

Mark's Gospel



Now
is the
Time

Study Notes Part One

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INTRODUCTION to the series...

Mark's Gospel: Now is the Time!

Mark's Gospel is full of activity. We look at who Jesus is and then in Part 2 of this series, make the journey with him to the Cross for Lent. Post-Pandemic, or as we learn to live within its limitations, we revisit this Gospel with its impetus for activity and its focus on time. Today, we recognise that the Gospel priority is for bringing people Good News now, and that the Good News is Jesus.

The Covid Pandemic with its necessity for quarantine may have caused us to press the 'snooze' button on much of life's activity. This series will encourage us to get up and get going with Jesus' Gospel priorities.

The guiding texts for the series are below and are part of a longer preaching series which can be found on my website:

The Time has Come	Mark 1:14-28
Time to Pray	Mark 1:35-45
Time to See Jesus	Mark 2:1-11
Time to Know Jesus	Mark 3:1-19
Time to Restore	Mark 5
Time to Trust	Mark 7:1-15

These notes have been created especially for you, for use in your personal devotions or small group study and are written as though there is a group present. There are prayer-pointers and worship song suggestions for you to use. Please do make good use of the booklet and ask for extra if you know people who would benefit from having one - they come with the love of Epsom Methodist Church.

Mark's Gospel is traditionally held to be written by John Mark whom we catch sight of in Chapter 14. Mark appears in Acts, falling in and out of favour with Paul and eventually gaining a good reputation with him, as we see in 2 Timothy 4:11 (Wilmshurst, page 9).

As we study in services and in groups together, my prayer is that God shows us how to make the most of this present time; what the times we are in require of us, and how we might be transformed in these times by meeting Jesus. I pray that this results in becoming active in God's service in the best ways possible. No more snoozing! The time has come...

With love,



The Time Has Come!

A Mini Study

Read Mark 1:14-28

Chapter One is filled with the energy and pace that will characterise the whole Gospel. John the baptist links the present activity with the Hebrew Scriptures. We are in a new era that comes with a sense of urgency and activity. **Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for the people who laid the paths of your faith to this point and give your future direction into God's hands.**

Jesus' Gospel message was then as it is now a call to all people to *"Change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News!"* (1:14 NCV) Although this has always been God's Covenant message, for obedience to his Law which meant behaving differently from the peoples around them, now the message is rooted in the person of Jesus. *"The time has come", he said. "The Kingdom of God has come near."* (1:15 NIV™) Jesus is the gospel and the bringer of salvation. **How does Jesus' authority as The Gospel as well as the Bringer of the Message have an impact on the people around him? Consider the close followers (disciples) and also the crowds who came to see what was going on. Do you place yourself with the close followers or in the crowds?**

We meet the close followers in verses 16-20. The authority and authenticity of Jesus' call to these people had an immediate impact and they were willing to immediately (18 & 20) leave career, location and gladly follow Jesus. **How do you respond to the speed of the response and change in the first followers? What challenges does this offer to you, your group and your church?**

After the encounter on the lakeside, Jesus takes his followers to the synagogue in Capernaum where, with full Gospel authority, he teaches and encounters opposition of a spiritual nature: His words are different from the teachers of the law because he "taught like a person who has authority". **Look up the verses in 1:22 & 27. Talk about why this authority is significant in bringing change. Can real change happen without Jesus? What are your observations from the Old Testament about lasting change?**

The pandemic has had its own authority over people - maybe bringing fear and loneliness. The pandemic has had its own rules which have had an impact on how we live. We may want to 'go back' and reclaim our previous lives and routines with a sense that everything was better before. **What might the impact of Jesus authority look like in your own life? And in your local church? How might you trust Jesus to lead you now?**

What is the Good News for you today? Pray Together.

Study 1 Time to Pray

Opening Thoughts

Talk about times you received unexpected gifts. How did you feel? Why had someone thought of you and given you the gift?

Prayer

- * Take a moment of silence and invite God to meet you.
- * Ask Jesus to make you holy, taking away all your sin, shame and guilt.
- * Receive assurance that your prayers has been heard and answered. Spend a while in quiet thanksgiving and ask the Holy Spirit to seal God's good work in your heart.
- * Ask that God guide you to the right paths ahead.
- * Pray for God's vision as you live and work for him today and tomorrow.

