

# **Mark**

## **Session 1**

## **Kingdom**

**(Mark 1:1—4:34)**

**HEARING MARK  
A LISTENER'S GUIDE**

By

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon

With additional material from:

**AUGSBURG COMMENTARY ON  
THE NEW TESTAMENT  
MARK**

By

Donald H. Juel

- ❖ Indicates material is from Malbon
- ◆ Indicates material is from Juel

# SOME PRELIMINARIES

## Assumptions About Mark

- ❖ It was written long ago - about 70 A.D.
- ❖ It was written in a different culture
- ❖ It was written anonymously
- ❖ It was written with an agenda - "from faith to faith"
- ❖ It was written in the form of a story
- ❖ It was written to be heard
- ◆ Mark was not a popular gospel to study until the 19th century
- ◆ It was characterized as the unsophisticated gospel
- ◆ According to tradition, Eusebius quotes Papias as saying that Mark transcribed Peter's memories of Jesus

## Assumptions About the Audience

- ❖ You have some familiarity with Mark
- ❖ You have access to a Bible in a good *translation*
- ❖ You are willing to commit to reading the biblical text as the primary text
- ❖ You understand chapter and verse references
- ❖ You have some relationship to a Christian tradition
- ❖ You will be reading Mark and Hearing Mark silently and alone

# KINGDOM

## MARK 1:1—4:34

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)

- ❖ Intended to be the title of the book

### Gospel

- ❖ Good news of Jesus and the good news about Jesus
- ❖ Same term used to refer to the Roman emperor's appearances, legislation, and military victories
- ❖ A possible challenge to imperial prerogatives

## Jesus

- ❖ Brings the good news of the kingdom of God
- ❖ Our text interested in elucidating the character of Jesus as described in Mark

## Christ

- ❖ A title, not Jesus' last name
- ❖ Christos in Greek
- ❖ Mashiah in Hebrew
- ❖ Means anointed, Christ comes from the same Greek root as Crisco
- ❖ Anointing in Jewish traditions has ties to the monarchy, the priesthood, and prophecy
- ❖ Indicates that a person has been designated by God to serve in some special capacity
- ♦ Use of this title without explanation suggests that Mark was writing for a Jewish audience, or at least those who understood their traditions

## Son of God

- ❖ Not synonymous with a claim of divinity in the early days of Christianity
- ❖ Meant someone who was obedient to God
- ❖ As a son is obedient to his father, so the righteous man is obedient to God
- ❖ In Hebrew Bible could mean all of Israel, the king, or any righteous man (Hosea 11:1, Psalm 2:7, Wisdom of Solomon 2:18)

## The beginning

- ❖ Because we don't know the ending yet
- ❖ Mark expected the apex of the story to occur with Jesus' return with power, but even this is not the ending (Mark 13:31)

# JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD (MARK 1:1-45)

## John the Baptizer (Mark 1:2-8)

- ❖ So, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus is a prophecy of Isaiah about John the Baptist
- This quote is a combination of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 with a hint of Exodus 23:20
- ❖ We are given specifics about what John wears and eats
- ❖ Mark assumes that his audience knows the Bible, that is the Hebrew Bible
  - John dresses like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8, Zechariah 13:4)
  - Elijah's return is associated with the last days (Malachi 4:5)
  - Jewish scholars expected that the "messenger sent to prepare the way" of Malachi 3:1 was Elijah
- ❖ Mark points to Isaiah, Isaiah points to John, John points to Jesus and Jesus is the one who comes

- ❖ Jesus is the one who comes to John to be baptized for repentance
- Washing rituals are an important feature of Jewish worship, especially for priests about to enter the temple, where they would enter the presence of God
- Mark begins in the wilderness, not in Jerusalem, where one would expect to find baptism for repentance of sins
- To the historians of the day, John is a more important figure than Jesus
- John's preaching promises baptism by fire, a baptism superior to water baptism (Jesus is superior to John)

## Jesus' Baptism (Mark 1:9-11)

- ❖ Jesus' baptism elicits a divine response: the heavens are torn apart
- ♦ Juel notes that this kind of violent tearing is not easily repaired
- ❖ The boundary between God and human beings has been breached
- ♦ "God is on the loose"
- ❖ The Spirit descending like a dove is another indication that the gap between God and humans is narrowed
- ♦ Literally, the Spirit descends into Jesus, suggesting a picture of Jesus as Spirit-possessed by the Spirit of God
- ❖ A voice says "You are my son"
- ❖ By now the audience is clued in that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and expectations are set up for the coming victory, or...

