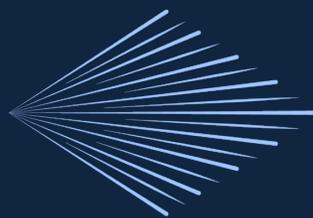




From Fear to Faith

7 studies in The Gospel of Mark



gateway
church

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Preface

As this booklet is being prepared, the world has been plunged into a full-blown crisis. 2 million people worldwide (and counting) have been diagnosed with the coronavirus. Of these, more than 100 thousand have died, which means that millions more have just suffered the loss of their loved ones. And these numbers belie the true extent of the damage that the virus has caused to human lives. As a result of businesses and workplaces being shut down, many will experience economic hardship. Movement restrictions are also bound to exert a psychological and emotional toll on us.

But none of these are alien to us as human beings. In more ordinary times, going through an economic downturn, or getting into an accident, or contracting a terminal illness will inflict no less misery upon us, albeit on a personal scale. For as long as we've been around, the threat of loss, pain, suffering, and ultimately death, has hung over us. And so, coronavirus or no coronavirus, suffering and death remain the one stubborn fact of life that all of us must reckon with. The only thing that we get to decide then, is how we will respond to it.

The ancient Stoics saw death as a natural event that will eventually befall us and encouraged us to accept it and to live consciously of it. And that mindset lives on today in our YOLO culture (You Only Live Once). We know that death is coming for us all, so keep calm and make the most of the time that we have now. That makes for a nice hashtag, and perhaps even a sensible philosophy to adopt in normal times. But if there is anything that this crisis has shown us is that when mortal danger lurks at our doorsteps, few of us can react with the same kind of calm and poise called for by the Stoics and the YOLO advocates. Under imminent threat of death, rationality and composure often give way to fear and hysteria.

Christianity, however, offers a third way of responding to death. One that refuses to accept it with a quiet resignation, but also one that isn't driven to fear and despair. It is called faith. To be more precise, it is faith in a man named Jesus. For 2000 years now, it is faith in Jesus that has allowed Christians to look death calmly in the eyes – through the normal course of life, when they were being killed for their faith, and yes, even during pandemics.

You might be wondering, how? How could believing in Jesus produce such an extraordinary response in the face of our greatest enemy? The aim of these sessions is to introduce you to him. As you read The Gospel of Mark, one of the eyewitness accounts in the Bible, you will see him encountering death multiple times and emerging victorious every time. Not just healing a woman with a terminal blood disease, or liberating a man possessed by a destructive demon, but ultimately dying on the cross himself, and rising on the third day never to die again. And because of that, he promises that those who believe in him will share in his victory over death. Who is he? How did he overcome death? How can I have a part in this eternal life that he gives? It is our hope that you will find out for yourself through these sessions. And by doing so, that you will move from fear to faith.

1. Who is Jesus? (Mark 1:1-15)

Big Idea -

Starter: On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how important a person do you think Jesus is? Why?

What do we learn about the identity of Jesus? Who is he, especially in relation to God?

What reasons are there to think that he's worth paying attention to from...

- John's introduction (v.4-8)?
- Jesus' baptism (v.9-11)?
- Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (v.12-13)?

What questions about Jesus might you have at this point?

Implication: On a scale of 1-10, how important of a person do you think Jesus is now? Why?

Glossary and FAQs

Gospel	Good news, momentous announcement
Christ/ Son of God	A technical term for God's appointed king predicted from the Old Testament
Prophet	A person who's been divinely appointed to speak authoritatively on God's behalf
Holy Spirit	As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is God. Mark doesn't get much into the person or the work of the Holy Spirit beyond what he mentions in his gospel.
Baptism	A ritual signifying repentance
Kingdom of God	Where God's rule is a reality, a future that is predicted from the OT and is now being realized through the coming of Jesus

Q: Why did Jesus need to get baptized if he was without sin?

Mark doesn't get into the details here. But the basic idea is that Jesus had to identify with sinful humanity in order to fulfill his mission of being their representative and baptism signifies the beginning of that act. In Mark especially, it is worth noting the parallels between this passage and the account of the crucifixion. Just as Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in his baptism, so Jesus was also declared to be the Son of God in his crucifixion (15:39). The former initiates his mission, the latter brings it to completion.

2. Why did Jesus come? (Mark 1:16-2:17)

Big Idea -

Starter: If you had all the authority in the world, what are the top 3 things you would do with it? Why?

What are the areas over which Jesus has authority?

In the previous session, we saw that Jesus is God's king. How does this underline his credibility as God's king?

Given that's the case, why might what we see in v.35-39 be surprising?