Worship

Sing a song of praise to God such as; *I Need Thee Every Hour; The Lord's My Shepherd; Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God; O Captain of Israel's Host and Guide*

Now Read Mark 1: 35-45

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

Jesus is awake early and spending time alone with God. His focus and priority for the day must be in line with that of his Father. The previous evening had been 'successful' with many in attendance and many people being healed of physical and spiritual afflictions. Once when I preached on this passage, one member of the congregation was clearly paying attention. I painted a word picture of an amazing event held at the church, full of people and bursting at the seams with many hearts being given to Jesus and miraculous healings. I put the question to the congregation; "what would you say to Jesus when you found him the next day?" David perked up and said loudly - "I'd give him a paintbrush!" There had been a working party and clearly, keeping

Jesus busy with ‘the lads’ at church would be brilliant and practical — but this is not why Jesus comes.

When have you been distracted by the events and activities and lost sight of God’s picture for your life?

Now is the time to pray.

Jesus doesn’t even come to work miracles and show the power of God. Dr Donald English puts it this way:

Jesus did not intend to prove who he was by his acts of authority and power. He healed out of love for the sufferer. He cast out demons because they had no right to occupy and spoil human lives. He taught in parables because these, like the healings and exorcism, required a response of humble faith. The disciples could no more understand that in their day than we can in ours. It’s part of God’s foolishness, as Paul described it (1 Cor. 1:18-31). It is Mark’s version of ‘it is by grace you have been saved through faith’ (Eph. 2:8). It is not the number of healings and exorcisms, but their meaning which matters. P 60

Consider how a humble faith returns to God in prayer over and over, acknowledging that; “we are not God, we do not know all things, our plans are not perfect”.

Talk about the relationship between humility, love, faith and salvation.

Why must these work together in any good relationship with God?

Jesus comes to transform lives in bringing us back to God. Staying close to God in prayer is necessary for Jesus, in order that he be focussed on exercising God’s will and purposes in his life. After a time of exhausting and ‘successful’ ministry at the house, Jesus needs to be in God’s presence to ensure that his heart and mission are absolutely aligned with God’s heart and mission.

Now is the time for the church to be clear about her purpose in the world and so prayer would be the place to linger, even if there is clamour for ‘more of the same’ which we see in the disciples as they declare “everyone is looking for you” 1:37.

What do you love about spending time with God in prayer?

What are the main hindrances to praying? What might your group/friends/church do to help you here?

Jesus is clear that his purpose (v38) is to bring the Good News to other small places and other people who need to hear it. He is uncompromising in this purpose, even to please the people he would be leaving behind. Verse 39 shows that this focussed ministry is indeed what Jesus goes on to do.

What is God calling you to do and/or be? Is it a new thing? Consider your calling under the banner of 'now is the time'.

What can you do to be faithful to the particulars and timing of your calling?

Looking Outwards

Jesus is approached by a man with 'leprosy'. The extent of the sickness was bad and the rules of the day meant that Jesus and the man - shall we call him Jim - must not meet. The question that Jim puts to Jesus in verse 40 does not doubt Jesus' capability to heal and cleanse him, but it does show that he doesn't have confidence in Jesus' willingness.

Look at v41 for Jesus' response. Who is the Gospel for?

What does this teach us about our willingness to share the Good News with people who are not 'on our list' or in our church?

Jesus doesn't want to be known for the displays of miracles and healings and instructs the recipients of these to not tell anyone. He brings the Good News of transformed hearts and lives. Today's church is sometimes pulled off track by fancy gimmicks and other priorities. Jesus, who showed us how to be church, demonstrated a ministry of prayer and true evangelism.

**Now is the time to seek God and be about his business.
Let us pray.**

Time to See Jesus

A Mini Study

Read Mark 2:1-12

This story concerns a paralysed man —let's name him Matt, and the authority of Jesus. We have already established that Jesus' purpose was to proclaim the gospel everywhere and not to have a focus on the activity of healing or miracles.