## Jesus' Testing (Mark 1:12-13)

- ❖ Now the Spirit "throws him out" into the wilderness
- ♦ This is the same word used for driving out demons
- ❖ Later Jesus will be throwing unclean spirits out of people, but first the most clean Spirit throws Jesus out
- ❖ Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days
- ❖ Who else was in the wilderness for 40 somethings?
- ❖ Jesus passes the testing in the wilderness and is ministered to (or deaconed) by angels
- ❖ Right at the beginning of Mark we know that Satan is allied with the forces of evil and that Jesus has clearly sided with God and the forces of good

## Jesus' Preaching (Mark 1:14-15)

- ❖ "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."
- ❖ *Chronos* (or clock) time vs. Kairos (or quality or right) time
  - This is a time of crisis, or decision, or tipping point
- ❖ In Jesus' and Mark's day, people thought that evil was so prevalent that the end times must be near
- ❖ Jesus announces that the kingdom of God is breaking into time
- ❖ "Kingdom is not a place; kingdom is an activity of God as ruler."
- ❖ Our response is to repent and trust in God

## First Disciples (Mark 1:16-20)

- ❖ The kingdom of God is such a big concept that it requires additional workers
- ❖ So Jesus begins by calling 2 brothers Simon and Andrew
  - Do you want to fish for people?
  - Recalls a metaphor used in apocalyptic Judaism in which the final judgement is symbolised by a net full of fish that are sorted out
- ❖ Next Jesus calls James and John who are with their father, whom they leave behind
- The charge of Rome against Christians was that this destruction of family ties was antisocial
- ❖ Maybe our usual roles will have to be rethought

## Teaching and Casting Out a Demon (Mark 1:21-28)

- ❖ Back in Capernaum, on the sabbath, Jesus goes to synagogue where he teaches with authority
- ♦ In Mark, Jesus begins his ministry in “a holy place on a holy day”
- ❖ The people notice that Jesus’ authority is different from the authority of the scribes
- ❖ In the synagogue, there is a man with an unclean spirit who calls Jesus “the Holy One of God”
- ♦ The unclean spirit is out of place, “an unholy thing in a holy place”
- ♦ No human will ascribe to Jesus the title Son of God until his trial
- ❖ Take note that the spirit world, whether good or evil, knows things that ordinary people do not know
- ❖ The unclean spirit also seems to know that Jesus’ arrival signals their demise

- ❖ Jesus' exorcism of the unclean spirit is connected by the people with Jesus' authoritative teaching
  
- ❖ There is a pattern here, or a sandwich
  - A reference to teaching
  - A reference to exorcism
  - A reference to teaching
  
- ❖ Together they tell us that the coming kingdom of God is signalled by the defeat of Satan's forces

## Healing a Fever (Mark 1:29-31)

- ❖ After the synagogue incident, Jesus goes to Simon's house where Simon's mother-in-law is ill
- Note that it is still the sabbath
- ❖ Jesus heals her and she ministers or "deacons" them
  - Word for minister is used infrequently in Mark, and so far we've seen 2 uses
- ❖ 2 healing stories
  - Man healed in synagogue, a public space
  - Woman healed at home, a woman's space
  - Demonstrates that gender and social location are no barrier to Jesus

## Healing Many (Mark 1:32-34)

- ❖ Mark tells us that the 2 preceding healings are just examples of the many people Jesus healed
- ❖ Jesus instructs the demons to keep silent
  - Known as the Messianic secret
  - Mark's audience, like the demons, know the secret
- ❖ So far we know that Jesus is a powerful healer and teacher

## Praying and Preaching (Mark 1:35-39)

- ❖ Jesus retreats to the wilderness to pray
- ❖ Simon “tracks him down” because so many are waiting to be healed
- ❖ Jesus agrees to go with them, but to the next town where he can proclaim his message to others

## Healing a Leper (Mark 1:40-45)

- ❖ Leprosy is any one of a variety of skin conditions, all of which isolate their victims
- With this healing, Jesus begins a pattern of breaking down ritual boundaries
- These boundaries were established by the Torah, as a means to protect life and community, not as a means to salvation
- ❖ Jesus has pity on the leper and heals him
- The Greek here suggests an exorcism; literally it says, "And snorting at him in indignation, Jesus cast him out."
- It is difficult to understand Jesus' anger here
- ❖ Then astonishingly, he asks the leper not to tell, except he can tell the priest to be restored to the community
- ❖ Implied is that the healing, and thus Jesus' power, can be attributed to God

# JESUS AND THE TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY (MARK 2:1- 3:6)

## Healing a Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12)

- ❖ The paralytic's friends lower him through the roof of Jesus' house
  - Roofs were made of mud wattle and were replaced after every rainy season
- ❖ Impressed, Jesus says to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven"
  - Note the passive voice
  - Passive voice is a circumlocution for God
  - Juel notes that, for Mark, there is something inherently evil about physical illness that links it to sin
- ❖ Scribes are offended by Jesus' blasphemy
- ❖ Jesus retorts that "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"
  - In Mark, only Jesus uses this title
  - Associated with the end times (Daniel 7:13-14)
  - Aramaic version of phrase is self referent
  - Jesus is claiming the right to speak for God