Looking at 1:14-15, what is the content of his preaching?

Now looking at 2:17, how does it explain Jesus' priority in preaching?

Implication: How would Jesus' answer to the starter question be different from ours? What do you think that says about what our greatest need actually is?

Glossary and FAQs

Sabbath	Seventh day of the week that is set aside by Jews for rest and worship
Synagogue	Place of worship for Jews, especially for the hearing of their Scriptures
Leper	Someone afflicted with leprosy, which is an infectious skin disease that rendered the person unclean according to Jewish law
Son of Man	A divine, human figure appointed to inherit God's kingdom

Q: Why did Jesus forbid demons and people to speak about him?

This is a theme that comes up multiple times throughout Mark's gospel. As Mark will make clear to us, Jesus is not to be known only as a miracle worker or a powerful ruler, but as God's crucified king. For others to propagate a partially true picture of who Jesus is would be counterproductive to his mission.

Q: If Jesus had authority over sin, how could the leper disobey his command to keep quiet?

At the very least it signals to us that sin is the real issue here, not a skin disease. What the person needed to be healed from ultimately is sin, and only the death of Jesus can heal that.

3. Why listen to Jesus? (Mark 4:1-34)

Big Idea -

Starter: What are some of the common objections that people have to Jesus' teaching? How does that make you feel about him?

Part 1

From the story that Jesus tells in verses 1-9, what are the different grounds that the seed falls on and what are the different outcomes?

In verses 13-20, Jesus explains the meaning of the story. Who/what does each scenario represent? Give an example of what that might look like today.

What changes in each scenario and what stays the same? How does that give you confidence in Jesus' word?

In verses 10-12, Jesus gives us the two-fold purpose of his words. What are they? How does that explain what we see in the parable and help to reinforce our confidence in his words?

Part 2

In this next part, the seed in each of these parables now represents the kingdom of God. Previously, we saw Jesus declaring that it is near. What do each of the 3 illustrations from v21-32 tell us about God's kingdom?

Implication: Jesus' main message is about God's kingdom that is coming and that we need to repent in order to be part of that kingdom. We've seen that that message has proved to be very unpopular even until now. How has today's passage given you more confidence to trust him and his message?

Glossary and FAQs

Parables

Stories that are told to illustrate a point

Q: Why would Jesus want to keep some people from understanding his message?

As God's king, Jesus has also come to judge those who reject him. Keeping them from understanding his message about the coming kingdom is a form of judgment on them.

4. Why trust Jesus? (Mark 4:35-5:43)

Big Idea -

Starter: What do you look for in a leader? What kind of leaders do you trust?

This passage has four encounters with Jesus in it:

1. 4:35-41
2. 5:1-20
3. 5:24-34
4. 5:12-24. 35-43

For each one, describe:

- a) What is the problem?
- b) How bad is the problem?
- c) What does Jesus do about the problem?
- d) How do people react to Jesus?

	What is the problem?	How bad is the problem?	What does Jesus do about the problem?	How do people react to Jesus?
4:35-41				
5:1-20				
5:25-34				
5:12-24. 35-43				

What do the four encounters together teach us about:

- a) Jesus' power (what he's able to do)
- b) Jesus' character (how he treats people)
- c) The right response to Jesus

Implication: How do these four episodes help us to trust Jesus as our leader?

Glossary and FAQs

Q: Does this mean Jesus will save us from all the dangers we face in life?

Ultimately, when Jesus returns, he will remove all danger and distress from the world (Rev 21:1-4). Until then, Christians still experience sickness and sorrow in our broken world. This passage helps us to trust Jesus, whatever happens now, knowing that he has the power to save us from the worst danger of all: death itself.

Q: Why did Jesus say the little girl was not dead but sleeping (5:39)?

It was in anticipation of what he was about to do - bringing the girl out of death as though she was being brought out of her sleep. Judging by the reaction of everyone else, there's no reason to doubt that the girl really was dead.

Q: What does it mean to say that Jesus rescues us from death? Doesn't everyone die?

Yes, everyone dies. But the Bible talks about a day that is coming when everyone who has died will be resurrected and judged by God. Those who have trusted in Jesus will go into his kingdom, while those who haven't will spend eternity in hell. It is this final destiny that Jesus saves us from.

5. What does it mean to follow Jesus? (Mark 8:27-38 & 10:17-27)

Big Idea -

Recap: What have we seen so far about the kind of king Jesus is?

Starter: What do you think becoming his follower might look like today?

Part 1

Why might the disciples' conclusion about Jesus' identity in v.27-30 make sense given all that we've seen about Jesus so far?