Suggest some reasons why so many people wanted to be near Jesus while he preached (2:2).

Matt's friends believed that what Matt truly needed was to see Jesus - pretty much like we would decide that we needed to 'see the doctor'. However, one of the outcomes of Jesus seeing a person is that they are set free and made new — sometimes physically, like Matt (2:11) and also spiritually— which is also like Matt (2:5 & 10-11).

What impact does being able to see Jesus have on those who look for him? (*Think about Zaccheus, Nicodemus, The Rich Young Man*).

When we put ourselves close enough to Jesus that we can see his face, we let the truth of who he is speak to whom we are. If Jesus really is Good News, then his very presence speaks to our fear or our hurt. If we allow his eyes to meet ours, then he speaks a challenge to our ungodliness and waywardness. Jesus spoke freedom for Matt with the Good News of sins forgiven in 2:5.

Talk about why this turn of phrase was so effective in restoring Matt's health and also in inciting anger among the Pharisees.

Matt sees the truth of Jesus' authority and is very willing to obey his command in 2:12. Where Jesus is preaching the truth of God's nearby kingdom, the life of the kingdom is present.

When we look at Jesus, be it in worship, prayer or in times of God-focussed fellowship with friends, there is a greater likelihood of us seeing the truth of who Jesus is and allowing him therefore to forgive our sins and heal our wounds. Now is the time to be present. Choose to do this soon.

It was Matt's friends who recognised that Now was the time for him to see Jesus. They put a lot of effort into bringing Matt into Jesus' presence. If a friend has done this for you, call them and remind them as an encouragement. Prayerfully consider who you can bring for Jesus to see and to bless.

Jesus is unafraid of the Pharisees' critical objections to him and his ministry. He is clear about his own identity and where his authority comes from. **Pray that you see Jesus and begin to have confidence in the life of freedom he holds out to you.**

Study 2 **Time to Know Jesus**

Opening Thoughts

What are 2 things that people might not know about you?

If you are in a group, write each one on an individual piece of paper and put it in a dish.

The group can then guess which facts belong to which person.

Pray

- * Each person give thanks for a different attribute of God's character.
- * Each person offer praise to Jesus with the phrase "Jesus, you are ____." A different title is then added by each person. (*King, Lord, friend, healer, son of God etc*)
- * Pray for a greater knowledge of God's love for the world.
- * That the church might be a blessing to the world in accordance with God's perfect will.
- * That we might be open to knowing God more fully today.

Worship

Sing a song of praise to God, such as; *I know that my Redeemer Lives; So Will I (Hillsong); Come, Now is the Time to Worship; Fill thou my life O Lord my God.*

Now read Mark 3:1-19

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

It can be possible to assume that we know a person because we have been around them for years without really engaging with the things of importance in their lives. A similar issue can be true of our faith, especially if we have been around church for many years... Knowing about Jesus and basic facts about Jesus is not the same as truly knowing him. In this first half of Chapter 3, Mark's Gospel reveals some major insights into who Jesus is.

Talk about Jesus and his interaction with the 'accusers' in 3:1-6. Look back at 2:27-8 for some context for Jesus' actions and motivation.

In 3:6, we see the consequences for Jesus of his uncompromising commitment to show the love of Father God for the man whose hand had become the source of controversy.

If we are to properly know Jesus, we must understand that the things we learnt of him in Chapter 1 are constant in his ministry: He has come to announce that the kingdom of God is near and to bring the Good News. Where this confronts the ‘norms’ of religious society, there will be resistance. Jesus is unable to compromise his calling to satisfy the ‘law’ as it was being interpreted.

Look carefully at verses 4-5. Note Jesus’ question regarding the Law’s purpose. Consider Jesus’ emotional reaction. Why is it important to register his anger and distress?

Do you suppose that the man whose hand has become the focus of this agitation - let’s name him Andy - is pleased to be in view in this way? Talk about your reasoning.

Donald English makes the following observation; “*Religious rules offered to God were hindering the liberation offered in the kingdom of God.*” P 78. For Andy and others like him, there is no limit to the Kingdom of God and its impact, the old and narrow rules are not going to limit the effects of Jesus’ Good News. The difference between what the religious leaders thought they knew and the purposes of God’s saving love was unbridgeable.