- Result of healing the paralytic is that the crowd glorifies God

## Calling Levi and Eating with Sinners (Mark 2:13-17)

- ❖ While teaching by the sea, Jesus sees a tax collector named Levi and calls him as a disciple
- ❖ Levi's name identifies him as Jewish, but he is working for the Romans
- Juel notes that since Levi is in Galilee, he is actually working for Herod Antipas
- ❖ While feasting at Levi's house, some people call attention to the fact that Jesus and his disciples eat with sinners
- According to the Babylonian Talmud, tax collectors are so sinful that they are not allowed to come to the synagogue
- ❖ Jesus does not dispute their sinful state, but notes that he has come "to call not the righteous, but sinners"
- ❖ Once again, the kingdom of God is breaking in and it is disruptive

- ♦ The scribes and Pharisees were interested in preserving order; Jesus was interested in restoring the outsider to the community

## Question about Fasting (Mark 2:18-22)

- ❖ John's disciples fasted, but Jesus' disciples do not
- ❖ Jesus' response: "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them...The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them"
  - "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak"
  - "No one puts new wine into old wineskins"
  - Jesus, like the new wine, is apt to burst some of the old containers of society
- ❖ Jesus, the bridegroom, will be taken away at his death, but now it's time to party

## Plucking Grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28)

- ❖ Issue here is whether plucking the grain and rubbing the heads together is work
- ❖ That the disciples are eating the grain harvested in this manner is implied
- ♦ Deuteronomy 23:25 explicitly permits this activity
- ❖ Jesus' response to the Pharisees is guaranteed to make them even more unhappy with him than they already are
- ❖ "If breaking this law is all right for David and his men, then it's ok for me and my disciples"
- ❖ Then Jesus ups the ante by adding, "The sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."
- ♦ The view that sabbath is for people is found in the traditions associated with Hillel and his disciples

- ❖ Once more the kingdom of God is breaking in, and it's disrupting the present order

## Healing a Withered Hand (Mark 3:1-6)

- ❖ Next, Jesus goes to synagogue where he meets a man with a withered hand while being observed to see if he will heal
- ❖ Jesus asks, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?"
- ❖ It would be fair to ask, "Why not wait for one more day?", but Jesus insists that the healing must occur now
- "If a man has a pain in his throat they may drop medicine into his mouth on the Sabbath, since there is doubt whether life is in danger, and whenever there is doubt whether life is in danger this overrides the Sabbath." (Mishnah)
- ❖ Jesus asks the man to stretch out his arm and merely observes that it is healed; no work is done by Jesus or the man
- ❖ But immediately the Pharisees go out to conspire against him

## Reviewing Mark 2:1-3:6

- ❖ Each of the stories in this section end with controversy

2:1-12	healing a paralytic	useless legs
2:13-17	calling Levi/eating with sinners	eating
2:18-22	not fasting	eating
2:23-28	plucking grain on Sabbath	eating
3:1-6	healing on the Sabbath	useless hand

- ❖ At the very center of these stories are the sayings about new and old things
- ❖ Central question at issue: How does the new relate to the old?
- Note that the fact that authorities asked Jesus questions implies that they value his response
- Intense discussion about the law is a valued part of Jewish tradition
- Juel notes that Jesus is more similar to the Pharisees than any of the other groups in Mark

# JESUS AND THE NEW COMMUNITY (MARK 3:7-35)

## Healing Many (Mark 3:7-12)

- ❖ People came from the entire region, from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, Tyre, & Sidon, to hear Jesus and be healed
- ❖ The places named constitute the land of Israel at the height of the empire under David
- ❖ Once again, the unclean spirits clearly identify Jesus and are told to keep silence
- ❖ Mark exhorts the reader to wait until they have all the facts before they speak

## Naming Twelve (Mark 3:13-19a)

- ❖ Out of all the disciples, Jesus now appoints twelve men to that group who will be known as the apostles, or the “sent out”
- ❖ Twelve is an important number because it is associated with the twelve tribes of Israel
- ❖ Jesus performs this task on a mountain, just as Moses ascends a mountain to talk to God and receive the 10 Commandments
- ❖ The apostles are sent out to preach and to cast out demons
- ❖ We are told a little about these men
  - Simon has a nickname, Peter, that means rock, sort of like Rocky (keep this in mind as we approach the end of Mark’s account)
  - James and John are the “Sons of Thunder”

