



MARK

Survey of the New Testament: The Gospels & Acts Winter 2005

Introduction

Author

This gospel is technically anonymous. However, the earliest church fathers have unanimously ascribed the book to the authorship of Mark. The oldest reference comes from Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis who wrote in AD 140 that Mark himself was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, but Mark interpreted what he remembered from Peter's testimony to the life of Jesus. While the gospel is not a chronological outline of the life of Christ, it is nonetheless an accurate record¹. The early church historian Eusebius agrees with Papias, indicating that Mark's gospel is a compilation of the gospel preached by the apostle Peter, written down at the insistence of Peter's followers².

In addition to this external evidence, there is some internal evidence that Mark's gospel was influenced greatly by Peter. The outline of Peter's sermon in Acts 10:34-43 has much in common with Mark's gospel.

Mark, also known as John Mark, is a minor character in the New Testament narrative. The early church in Jerusalem met in house of Mark's mother (Acts 12:12). He was a cousin to Barnabas, accompanying Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. However, because Mark leaves the journey early and heads home, Paul is reluctant to take Mark on his second missionary journey, causing Paul and Barnabas to part company (Acts 15:36-41). Nonetheless, Mark was later reconciled to Paul, as Paul asks Timothy to send Mark because of his helpfulness to his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

Date

In one of our earliest manuscripts of the book of Mark, dated AD 160-180, the prologue to the gospel states that Mark authored this book in Italy after the death of Peter³. Peter's death was around AD 64. Given that there is no reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70, the best dating of the gospel is probably between AD 64 and AD 70. However, who believe that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, place the writing in the AD 50s.

Audience

In addition to this ancient prologue, in 1 Peter 5:13, Peter states that Mark is with him in Rome, and in Colossians 4:10 Paul says that Mark is with him in prison in Rome. This is all strong external evidence that Mark wrote to the Christians in Rome. Internal evidence supports this contention, as Mark uses many Latin phrases in his text.

¹ Eusebius Pamphilus. "Church History." From A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Rev. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, translator. (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1890), 173. Available on-line at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.i.html>.

² Eusebius, 116.

³ Walter W. Wessel. "Mark." *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

At the time of this writing, the church in Rome was first being persecuted by the Roman officials. The city of Rome had faced a disastrous fire which destroyed much of the city. Rumors circulated that the Roman emperor, Nero, had purposely started the fire so to clear land for a large urban renewal project he wanted. To combat these rumors, Nero placed the blame for starting the fire on a group of people from a new religion called Christianity. While the persecution from this was short-lived, it was intense, with stories told of Nero lighting his evening garden parties with Christians tied to poles and set ablaze. From this time forward, the Romans no longer considered Christianity as a sub-set of Judaism, and therefore were no longer a “legal” religion in the eyes of the law.

Style

Of all the four gospels, Mark’s writing style is the least sophisticated in its use of the Greek language, showing strong Aramaic and Latin influences. However, Mark seems to give us a better picture of what day to day life was like around Jesus. Mark emphasizes how the multitudes were always around, and how it was difficult to get away (Mark 1:45). Little details about color and feelings give Mark a very descriptive tone. Mark also records much of the interaction between Christ and His disciples, focusing on his relationship with the disciples and how He trained them (see Mark 6:30-39).

Purpose

- To draw the audience to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God.
- To demonstrate that the purpose of the coming of the Son of God was to suffer and die.
- To encourage the Roman church that persecution was normal and part of God’s plan, for Jesus himself suffered and died.

Structure

Mark does not have the same clear structure that some of the other gospels do. Papias tells us that the structure is not chronological. Instead the structure is designed to draw the audience into answering the question “who is this man, Jesus?”

“Who is this Man?”			The Suffering Servant		
A Man of Charisma 1:1 3:12	A Man of Authority 3:13 6:6	A Man of Compassion 6:7 8:26	Teaching the Disciples 8:27 10:52	Teaching at the Temple 11:1 13:37	Trial, Crucifixion and Resurrection 14:1 16:8

Theme

Jesus, the Son of God and the suffering servant.

