

A few quotes to think about:

“Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing”

(Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father of the USA, 1706-90)

“God writes the gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars”

(Martin Luther, Protestant Reformer, 1483-1546)

“If you believe what you like in the gospel, and reject what you don’t like, it’s not the gospel you believe but yourself”

(Saint Augustine, Christian theologian, 354-430)

“The Gospel offers forgiveness for the past, new life for the present and hope for the future”

(John Sentamu, Archbishop of York)

“Let us preach Christ, let us be faithful to proclaiming the gospel, but let’s leave judgment in the hands of God”

(Tony Campolo, American Christian sociologist and speaker).

Prayer:

Almighty God, who enlightens your Church through the inspired witness of your evangelist Mark, grant that we, being firmly grounded in the truth of the gospel, may be faithful to its teaching both in word and deed. Amen.

Thoughts about NLT:

Mission work today is a continuation of the work begun by the apostles, and is also carried out by those who are ‘witnesses’. Eileen Lodge, who founded NLT, was among the first to do something new in Nepal — to work with people affected by leprosy. In many difficult situations she had to persevere, not give up and run away. She saw a great need, but had to be very persistent to build a leprosy hospital in southeast Nepal. The story is told in the book ‘A Touch of Providence’. Any story about what God has done is ‘good news’, even if there are many ups and downs. It is a privilege to be co-workers with the Lord.

Mark’s Gospel – Study Notes for Small Groups

Week 1 – Meeting Mark

These notes, which can be used for group study in six sessions, are an introduction to this foundational New Testament book—the Gospel according to Mark.

Who was Mark?

John Mark (to use his full name) was not an eyewitness of all of the events he wrote about, but probably was to some of them. We come across him in the Acts of the Apostles when he accompanies the apostle Paul on his first missionary journey (**Acts 12:25 – 13:5**). We discover that he doesn’t stay the course, but leaves Paul and Barnabas and returns home to Jerusalem (**Acts 13:13**). Later on, because of this ‘desertion’, Paul refuses to take Mark on his second missionary journey — which leads to a sharp disagreement with Barnabas, who supports Mark and takes him with him on a separate journey to Cyprus (**Acts 15:36-40**). The story ends well, though, as Paul and Mark are eventually reconciled and become close friends — when Paul faces his execution under Nero, the person he really wants to see, along with Timothy, is Mark (**2 Timothy 4:9-11**).

For Discussion (using the above Bible passages):

(a) Mark appears to have a tendency to run away from things he can’t handle. It is possible that he wrote himself into the text of his gospel (**Mark 14:51-52**) as the young man who runs away when Jesus is arrested. For whatever reason, he turned back partway through the challenges of the first missionary journey. Does today’s culture encourage ‘giving up’ too easily, especially if what we are doing is tough or seems unrewarding? What should we stay committed to?

(b) Without Barnabas standing up for him, Mark might well have ended up as a failure. Barnabas was actually a nickname, meaning ‘son of encouragement’ (**Acts 4:36**); he rescues Mark from failure and this transforms his life. Mark ends up as the writer of the gospel

account that bears his name, and useful in ministry. Have we had a 'Barnabas' in our lives? How can we encourage someone we know?

What is unique about Mark's gospel?

It is thought by some to be the earliest narrative of the life of Jesus ever to be recorded. Estimates of exactly when it was written differ quite a bit (within a range from AD 43-65). It is not the first New Testament document we come across, though: Paul's early epistles probably pre-date Mark, as does James's epistle.

It is a fast-moving, crisp account of Jesus' life, focused on action. It appears to be generally chronological. It was probably written in Rome, for the Christians at the heart of the Roman Empire. Because of the widespread common language (Koine Greek) and the Roman Empire's excellent communication systems (roads), Mark's gospel account would have spread quickly from nation to nation.

If Mark was not an eyewitness of Jesus' entire ministry, where did his information come from? Quite likely he heard it from the apostle Peter, whom Mark came to know very closely (**1 Peter 5:13**).

To discuss:

(a) What is it like to be the first to do something? Scary? Exciting? Are **we** inclined to do 'new things' or to stick with what's been tried and tested? What 'new things' could the church be doing today?

(b) Mark discovered that he had a gift for writing things down. This might not have been his 'primary' gifting; we don't know. What are **our** abilities? We have both primary and secondary giftings, i.e. what comes most naturally to us (primary) and what we might need to put more effort into (secondary). Should we simply do whatever presents itself to us as a need or opportunity, or find easy? Are we most effective when we do things from a natural enthusiasm?

(c) Mark includes 'second-hand' material, gleaned from Peter. Is the Christian faith 'second-hand' to us, or is it something more — a first-hand experience? i.e. Is it knowing 'about Jesus' or 'knowing Jesus personally' (if so, what do we mean by this?).

What is the gospel's key verse?

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." We will be exploring the key theme of 'servanthood' later.

The beginning of Mark's gospel:

Read Mark 1:1-8. This opening passage introduces us straight away to "the **gospel** about Jesus Christ, the Son of God". There's no narrative about Jesus' birth — we enter straight into the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The only preamble is for the author to quote the Old Testament prophecies of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 and to see these fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist who heralds the coming of Jesus. The ensuing text is fast-moving, and Jesus is soon actively calling his disciples, teaching with authority, casting out evil spirits and healing. The active nature of Jesus in Mark's gospel is explored in the next study (the importance of **doing**); this relates to Mark's target audience of Romans who were engaged in 'doing' rather than 'talking'!

To discuss:

(a) What is the 'gospel'? The Greek word means 'good news' or 'good story'. What would be good news to us? — and to our sad and suffering world?

(b) How many 'gospels' are there: one or four? Briefly compare the opening paragraphs of the gospel accounts according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. How does Mark's gospel differ from the others? In what way is John's gospel different to the others?

(c) We're told that John the Baptist preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" — how does this differ from what Jesus subsequently does? Does Christianity come across today as negative (judgmental) or positive (life-affirming and hopeful)?