## Jesus' Family (Mark 3:19b-21)

- ❖ Even at home, with his family, the crowds are so great that the family can't eat
- ❖ While at home, the family attempts to restrain Jesus, having heard talk that he is crazy
- Literally, Jesus' relatives come to seize (krateo) him

## Jesus and Some Scribes (Mark 3:22-30)

- ❖ At this point, some scribes from Jerusalem begin to assert that Jesus is indeed crazy, like a fox, as Malbon says
- ❖ They claim that Jesus power over demons derives from his alliance with the power of evil
- ❖ Jesus responds that this is not logical, because the forces of evil are being defeated, thus demonstrating his allegiance to the kingdom of God
- ♦ As the One who proclaims the imminence of the kingdom of God, Jesus' exorcisms are like an invasion of alien territory
- ♦ Note the language Jesus uses of his own task; he has come "to bind and plunder", hardly civil discourse
- ♦ Later, Jesus will be crucified as a bandit
- ❖ It is the false claim of the scribes that Jesus is an associate of Satan that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, because Jesus'

power to teach and heal comes from the  
Holy Spirit

## Jesus' Metaphorical Family (Mark 3:31-35)

- ❖ Now, it is Jesus' family standing outside who must send a message inside to him
- ❖ Jesus asks the question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"
- ❖ Jesus' answer: "Whoever does the will of God"
- ❖ Malbon thinks this is Jesus, the gifted teacher, who is talking
- ❖ We know with certainty that the church in Mark's time did become the family for many whose allegiance to Christ had broken their ties to birth relatives

# JESUS AND PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

## (MARK 4:1-34)

- ❖ Parable derived from 2 Greek words that mean "to throw along side of"
- ❖ They usually take a concrete, everyday image and use it to elucidate an abstract idea

## Parable of the Seeds (Mark 4:1-9)

- ❖ In the parable, the sower appears to be quite careless; note where the seeds fall
  - On the path
  - On rocky ground
  - Among thorns
  - Finally, on good soil
- 
- ❖ Surely the harvest will be disastrous
- ❖ But no, the yields are astounding
  - 30-fold
  - 60-fold
  - 100-fold
- ❖ Farmers of the day expected an 8-fold yield
- ❖ Parable can also mean “riddle”, so “let anyone with ears to hear listen”
- ❖ This kingdom of God is going to grow!

## Parables and Mystery (Mark 4:10-12)

- ❖ Jesus tells his disciples, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God"
- ❖ The greek word here is mysterion, or mystery
- ❖ Then Mark makes an allusion to Isaiah 6
- ❖ Mark expects his audience to know their Hebrew Bible
- ❖ This paraphrase of Isaiah 6 is so important to the early Christians that every gospel plus Acts (Luke, Part 2) contains it
- ❖ When the first Christians felt that no one was responding to their message from God, they knew they were not alone. Isaiah had experienced this too.

## Interpreting the Parable of the Seeds (Mark 4:13-20)

- ❖ This is an allegorical interpretation of the parable of the seeds
- ❖ In an allegory, each thing in the story stands for some specific thing, e.g. The seeds are the word
- ❖ Most scholars think this was an interpretation added after Jesus' time
- ❖ The problem with allegories is that they limit the meaning of a text to a very specific one

## See What You Hear (Mark 4:21-25)

- ❖ Parables may require interpretation, but they are intended to be understood
- ❖ "There is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light."
- ❖ "Pay attention to what you hear" literally says "Look what you hear" in Greek
- ❖ Together with "For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away" suggests that this section is pushing the limits of language

## Parable of the Seed Growing of Itself (Mark 4:26-29)

- ❖ The kingdom is like a seed, that once sown, grows without human intervention
- ❖ God is behind the growth of the seed, and behind the kingdom
- ❖ Like the seed that is already growing, the kingdom is already here in some ways
- ❖ Soon the harvesting will need to begin, harvesting that is a picture of the end times in apocalyptic Judaism

## Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32)

- ❖ The mustard seed, a tiny seed, when planted, will grow into a large shrub
- ❖ Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4 speak of nations that are like large trees
- ❖ But God's kingdom is like a shrub
- ❖ Mustard is really kind of a weed
- ❖ A better translation for our day: The kingdom of God is like a dandelion seed
- ❖ God's kingdom is not under our control
- ❖ God's kingdom is spreading and won't be eradicated

## Hearing the Parables (Mark 4:33-34)

- ❖ Jesus uses parables a lot to speak to the crowds, but he explains them to his disciples
- ❖ This suggests that the disciples are insiders
- ❖ Who are the outsiders?
  - The Jewish leaders?
  - Gentiles?
- ❖ What does it mean to be an insider?