“Who Is This Man?” (1:1 – 8:26)

A Man of Mystery

The Mystery of His Ministry

In Matthew, Jesus is introduced with a formal genealogy establishing his heritage. Luke also goes into great detail about Jesus birth and heritage. John introduces his gospel with a beautiful chapter about the nature of Jesus. But Mark begins abruptly, declaring that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

But Mark’s case for Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God is laid out in an unusual way. He shows the questions and feelings of the people around Him as they wrestle with the question, “who is this man?”

In a rapid manner, Mark shows Jesus doing miraculous things, but also being in unusual situations with unusual characters, such as a wild guy who eats grasshoppers baptizes Jesus. He spends time with wild animals in the wilderness (1:13). In fact, the first person who recognizes His identity is a crazed demon possessed man who states, “I know who You are-- the Holy One of God!” (1:24).

Jesus himself fosters this sense of mystery about Him. When Jesus heals the leper in 1:40ff, he sternly warns the healed man not to tell anyone of his miracle (1:44). It is as if Jesus does not really want people to know about His identity yet.

Mark is building interest in the first four chapters, setting the stage for the question. Up to this point all we know about Jesus are the statements of some suspicious characters and questions without answers from others. All of this is designed by Mark to draw us into the question, “who is this man?”

The Mystery of His Teaching

Jesus’ teaching was also often enigmatic and veiled. After giving the parable of the sower in 4:1-9, when they were alone, the disciples admitted that they didn’t understand the parable and asked him to explain it. This seemed to be a regular practice of the Jesus and the disciples. He would teach in parables to the crowds, but then when alone he would explain the meaning to the disciples.

With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples. (Mark 4:33-34)

Most teaching in that day was a recitation of other’s teachings and did not confuse or force the listener to hear with an understanding ear. But Mark is building up Jesus as a man of mystery so as to draw us into the question, “who is this man?”

A Man of Charisma

The Calling of the Disciples

Jesus public career around Galilee had just started when he began forming a team of men who would help him spread his message. Mark does not give us many details into these men or why they would be willing to leave their lives behind in order to follow this enigmatic man from Nazareth. What he does record gives an insight to Jesus’ character: Jesus was a man of charisma.

There were four commercial fishermen in business together: Peter and Andrew (who were brothers) and James and John (also brothers). Mark tells us they were just going about their business when Jesus calls to them to be fishers of men.

These four dropped their business, their careers, and their families and immediately began following Jesus. Verse 20 even says that James and John left their father in the fishing boat when they left to follow this man.

The calling of Matthew follows a similar circumstance. However Levi was a tax collector. In a time when the Roman taxation was so extremely oppressive, Levi was certainly not the most loved of his countrymen. He would have been hated. But he also would have been extremely rich, as the Romans gave tax collectors the ability to take their salary to the top of what was due the government.

It is clear that Jesus must have been a tremendously charismatic leader. These men were willing to follow after a first meeting. They were not gullible people. These were hardened fishermen and street-wise savvy businessmen. Jesus must have had a quality about him that inspired people to follow after Him.

The Crowds

Jesus not only inspired his disciples to follow after Him, but crowds of people were thronging to Him. News of His ministry was spreading throughout Galilee (1:28), and soon there were so many people coming to see Him that he could not longer publicly enter a city for fear of being mobbed by the crowd. So Jesus moved his ministry out of the city and into the countryside so that they could all have room to see Him (1:45).

A Man of Authority

Teaching With Authority

Part of Jesus charisma is tied with the manner in which he taught.

They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:22)

The standard of teaching in that day by the “teachers of the law” would be to quote the sayings of other teachers. They would gather their evidence and present a case for their teaching using secondary sources. Their knowledge was derived from tradition and scholarship⁴. But Jesus was using himself as a primary source. He dared to present teachings without quoting others or using others as a proof of his case. He spoke with authority, and this amazed the disciples and his other listeners.

This sense of authority was supported by an ability to heal sickness, cast out demons, and control nature itself.

As Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, a man with an evil spirit came in and interrupted the scene. After Jesus had rebuked the evil spirit and command it to leave the man, Mark tell us:

They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." (Mark 1:27)

It is interesting that the people responded to the authority of Jesus’ teaching, not the authority he had over the evil spirit. It seems that the same authority they had sensed in his teaching, which was unlike the normal teaching, was transferred into this miracle. This was a mind-boggling

⁴ John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Victor Books, 1988), 109.

teaching style. When Jesus opened his mouth, the things he said amazed people. It was a new teaching. It was an authoritative teaching. It was a teaching that had power.

A Storm Which Begg the Question (4:35-41)

While the disciples were amazed by His charisma and by how He taught, their amazement about this man named Jesus was about to rise to a new level in Mark 4:35-41. This is the first pivotal point in the book, raising the question which people in the first four chapters have been asking: "Who is this man?"

Mark uses four questions in the passage come together to make a point. The usage of questions to make a point is an important literary device which even today is a part of Jewish culture. These questions build upon each other to brings us to a conclusion:

1. Disciples ask, "Do you not care?" (v. 38)
2. Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid?" (v. 40)
3. Jesus asks, "Why do you have so little faith?" (v. 40)
4. Disciples ask, "Who is this man?" (v. 41)

Don't You Care?

The scene begins with the disciples in a boat, and a storm. However, Jesus is asleep in the boat. The boat is about to sink in this windstorm and Jesus is sleeping in the stern with his head on a pillow. The disciples were not over reacting. At least four of the disciples were fishermen, with experience sailing on the sea. When they say that they are about to die, these men really thought the boat was going down. And here Jesus was, sleeping, as if he didn't care about their plight. They ask the obvious question of the indifferent sleeper: "Don't you care that we are about to die?"

Why Do You Fear, Where Is Your Faith?

Jesus quietly gets up and issues a simple command. "Quiet. Be still." What follows is what has been described as a point of quiet intensity⁵. The silence is almost tangible as the disciples stand there with their mouths agape. Jesus breaks the silence by asking two questions: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Jesus is expressing his disappointment. He expected that by now the disciples would have understood who he was. They had seen him perform miracles. They had seen him teach with great authority. But they doubted not only that He had the ability to calm the storm, but that He cared for them.

Who Is This?

You get the sense that the disciples didn't even hear Jesus questions. They were in complete shock. The moment strikes fear in the disciples and the haunting question just hangs there awaiting an answer: "Who is this?" Who has the power to control the wind and the waves?

Before the storm, it is clear that the disciples are afraid for their lives. But after Jesus has calmed the storm, Mark tells us that now they are terrified. It seems that the disciples felt their lives more threatened in the presence of someone with the power to end a storm than in the midst of deadly storm.

This is the beginning of a theme of fear which Mark shows us all through His gospel. The disciples were afraid of the storm. But now they are even more afraid to be in the presence of this man who has the very power to control nature.

It seems if you are able to answer the last question, "Who is this man," you will have faith. That faith will keep you from fear, which then answers the first question, "Does Jesus care about my peril."

⁵ Rick Taylor, in a lecture given at the *Grace Institute*, October 9, 1997.

Mark's audience would have also been facing a great deal of fear due to the persecution at the hand of the Roman government. Indeed, many in the Roman church were probably wondering if Jesus cared for their peril. But if the Christians reading Mark's gospel understand who Jesus is, they will have faith. That faith will keep them from fear, and answer the question if Jesus remembers or cares for them in the midst of their suffering.

Mark spends the rest of this book showing who Jesus is and asking his reader to determine for themselves who He is. This, in turn, will tell his audience, that there is no need to fear and that indeed Jesus does care about their perils.

The Power of this Man (5:1 – 8:26)

In trying to answer the question raised in the previous verse (4:41), Mark's narrative moves to several miracles of Jesus. Mark seems to slow down and spend a little more time with the narrative so as to indicate that these miracles seem to be of a higher order of magnitude than what we have seen so far. Mark is drawing a picture here of a man who has great authority.

The picture begins with a demonstration of his power over a legion of demons. He then demonstrates his power over death as he raises Jarius' daughter (5:35-43). The demonstration of power continues as he feeds the 5,000 (6:30 ff.) and then the 4,000 (8:1ff). He walks on water (6:45ff). His power is so pervasive that even people who touch his cloak are healed (6:56)

These miracles demonstrate the incredible authority and power of this man.

