

## Week 1: 'I wanna tell you a story'      Mark 1:1-3

### 'The Gospel of redemptive activity' (Gundry)

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the **good news** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

- Earliest of the four Gospels and written probably in the late 40s - early 50s AD in Rome and probably for a Roman audience. Shortest Gospel (16 Chapters) and is one of 'action' instead of long discourses. Only a small amount of material is unique to Mark (see figure below).
- Attributed to 'John Mark' who accompanies Paul, Barnabas, and Peter on their journeys (Acts 12:12, 25, 15:37, 39; Col. 4:10; Phm. 24; 2 Tim. 4: 11; 1 Pt 5:13 - see also the 'naked young man' in Mk. 14:51).
- Early tradition says Mark recorded 'accurately' the reminiscences of Peter but not always in chronological order. Emphasised by Papias in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
- Why was it written? Instruction for new converts? Liturgical use? Evangelistic – the story of Jesus given in such a way to win converts to the Christian faith.

### Something about style

'direct and straightforward in style, with energy and vigour in the writing' (Proctor)

- Action moves quickly from one incident to another – 'just then' (1:23), 'as soon as they left' (1:29) - see also 1:35, 1:39, 2:1. Small details that make the story come alive – 'they dug through the roof' (2:4), 'asleep on the cushion' (4:38), 'shackles and chains' (5:4), 'a sponge full of sour wine' (15:36) - 'immediately' (27 times).
- Mark likes sandwiches! Sometimes the story line is interrupted by a diversion into something different only to return to the original narrative a little later - read the healing of Jairus's daughter and the woman in the crowd (5:21-43) but also 3:20-35; 4:1-20; 6:7-30; 11:12-25; 14:1-11; 14:53-72.
- He uses 'echoes' so the listener/reader will say "haven't I heard that before?" The two blind healings (8:22-26 and 10:46-52) – see also 8:31; 9:31; 10:33f which reinforce one another but prepared by 6:14-16 and 8:27-29. See also the echoes in 6:41, 8:6, 14:22
- There are sustained themes, repetition for emphasis (the controversy accounts in 2:1-3:6, Gentile material in chapter 7, the parables of chapter 4).
- The parables in Mark are compact (2:21f; 4:31f) with only two longer ones (4:3-9 and 12:1-9). The parables help to show the meaning of the gospel and make sense of the events.
- Mark does not use the Old Testament as much as say Matthew does in his Gospel, but it is there all the same. 'For Mark, the Old Testament Scriptures are like a bank of floodlights, shining out of the past to illuminate Jesus and to show how God works through him' (Proctor).

## Gospel – “good news”

- ‘gospel’ is the translation of the Greek εὐαγγέλιον, meaning "good news" (εὖ *eû* "good" + ἄγγελος *ángelos* "messenger"). The Old English *gōdspel* (*gōd* "good" + *spel* "news") becomes gospel. In Greek it is found 77 times in the NT, translated gospel (46), gospel of Christ (11), gospel of God (7), gospel of the kingdom (3), and other miscellaneous times (10).
- Mark uses the word seven times (1:1,14,15; 8:35;10:29;13:10: 14:9) with possibly a couple of hints elsewhere so it is important.
- Why might this be significant for those listening?

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’”

They would hear the OT prophets. Isaiah Ch. 40-55 speak of ‘good tidings’ to come (40:9; 41:27; 52:7). Israel’s exile will end, God will lead his people home and instead of tears there will be comfort and joy. The way is now open, and God is calling them home.

Second, there were almost certainly echoes of the Roman world where ‘good news’ was sent out about a new Emperor, or their birthday, or a victorious army. This was good news of a new ‘Lord’ to challenge and question all those existing powers – his throne a cross (15:26, 39).

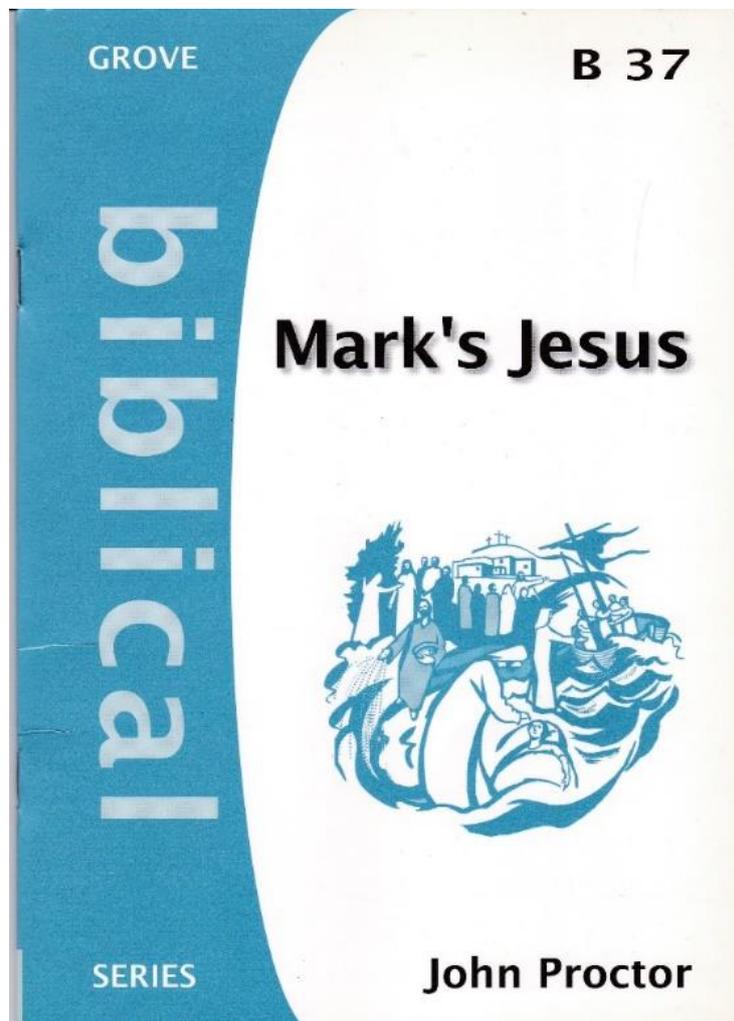
## Mark as ‘story’