The awful time of Covid has placed many limitations on us as people, as society, and as church. Now is the time for us to know Jesus in an authentic way.

Consider what you know to be true about Jesus and how knowing him better is important in current times.

How might Donald English’s statement challenge your own faith, or the activities of your house group or local church?

It can be possible that we fall into imagining God ‘in our image’, or to characterise Jesus as being ‘like me’ or fitting in with and giving full approval to our contemporary society. R. Kent Hughes, writing for the Preaching the Word series, makes the suggestion that in order to truly know Jesus;

People need to be exposed to the reality of God's Word, so that the false caricature of Christ will fall away. But they also need to be exposed to people full of his new wine. P 78

If the people who were watching Jesus ready to catch him in a religious rule-breaking situation had been watching with truly open eyes, they would have comprehended that it was their lives that Jesus was hoping to save on that Sabbath. Instead, they thought they knew what they were seeing and in their hearts, they were already working to find a way to get rid of Jesus.

Being around people who have an openly visible love for Jesus as we know him in the Scriptures can have a huge impact on our own willingness to know him. Talk about the people who have shown you something new about Jesus.

What fresh knowledge of Jesus has made an impact on you in the past couple of years? How did you come by that knowledge and what difference has it made?

Looking Outwards

In verses 13-19, Jesus calls the 12 disciples by name. There are plots against him and Jesus' ministry is now on the edges of town and out in the country. In that troubled time, it was important that the disciples 'be with him' 3:14. The small group of this nature was the basis for John Wesley's Class Meetings, established to nurture and provide accountability for those who responded to the preached Word.

In larger churches, small groups or house groups have become places for fellowship together with Jesus. They are places of security and pastoral care where learning to know Jesus and a deeper faith is gained. Once a group reaches a level of maturity of faith, a house group can become missional.

Taking the time to Be with Jesus is where we begin to truly know him. Now is the time for us to get to know Jesus.

To spend time with him in Scripture and prayer.

Maybe now is the time to begin keeping a faith journal or to join a house group at church?

Pray that you will know Jesus as he really is and share the good news with a friend this week.

Study 3 **Time to Restore**

Opening Thoughts

Find some pictures of restoration projects and comment on them. Do you like to see the repairs and where the new is added from a different era or do you prefer to see the old freshened up to look like it was when it was first made?

What has influenced your viewpoint?

Pray

- * That God would be present with you now, inspiring your worship and drawing you close to His heart.
- * That God would speak to you and bless you at a point of your pain or need.
- * That flagging faith or uncertainty would be strengthened by Jesus.
- * For those who are suffering for their faith.
- * For release for the captives who are unjustly held.
- * That our trust in God would grow every day and in every situation.

Worship

Sing a song of praise to God, such as: *Praise is Rising (Hosanna)*; *Lord, Thy Church on Earth is Seeking Thy Renewal From Above*; *I Am a New Creation*; *I Cast My Mind to Calvary*; *Way Maker (by Leeland)*; *Come Down O Love Divine*

Now Read Mark Chapter 5. *Pause between each of the 3 restoration accounts to absorb each one fully.*

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

Let's begin with the 'Gerasene demoniac' (5:1-20) whom we shall call Wilbur. If you take a quick look at the end of Chapter 4, it will remind you that Jesus has already established his authority over the storm on Galilee. In the 'region of the Gerasenes' which is on the Gentile side of the Lake, he meets Wilbur who is cast out from society due an 'impure spirit' which was causing him considerable distress (5:5). Wilmshurst in his very readable commentary on Mark's Gospel makes the point that; *"This is the neighbour from hell. He is uncontrollable, unmanageable and totally without hope. Even by the*

standards of demonic activity, this is an extreme case, a man whose life is the very picture of chaos.” Pp 97-8

Meeting Jesus is Wilbur's Time. He will know personal healing from affliction and restoration into society (5:15). His testimony among those who had known him when they needed restraints to calm him will have significant impact.

Wilbur, amid personal chaos, fear and hopelessness, approaches Jesus. Talk about this and share your observations about this account.