A Man of Compassion

Yet put in the midst of this power we see tremendous compassion, even when that compassion cost him something. For example, in 5:25ff, Jesus, on His way to heal someone, has a woman disturb Him. But it doesn't bother Him. Instead, he takes the time to heal her, and talk with her. His compassion is greater than the task at hand. He never allows the needs of someone to outweigh His personal agenda. However, the most compelling look at Jesus compassion is chapter 6.

Jesus Meets the Spiritual Needs of the Crowd

The Need of Jesus and the Disciples

Back in Mark 6:6-13, we read that Jesus sent his 12 closest followers, the disciples, on a whirlwind tour of Palestine to share the message of Jesus. Now, in verse 30, the disciples have gathered back together, and they have a debriefing session, where the disciples tell Jesus all that had happened on their mission. I am sure it must have been exciting to talk about their adventures. But the disciples were probably also rather tired. They had been traveling extensively for some time and now they were back reunited with their leader.

But it was not all a happy reunion. We read in the verses between the sending of the disciples and their return (i.e. verses 14-29) that John the Baptist has been beheaded by King Herod. John was Jesus cousin and his spiritual forbearer. It was John who had baptized Jesus and given Jesus his initial credibility, and now He was dead.

Jesus and the disciples were not just upset at the death of a close friend. They were probably also scared. If Herod were willing to kill John, would Jesus and his disciples be next on the hit list? It was no secret that John and Jesus were comrades, working for the same cause. So Jesus suggests a retreat.

The Need of the Crowd

But Jesus and his disciples had gained such notoriety, that they found it difficult getting away from the crowds of people who wanted to see and hear them. While Jesus and the disciples are in the boat crossing the lake the crowd ran around the lake to catch up with them.

But Jesus response gives us a wonderful insight into his character. He does not tell the disciples to get back in the boat. He does not tell the crowd, “Hey, I’m too tired, come back tomorrow.” Instead, he sees the need of the crowd and how desperate they are for a leader.

When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34)

Jesus is tired, wanting nothing more than to be alone with his disciples. But when he sees the crowd, he is overwhelmed by their need. He looks on them and sees them as sheep without a shepherd. They are people who need guidance. They are people who need leadership. And, even though he is weary, he reaches out to them to meet their need.

But what was their need? What gave him such a deep sense of compassion? We see what Jesus perceived their deep need to be by how he sought to remedy that need. His compassion compelled him to teach them many things. He looked at the crowd and saw what they lacked was spiritual insight. They needed to know and understand about spiritual matters. He did not heal them. He did not give them financial stability. He did not organize them into a political party. He taught them. He gave them insights into the word of God, because he saw these people as a spiritually needy people. A people with need to understand who God is and what he expects from us.

Jesus Meets the Physical Needs of the Crowd

Jesus and the disciples had been trying to get away from the crowd by sailing in their boat away from the cities and the crowds. So they headed to a deserted area across the Sea of Galilee. Now as Jesus is teaching the day is turning into evening and everyone is getting hungry. And since they are in the middle of nowhere, far from any town or city, the disciples come to Jesus.

But Jesus tells them to feed the crowd. He is telling the disciples to have compassion on the crowd and be willing to meet their need. The disciples respond that this would cost too much. It is interesting that the disciples don’t say, “but Jesus, we don’t have the money to buy this much food.” Rather they say, “Are we really supposed to go and spend that much?” It seems their concern was not with having the means to meet the needs of the crowd, but was in the cost of meeting the needs of the crowd.

Seeing the unwillingness of the disciples to take responsibility for the crowd, Jesus asks them what they are willing to give. He then proceeds to use what they have to meet the need of the crowd. And he does this in a miraculous way.

