!**” That's what scholars call “The Messianic Secret” especially prominent in Mark.

Now, that sorts of goes against what we say in church all the time doesn't it? Go tell the world about Jesus, right? So the question is, why? Why didn't Jesus want people – like the leper he healed, or the blind man he restored sight to, to tell people who he was?

Sometimes people were so excited that they went and told others anyway. And the consequence of that was that Jesus had so many people following him that he couldn't go among them openly anymore but he had to go off to the wilderness, or get pushed out in a boat in a lake, so that the people wouldn't crush him. But you will see as you read Mark that Jesus tells people over and over...Shhh! Don't tell people who I am... I will leave that interpretation up to you to discuss in class...I just want you to be aware that this is another strong theme in Mark.

### **The characteristics of Mark**

1. It is fast paced, and written mostly in the present tense. It is simple and urgent, using the word “immediately” frequently, and stringing sentences together with the word “and”
2. It talks more than any other gospel about Jesus’ emotions. Jesus is truly human in Mark.
3. There is a Messianic Secret in Mark meaning that often when Jesus heals someone he tells them not to tell anyone what happened or who he is.
4. Mark was written at a time of persecution and Simon Peter is the main source for Mark’s content.

I leave you with a challenge this morning. We are beginning this study, and you can either choose to engage in it or not. You can read the chapters ahead of time, or not. You can go to adult education and learn a deeper understanding of this gospel or not. It’s always your choice. The truth is however, that you can never invest your time in anything more worthwhile than studying the scriptures. This is an opportunity, in this sermon series today and in the adult education class to come face to face with the living Christ through the eyes of Peter and Mark. Knowing the scriptures brings us into a living relationship with God. No matter how long we’ve been a Christian, there is so much more to learn, so much deeper to go.

The beginning of Mark starts with John the Baptist preparing the way for the Messiah. In a moment we will prepare our hearts for communion. Before Easter, we prepared our hearts during Holy Week and Lent. And by studying the scriptures we prepare our hearts for Jesus again – to see him more clearly, to love him more completely. This is so important. Scripture has been given to us to read, to study, to fill our minds with – as Christians what else would you want to spend your time doing? I encourage you to engage in this study, go to the adult education class, and learn and grow in your faith. If you do this you will see Jesus.

Emile Cailleit, professor of philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary wrote an article about the Bible and the title was “**The Book That Understands Me.**” In college Cailleit had been an agnostic. He graduated without ever even having seen a Bible. But there was so much about the world and the human condition that overwhelmed him; and the realities of war at that time – the senseless murders of his buddies – he just couldn’t comprehend. Then he went to serve in the war and a bullet got him as well. As he recovered he began to read and write down phrases from books that inspired him, or seemed relevant. He collected these sayings and over time – still as an agnostic - the number of these quotations grew, and he eagerly anticipated sitting down and reading this great collection of quotations which he expected, “**would lead me as it were from fear and anguish...to supreme utterances of release and jubilation.**” One day he went

outside under a tree to read his anthology, and he was deeply disappointed. Each quote reminded him of the circumstances in which he had chosen it, but things had changed since then. He said, **“Then I knew that the whole undertaking would not work, simply because this anthology was of my own making.”**

At that very moment, his wife appeared after a walk with their child in a baby carriage. She had with her a Bible in French that she had received from a minister she had met on her walk. Cailliet took it, and opened it to the Gospels. And he was so taken with it he continued to read the gospels, deep into the night. The realization dawned on him and he wrote: **“Lo and behold, as I looked through them (the gospels) the One who spoke and acted in them became alive to me...this is the book that would understand me.”**

Tim Keller says about the scripture and its power. **“Though as a youth I had believed that the Bible was the Word of the Lord, I had not personally met the Lord of the Word. As I read the gospels he became real to me.”**

So what else do you want to do with your time? What else is more important. Let's commit to engage together in studying the gospel - this urgent message that Mark has written down for us - that we might see Jesus and that he might come alive for us. I urge you to **1. read three chapters of Mark before coming to church on Sunday.** I urge to **2. send me your questions and reflections** in between services so I can craft what I say on Sunday morning around what you have written to me. I urge you to **3. go to Adult Education** and discuss this amazing book written in peril in the midst of persecution by Mark who put his life on the line so that we could have these words. So that we could see Jesus. Lets do this! Let's pray. Amen