Talk about the name ‘Legion’ and the nature of authority.

Talk about Jesus’ authority from chapter 4 and in 5:1-20.

What does Jesus restore?

Look at verses 18-20. What do you make of this? Why does Jesus tell Wilbur to stay local? What is the value of remaining in a place where you have experienced the transforming love of Jesus?

The next two accounts overlap, with Jairus’ daughter - let’s call her Bethany - who is dying and Jesus’ path to visit her being interrupted by ‘Angela’ (5:25-34), whose touch of faith draws from Jesus her immediate healing from a condition that had left her untouchable for many years. Dr Donald English (p114-5) connects Jairus and Angela for their faith in him. They have heard about and believe in Jesus’ power to save. It is worth noting at this point that, Jairus is a synagogue leader and a happy counterpoint to all the religious leaders who are plotting to kill Jesus.

Angela receives instant healing from her condition through her approach to Jesus, but it is in the moment of owning her faith that she receives her own peace (5:34).

Consider the drive for Jairus and Angela to separately approach Jesus.

What were the risks?

Look at Donald English’s comments regarding Angela and talk about commitment to Jesus and its consequences.

He knows that power has gone out from him and asks by whom (30), to the amazement of his disciples in such a crowd (31). But he will not be gainsaid. The woman comes up to him, greatly afraid, and tells him the whole saga (33). Her commitment is complete. She had received power already (29): she now receives peace (34). And the clue is her faith (34). P 115

What form did Angela's restoration take?

What are the challenges to us when we try to be anonymous in seeking Jesus' help before we acknowledge our need for Jesus?

This detour has meant that Bethany, Jairus' daughter has now died (5:35). Jairus' household are desolate and hopeless, but Jesus refuses to see the situation their way (5:36-7). Now is the time for action and restoration rather than wailing and mourning (5:39-40). Again, English's comment on this is helpful and solid; *"If Jesus remains with you, there is no ground for fear."* P 115.

Look back at Jesus' words to his disciples in 4:40.

I notice no showy shouting when Jesus heals or restores life to either the woman or the girl. He is calm and authoritative. His power is absolute and allows no intense emotions or wild words. He is the opposite of chaos with order, authority and calm intention.

Talk about Jesus' care over women and girls in Mark 5.

Discuss the simplicity of the miracle in the face of human chaos and disorder.

Does restoration need to be complicated?

What challenges does its simplicity present to you in your sophistication?

Now is the time for restoration of faith in Jesus.
How will you approach him and what do you need to tell him?

For Reflection

Jesus' ministry of restoration happened publicly. We know how effective his command to 'not tell anyone' was by how quickly his reputation spread.

Do you think that the church has lost confidence in Jesus' power and authority to restore lives and give real salvation?

What is your picture of Jesus? Is it one that is recognisable in its scope and nature from the scriptures that we have looked at in this session?

What do you think Jesus is saying to today's disciples?

What 'now' do you take from this passage about restoration for yourself and for your church?

If you are wondering about why I've chosen to name the people in these accounts, inspiration is taken from **2 Corinthians 5:17-19** where Paul puts the case much better than I might.

These people in Mark's Gospel are transformed and restored through meeting with Jesus. Now is the time for them to lead full lives and share the Good News.

Their old identity is gone.

These people will never be the same... They are New Creations.

Spend some time reflecting on your personal needs for restoration and bring them to Jesus in prayer.

Study 4 **Time to Trust**

Opening Thoughts

How do you feel about glass-floored bridges?

What about eating raw fish or very rare steak? What are your thoughts on audio-books or even e-readers? Have a good debate about the rightness or wrongness of these things as you see them!

Pray

- * For a fresh filling up of God's perfect love that casts out fear.
- * For a faith that looks to Jesus of the Scriptures for life and hope.
- * For Jesus to take away your reliance on any empty rituals which have taken the place of trusting God's provision and goodness.
- * That the holiness within you is greater than the appearance of faith that is your public face.
- * That we may thoroughly understand what it means to trust in Jesus.

Worship

Sing a song of praise to God, such as: *What a Friend we Have in Jesus*; *Cornerstone*; *Oceans (Where feet may fail)*; *Rock of Ages Cleft For Me*.