In verse 31, what is the surprising, even shocking thing that we learn about Jesus?

How did his disciples respond to this revelation in verse 32?

At this point, why might we think they're justified to react in such a way?

From v.34-38, what do we learn about the way to follow Jesus?

And how might that explain..

... the real reason why the disciples reacted the way that they did?

... the way Jesus reacted to their reaction in verse 33?

Part 2

But what would it look like in practice to follow Jesus? Let's read Mark 10:17-22.

Here we have a man who wants to be a follower of Jesus in order to enter his kingdom and inherit eternal life. What do we learn about what's required in order to do that?

From verses 23-27, what does Jesus think about our ability to do that?

Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?

Implication: Going back to the starter question, how has the portrait of Jesus and what it looks like to follow him changed for you? How do you feel about that at this point? Why?

Glossary and FAQs

Elijah One of the greatest Old Testament prophets, it was prophesied at the end of the Old Testament that Elijah would return before God returns to establish his kingdom

Elders, chief priests and the scribes High ranking figures of the Jewish religious establishment

6. Why did Jesus die? (Mark 14:26-15:39)

Big Idea -

Starter: What do you think about the cross of Jesus? Does Jesus' death make you want to follow him more or less? Why?

From verses 26-31, what is the promise that Jesus made to his disciples and what promise did they in turn make to him?

Let's first zoom in on the disciples and see how they fare in terms of following through on their promise. From verses 32-72, if you were to plot a graph of how well they're doing in terms of fulfilling their promise, what would it look like and why?

Previously, we saw that the requirement for us to enter Jesus' kingdom is to suffer now and receive glory and life later (8:34-38). How do the disciples' prospects look at this point? Why might this be particularly troubling for us?

Now let's see how Jesus does in terms of fulfilling his promise from these same verses. What would his chart look like? Why?

By the end of chapter 14, the disciples have utterly failed, and Jesus is the only one left who's still on his mission. What would the rest of his chart look like from 15:1-39?

Earlier in Mark, Jesus explained the significance of his death. In Mark 10:45 he said that he came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus died so that we might enter his kingdom and have eternal life. How does what we've seen explain why Jesus needed to go to the cross?

Implication: What do you think about the cross of Jesus now? Does it make you want to follow him more or less? Why?

Glossary and FAQs

Q: Did Jesus not want to go to the cross (14:36)?

Yes, in the sense that no one *wants* to go to the cross. Certainly not when you are going to bear the sin of man and as a result experience the abandonment of the Heavenly Father (15:34). But that is not the same as saying that Jesus was forced to go the cross against his will. His will is ultimately to do his Father's will. Elsewhere Jesus said that no one can take his life from him, but he lays it down of his own accord (John 10:18).

Q: How are we to understand 14:51-52?

We are not told who the young man is. It is likely to be one of those who left Jesus and fled in verse 50. But it is included here to show us how desperate Jesus' disciples were to save themselves.

7. How will you respond? (Mark 15:40-16:8)

Big Idea -

Recap: Let's do a quick summary of what we've seen about Jesus so far.

- Who is Jesus and what has he come to do?
- What is he able to rescue us from?
- At the same time, what is required in order to be his follower?
- How has Jesus made it possible for us to follow him and enter into his kingdom?

There are two characters in this passage - Joseph of Arimathea and the women. How did each of them respond to Jesus' death on the cross?

If you had to use one word to describe their responses, what would it be?

Implication: Think back to what we've seen about Jesus so far. In light of all those things, which of these 2 responses towards Jesus would be more appropriate? Which one are you leaning more towards at this point? Why?

Glossary and FAQs

Q: What do we do with Mark 16:9-20?

As the ESV editors have pointed out, the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of Mark's gospel did not contain verses 9-20. Furthermore, it would make sense that later scribes would feel the need to add on an ending because finishing at verse 8 without a resurrection appearance seems incomplete. This would suggest that verses 9-20 is a later addition rather than something which was originally penned by Mark.

Recommended Resources

Understanding the Bible and Mark's Gospel

Dig Deeper- Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach

Dig Deeper into the Gospels- Andrew Sach

Answering Questions

Reason for God- Timothy Keller

The Case for Christ- Lee Strobel

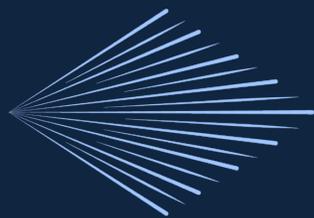
Truth Matters- Andreas Kostenberger

Is the New Testament Reliable? - Paul Barnett

Starting to live the Christian life

A Fresh Start- John Chapman

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