Mark is very descriptive in this passage. He says that Jesus had the people sit in groups of 50 and 100 on the green grass. What a wonderful portrait. You can see a patchwork of people sitting in this green pastureland, as the disciples pass the food amongst the crowd. Mark is painting a picture that is very reminiscent of a song, written 1,000 years before by Jesus ancestor, David:

*The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not be in want.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
³ He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for
his name's sake.*

He makes me lie down in green pastures, just as Jesus made the crowd to sit down in the green grass to provide for them. Jesus is the shepherd that provides. He gives me what I need. I shall not be in want. But the need is not just physical in this song. Yes, he provides green pastures and quiet waters for me to eat and drink. But it is not merely physical refreshment. It is a spiritual one. “He restores my soul and guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” It is the

shepherd who gives me what I need for righteousness. And like the feeding of the five thousand, it is a miraculous provision.

Jesus Walks on the Water

Immediately after the Jesus performs this miracle, he puts the disciples on a boat on ahead of him while he dismissed the crowd. Then after saying goodbye to them, he headed up a mountain to spend time praying. The original purpose for Jesus in crossing over to this side of the lake was for a time of retreat. While Jesus took a brief time out to meet the needs of the crowd, Jesus was still in need of some time to refresh himself.

The disciples are in the meantime, back in the boat in the middle of the lake. But the wind on the sea was against them, and the disciples were struggling to row the boat. They struggled as the day wears on into evening. The evening wears on into the night. And finally after midnight, the disciples are still fighting the wind trying to get across the lake.

Jesus meanwhile looks down on the lake and sees these men struggling against the wind. So he left the mountain and decided to go walk out to them, literally walking on the water to get out to the lake. The passage says the disciples become greatly afraid of by this man who walks on the water. But in the midst of their fear he enters the boat and comforts them.

The disciples were afraid because they had not understood about the loaves. The disciples had just seen Jesus feed 5,000 people from a single loaf of bread. If they had recognized the power of Jesus as exhibited in the feeding of the 5,000, they would have not been scared when they saw Jesus walking on the water.

Just as we saw in the calming of the sea in chapter 4, the antidote to fear is faith in who Jesus is, faith in His authority, and faith in His compassion. In crafting this story in this manner, Mark is also telling the Roman church to put their faith in Jesus authority and compassion and Jesus will give them the courage they need to endure.

The Suffering Servant (8:27 – 16:8)

“Who do you say that I am?” (8:27 – 16:8)

Mark changes the question in this second pivotal point in his gospel. Now that we have seen the power and compassion of this man, the question is no longer “who is this man,” but “who do you say he is?” Mark chooses his stories from here out to show people in different circumstances coming to Jesus and wrestling with His identity: Peter (8:27ff), a rich young ruler (10:17 ff.), Bartimaeus (10:46 ff.), the Sannhedrin (14:61-62), Pilate (15:2), and a Roman centurion (15:39).

Seeing Jesus Clearly (8:1-26)

Chapter 8 begins with another look at the compassion of Jesus as He once again feeds the multitudes who are hungry. And, just as the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6 was ultimately a object lesson for the disciples, so again the feeding of the 4,000 in this chapter was intended to teach the disciples of the compassion and power of their master. But the disciples again fail to learn the lesson.

In 8:12-21, the disciples get into a boat with Jesus, only to discover that they have forgotten to bring bread. This creates quite a discussion as they become upset that there is nothing to eat. Jesus expresses frustration at the disciples, for he has twice demonstrated that he can feed thousands of people, yet the disciples are afraid of starving. Jesus asks them:

*“Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? **“HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR?”** (Mark 8:17-18)*

But the disciples are not the only ones who do not understand who Jesus is. In 8:11-12 the Pharisees approach Jesus and ask for a sign from heaven. Their request sounds as if it is a genuine desire to learn who Jesus is. However it is clear from the passage that they have already made up their minds as to who Jesus is, and so Jesus is unwilling to give them any supernatural signs or understanding.

While the disciples have yet to understand fully who Jesus is, unlike the Pharisees, Jesus is willing to give them a supernatural understanding of his true nature. Beginning in chapter 8 Jesus begins instructing the disciples plainly.

To illustrate this point, Mark inserts into his narrative the story of the blind man being healed. In 8:22-26, a blind man is brought to Jesus. Jesus spits into his eye and lays His hands upon him. The blind man begins to see. However, at first he can not see clearly. So Jesus lays his hands upon him again. Now the blind man can see clearly.