Now Read Mark 7:1-15

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

What does it mean to get your Christianity - or even your Methodism or (insert your denominational affiliation here) looking and sounding right? Chapter 7 introduces us to disciples that are not 'doing their faith right'. During the past couple of years, there has been an emphasis on things being 'done right' as a tag line, everything from coffee to 'Sunday' is followed by 'done right'.

Companies are even naming themselves in this vein with, among others: "Building Done Right", which is comforting. I'm glad that my research didn't lead to any firm called "Accounts Done Right"... Jesus wasn't doing his religion right. He had corrupted his disciples too and they were all under scrutiny for what they were doing wrong!

Are there rituals that you exercise in order to look like you are doing Church right? How did they begin? Why have they taken root?

Mark is writing his Gospel for Gentile or not-Jewish people. He spends some time detailing what the laws require of Jewish people. Wilmshurst explains their situation in this way;

These people too feel that all they hold dear is under threat. Their treasured Jewish culture is being swamped by the rising tide of Greek influence; their national independence has been stolen from them by the Roman Empire; and now some wandering preacher and his bedraggled band of followers are stirring up even more trouble away in the north by saying that their cherished tradition doesn't even matter! The first half of Mark 7 is all about Jesus' response to tradition. P 138

Think about how threat affects you. Maybe the threat to worship and the erosion of your liberties during the Covid Pandemic has encouraged you to place value on 'traditional practises'. Are you able to laugh about these or do you hold them still?

Maybe the seating at church is different or the way you respond to other people that 'made it feel like church' has had to change. Maybe you are feeling vulnerable because the markers for your faith that you understood and felt safe with in a Sunday or weekday service have changed. How we respond to these threats can either aid our growth or constrain us. For the Jewish Leaders in Jerusalem, their response was constraint.

The disciples, along with Jesus in 7:1-20 are being judged for their non compliance with the pharisaic traditions by the Jewish equivalent of OFSTED (7:1); some of the religious elite who have 'come from Jerusalem'.

Look carefully at verses 6-8.

What do these verses tell us about the particular 'laws' that the disciples were supposedly in breach of?

Why can traditions be useful?

How can they be limiting?

Wilmshurst writes that the Jewish teachers have incorporated so much extra into the Law that it has become impossible to keep - even for people who are eager to do so. Jesus takes apart the system in verses 9-13. The ones who have come to judge are finding themselves held to account for their own deviation from the Law.

Now is the time for Jesus to bring to light what is important. Traditions do bring comfort, but they do not hold the key to salvation. Jesus makes this clear to the disciples and Mark makes it clear to his readers. Jesus uses the 'food laws' to make the point about true cleanliness before God. Wilmshurst reminds us that;

What you eat can neither destroy nor preserve your relationship with God. If your heart is far away, eating from the approved list is not going to help... What makes you unclean in God's sight is not anything you might consume; the problem that needs fixing is what is already inside you, the sin that comes from your heart... Remember that Mark is almost certainly getting his information from Peter, who is there with Jesus in the house. P 144

Talk about your observations about the Pharisees, the ordinary people, the disciples and yourself.

Pray that God will strengthen you to trust Jesus in all areas of life and faith.

We know that Peter will need that lesson spelt out to him in a vivid way in Acts 10:9-16.

The key to being right with God is to trust him; to trust Jesus for all we need. This will necessarily bring us into a fully right relationship with God as we find the course of our lives, our actions and attitudes begin to shape themselves around the Jesus whom we see in the Scriptures.

Looking Outwards

Now is the time to trust Jesus. The rituals of church life have been set aside due to the Pandemic's impact.

When all the trappings of religion are not available to us, how do we respond?

How do they impact our desire to worship and serve God?

Now is the time to let the real Jesus, whom we meet in the Scriptures, affect our attitude to the world around us.

What now is the most important message to share as a Christian?

What now is the most important message that the people around us need to hear?

Think about your own doorstep-community and those living and working around your Church building.

Pray together for your ministers, leaders, house group, church, community and nation. Ask that there be a growth in trusting Jesus.

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