In ‘Mark: The Gospel as story’, Ernest Best, a Scottish New Testament scholar, argued that Mark stood on the border between oral tradition and written material. It was to be **read** as a whole, not divided, achieving ‘its effect through its total impact’. It was written ‘for believers who know the stories it contained as individual stories before they had heard the whole’.

So why was it written? Evangelistic – to win converts to the Christian faith – probably yes. Liturgical – bring back the 60-minute sermon! Perhaps Mark’s purpose was equally pastoral in the widest sense, to build up the community in faith, perhaps against a background of persecution. Best uses the phrase ‘radical’ when speaking about discipleship – ‘that in order to go the way of a disciple it was not sufficient to imitate Jesus; imitation was impossible without the help of Jesus himself. Thus he gives a central place to Jesus; it is from Jesus that discipleship begins; it is because of Jesus and what he has done that discipleship is possible.’ (Best).

John Proctor (p4) says:

'One word needs explaining. I refer often to Mark's gospel as a 'story'. In my view it is a profoundly true and trustworthy story, both as a historical record and as a basis for faith. But I call it a story because it is deliberately and carefully told. Simply to reel off a string of events, as if they were entries in a telephone directory, might conceal their meaning rather than bring it out. But to present the material - to select, arrange, abbreviate, emphasize, summarize, begin and end – is the skill of an author, and this skill counts for most when the story is both important and true. Mark was an able author, and his story is a shrewd and subtle piece of writing, simple and yet deep, accessible yet marvellously intricate. The church's knowledge of Jesus become gospel, not just because of what it is, but also though how it is passed on. This was true in Mark's day, and it remains so in our time too.'



[https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/b-37-marks-jesus-the-message-and-meaning-of-marks-gospel?\\_pos=1&\\_sid=34764af40&\\_ss=r](https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/b-37-marks-jesus-the-message-and-meaning-of-marks-gospel?_pos=1&_sid=34764af40&_ss=r)

# Mark in the Sunday Lectionary – Year B

**Advent** 1 13.24-37

2 1.1-8

3 *John 1.6-8, 19-28*

4 *Luke 1.26-38*

**Christmas** 1 *Luke 2.15-21*

2 *John 1.1 (or 10)-18*

**Epiphany** 1 1.4-11

2 *John 1.43-51*

3 *John 2.1-11*

4 1.21-28

Proper 1 1.29-39

2 1.40-45

3 2.1-12

2 before Lent *John 1.1-14*

1 before Lent 9.2-9

**Lent** 1 1.9-15

2 8.31-38

3 *John 2.13-22*

4 *John 3.14-21*

5 *John 12.20-33*

6 14.1-15.47, or 15.1-39 (or 47)

**Easter Sunday** 16.1-8, or *Jn 20.1-18*

Easter 2 *John 20.19-31*

3 *Luke 24.36b-48*

4 *John 10.11-18*

5 *John 15.1-8*

6 *John 15.9-17*

7 *John 17.6-19*

**Pentecost** *John 15.26f; 16.4b-15*

**Trinity** *John 3.1-17*

Proper 4 2.23-3.6

5 3.20-35

6 4.26-34

7 4.35-41

8 5.21-43

9 6.1-13

10 6.14-29

11 6.30-34, 53-56

12 *John 6.1-21*

13 *John 6.24-35*

14 *John 6.35, 41-51*

15 *John 6.51-58*

16 *John 6.56-69*

17 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23

18 7.24-37

19 8.27-38

20 9.30-37

21 9.38-50

22 10.2-16

23 10.17-31

24 10.35-45

25 10.46-52

**Bible Sunday** *John 5.36b-47*

**All Saints** *John 11.32-44*

4 Before Advent 12.28-34

3 Before Advent 1.14-20

2 Before Advent 13.1-8

1 Before Advent *John 18.33-37*