Jesus is about to do the same thing with the disciples. Up to now they have been touched by Jesus, but they only have a blurry vision of who he is. Now, just as the second touch by Jesus brought clear sight to the blind man, Jesus is going to allow the disciples to see Him in his fullness.

Peter’s Confession

This second touch by Jesus begins with a simple but critically important question. Jesus asks His disciples who people say He is. They respond, “some say John the Baptist or Elijah.” Then he asks:

*“But who do you say that I am?” Peter *answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:29)*

This is a turning point in the book of Mark. Jesus true identity has been revealed to Peter (Matthew 16:17), and from here forward Jesus speaks plainly to them of his ultimate purpose (8:31-32a). He has come to suffer and die.

From this point in the book, Jesus comments become increasingly serious, condemning the religious leader's hypocrisy and showing the signs of the end times. It is as if the sobriety of the story is growing as we get closer and closer to the climax: Jesus death.

The Transfiguration

No longer should Jesus identity and purpose be a mystery to the disciples. But if Peter's confession and Jesus plain statement of purpose in chapter 8 is not clear enough, surely the transfiguration in Mark 9 should be a clear enough picture of who Jesus is.

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a mountain where he is transfigured before them into his glory. He is joined there by Elijah and Moses. Then, a cloud appears before them and envelopes them. In the book of Exodus a cloud represented the presence of the glory of God. From this cloud shouts a voice, "this is my Son whom I love. Listen to him!"

For nearly 8 full chapters, Mark is raising the question, "who is this man." Now the question has been answered plainly, first by Peter, and now by the very voice of God the Father.

Yet, even in the midst of such an obvious display of Jesus glory, the disciples' reaction is one of fear. Fear often comes when we don't understand what God is trying to do. Peter wanted to build tents to dwell in because he did not understand the Jesus ultimate purpose. He wanted to dwell in the glory on that mountain, forgetting that Jesus real purpose was to suffer and die.

The Purpose of this Man

In Mark 10:32ff the disciples again become afraid, again because they do not understand Jesus ultimate purpose.

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. (Mark 10:32)

Why were they afraid? Jesus had been making enemies of the Jewish religious leaders. Going to Jerusalem would be walking straight into the enemy camp. So Jesus followers, seeing that Jesus was leading them into Jerusalem caused them a lot of fear.

So Jesus tries to help them with their fears by reminding them of His purpose. He tells them that when they go up to Jerusalem he will be betrayed and killed. But not to worry, for three days later he would rise again. But all of this was necessary, for in so doing, Jesus would bring salvation to the world:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

This is the first time in the gospel that Jesus' death is so clearly stated as being substitutionary atonement.

However, you get the sense in the following verses, however, that the disciples still don't really get it. Immediately after this takes place, we read about a strange request by two of Jesus followers, James and John. James and John want to be Jesus right-hand guys. Jesus tells them that if they want this, it is going to cost them. They will have to go through the same difficult circumstances that Jesus must face.

For Mark's readership, this provides context to their suffering. The Roman Christians need not have fear about impending persecution, as were the disciples in chapter 10. By enduring the same persecution and death as Christ, they would be considered great in the coming glory.

The Passion of This Man

The Trial

Just as Jesus predicts, when they go up to Jerusalem he is betrayed, arrested and tried. Yet even in the midst of his trials, Mark is answering the question of who this man is.

In the trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Jesus was asked straight up who he was. The Jewish High Priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

Jesus response shocked the entire courtroom. "I AM," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus boldly proclaims that he himself is the Messiah, the promised one. And further more, that He is the Son of God himself who dwells in heaven on high with God Almighty.

The Death of this Man

Even in the manner of Jesus death his identity becomes apparent to those around Him. The Roman troops take Jesus out of the city and crucify him alongside two thieves. This is not a unique or special event to these soldiers. Execution by crucifixion was just "another day at the office." Yet there was something different in this execution. As darkness covers the land and Jesus breathes his last, the attending Roman centurion is struck by the manner of His death and boldly declares, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." (15:39)

The Resurrection of this Man (16:1-8)

Variant Manuscripts for Mark

If you look at your bible, you will probably notice that verses 9 through 20 of chapter 16 are bracketed or set apart some how with a footnote. There is a dispute as to whether verses 9 through 20 actually belong in the bible. The bible we have today is based upon thousands of manuscripts that date back almost 1900 years. However, in several of the most reliable of these manuscripts, these verses don't appear.

Some scholars believe that the original ending was lost and some scribe in later years decided to reconstruct the original ending. Others believe that Mark actually ended the book at verse 8, and that a later writer didn't like the abrupt ending to the book and decided to give it a better ending. I think that Mark actually did end his book at verse 8, for this abrupt ending fits with the style and themes within the book.

The End of the Story

Jesus has been killed, executed by the Roman authorities for claiming to be the King of the Jews. His followers were scattered, and has been buried in a borrowed tomb. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

These women have just been given wonderful news. The body they were coming to embalm is no longer dead! Jesus is alive! He has risen! What a miracle! What power! God has done

something amazing! But do these women respond with excitement and praise to God? Is that how Mark ends his book? No!

They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:8)

If verses 9 through 20 are not part of the original manuscript, that's how the story ends. "They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." The end.

It does have a certain anti-climatic end to it. When we compare the end of Mark to the end of the other gospels, Mark lacks a sense of victory. Mark lacks a sense of conclusion. Jesus doesn't appear to the disciples at all in Mark's story. Peter and John don't go to the tomb in this story. Thomas doesn't doubt Jesus' resurrection in this version. There is no Great Commission, no restoration of Peter, and no ascension. Instead, the women say nothing, for they were afraid..

It's just such a strange ending you can see why scholars believe that the original ending must have been lost. You can almost see some monk copying the scripture coming to this ending and thinking, "You know, I can do better than that." So he adds his own ending.

However, if this is our reaction, we are not giving Mark, the credit for literary style that he deserves. We want a nice neat conclusion to the story. We are looking for the facts of the case rather than trying to understand what Mark was trying to communicate to us through his ending. Mark was written not to give information, but to solicit a response. We find ourselves asking the question, "what happens next?" Mark is forcing the reader to make a decision with what happens next. Who do you think this man is? The reader must respond to fill out the story.

Verse 8 ends with the women in fear. We have seen the theme of fear is weaved all the way through this book. We saw many people, when encountering Jesus, their reaction was to be afraid. The disciples in particular were afraid when they knew they were heading to Jerusalem. Peter was afraid at the transfiguration. The disciples were afraid when they saw Jesus walk on the water. Finally, they were afraid when Jesus calmed the storm.

If we go back to calming of the wind and the waves, Jesus question of the disciples seems to tie this book up. Jesus asks the disciples, "why are you afraid?" For if the disciples were able to answer their question, "who is this who is able to calm the wind and the waves," they would have no reason to be afraid.

Mark has asked the question, "who is this man," and then demonstrated his case that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. It is affirmed by Peter and by God the Father at the transfiguration. It was attested to by Jesus himself at the trial, and by the Roman soldier at the cross. If Mark has answered the question, when you get to verse 8 of this chapter and see the fear in the women, your natural reaction to this should be, why are you afraid? Don't you know who Jesus is?

Mark's gospel serves as a source of encouragement for all who are afraid, be they Mark's original audience undergoing persecution, or be they a 21st century believer whose life seems out of control. For those who know Jesus have no reason to fear, for He is the Messiah, the son of God, a man of authority and a man of compassion.

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Eusebius, in his *Church History* quotes Papias, who in turn quotes someone known as the "elder" who states:

Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.

Eusebius, from his church history also states:

So greatly did the splendor of piety illumine the minds of Peter's hearers that they were not satisfied with hearing once only, and were not content with the unwritten teaching of the divine Gospel, but with all sorts of entreaties they besought Mark, 389 a follower of Peter, and the one whose Gospel is extant, that he would leave them a written monument of the doctrine which had been orally communicated to them. Nor did they cease until they had prevailed with the man, and had thus become the occasion of the written Gospel which bears the name of Mark.