



Member's
edition

your kingdom come

small group studies from Mark's gospel

January—April 2012



Introduction

John Rowland

Many of the stories of Jesus will seem familiar, but don't be surprised if the issues raised cause you to stop and think carefully about the meaning and reality of faith in the 21st Century. And it will be practical. If we say we believe in Jesus, and want to follow Him, then that is life-changing, culture-changing, and daily-decision changing. Like our other small group series, this is no academic exercise; it is not designed simply to inform us, but also to transform us. Mark's Gospel leaves the reader almost breathless; he races from story to story. His favourite words seem to be 'Immediately', 'And then..' or 'Straightaway'. Over and over again he writes about 'The Kingdom' – the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven. Just what did Jesus mean by that little phrase? Does it mean something in the present, or is it all in the future; is it a place, or a state of being; how do you get into it and who belongs; who is the King, and how does he rule; how might it impinge on life now?

Background

Peter Butchers

What follows is the result of a tremendous collaborative project which took place over the autumn of 2011. Thirteen people from UBBC formed two groups to study, reflect, pray through and finally come up with home group themes for these studies. They were all wonderful opportunities to dig deeper into God's word and sense together what the Lord is saying to us as a church, through the gospel of Mark, in 2012. A big thank you to those who journeyed with us these past months to make this possible. I have been thrilled with the way they wrestled with scripture and worked together. We pray that the study notes will not only give us a good 'way in' to Mark's gospel but also help us to see what it means for us, today, to live in God's glorious Kingdom.

Mark is very selective as to what he includes and careful in his use of words and details included. We must pay close attention to what Mark is saying and whenever he includes details which might seem unnecessary, we must ask ourselves, why? Resist the temptation to get too bogged down in the scripture or get side tracked with ideas or themes that aren't important. You'll notice we have placed more attention in the 'what does it look like?' section. This is on purpose. Scripture needs to be understood and then correctly applied. Without the 'doing' of the Word our meetings become study groups rather than growth groups.

Study 1 – 9th Jan onwards

Announcing the Kingdom Mark 1.1-8

In the very first verse Mark sets out his stall: The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Everything else that follows points to Marks' claim that Jesus is, indeed, the Son of God.

The beginning
of the good
news about
Jesus the
Messiah, the
Son of God.

Mk 1.1

What does it say? *Mark 1.1-8*

1. Mark is very clear as he starts off what kind of gospel it is. What does 1.1-3 tell us, and what does it mean?
2. If Mark is so keen for us to understand who Jesus is, why does he start with John the Baptizer? And what does John say about Jesus?
3. What does John preach? What is his message and what does it mean?

What does it mean? *in today's world*

1. John the Baptist saw that his ministry and that of Jesus would be very different. How are they going to be different and what does it mean?
2. Is John's teaching meant to encourage, warn, challenge or inform?
3. Are themes of repentance and faith outdated? What is the 21st C equivalent to 'prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'?

What does it look like? *in my life*

1. Both Mark and John are expectant and excited about Jesus's coming. Very often new Christians are excited and expectant, but then we 'tarnish' a bit and lose our excitement. Why is that? And is there anything about Jesus that still thrills you? Are there any ways in which you can act like John the Baptist to point people to Jesus?
2. As we begin the studies in Mark we hear the call to prepare ourselves in repentance and faith. What can you do to prepare yourself better to meet with the Lord:

On a day to day basis? In a church service? In this homegroup?

Prayer time

Read Colossians 1.15-17. This is the Jesus who came crashing in to Mark's gospel. It is the Jesus whom John proclaimed, and it is the Jesus who is with us here, this moment, by the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Study 2 – 23rd Jan onwards

Marks of the Kingdom

Mark 1.21-39

In these few verses Jesus sets out, by word and action, the nature of the Kingdom that He has come to demonstrate.

What does it say? *Mark 1.21-39*

1. You can't help but notice the authority of Jesus in this passage. What evidence is there for saying that Jesus is empowered by God Himself?
2. Jesus seems to have three different arenas to His ministry: public, private (just with the disciples) and personal (alone). According to the passage what does He do in each of these arenas?

What does it mean? *in today's world*

1. Often people are nervous to talk about demon possession. Are we to believe that people don't suffer in these ways today? What other 'demons' do we need to exorcise to push back the Kingdom of darkness?
2. Verse 31 tells us that Peter's mother in law, once she was healed, served Jesus and the disciples. Does that give us any understanding as to why Jesus healed her?
3. In most churches today Jesus' authority in teaching is still strong, but why is it that many churches shy away from healing and demon possession?

What does it look like? *in my life*

1. How is the power and authority of Jesus reflected in:
The world today? The church today? Your life today?
2. Very often humans seek authority for their own gain. Here Jesus uses His authority to bring healing and wholeness. How can we live our lives following this model? In other words, how does what we do as Christians bring healing and wholeness to others?
3. Jesus spent time with the disciples training and equipping them for service. How well do you feel you have been trained and equipped? How might your experience of preparation have been improved?

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. Mk 1.39

Prayer time

Read Habakkuk 3.1-2 as an introduction to your prayer time, and spend some time in quietness asking the Lord to bring His rule and authority more into our lives. Remember Jesus still wants to break into our current situations and bring healing and wholeness. Be brave and share with one another how you have prayed. Then pray for those in authority, in the church and in our world.

Study 3 – 13th Feb onwards

Mark 4.35-41

The King of the Kingdom

Jesus has been healing the crowd and teaching about the Kingdom of God; He has been busy with the crowds, but now Jesus turns His attention to His disciples.

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Mk 4.41

What does it say?

Mark 4.35-41

1. Why do you think Jesus leaves the crowds?
2. What does this teach us about Jesus?
3. Consider the storm – try to imagine what happened and how the disciples must have felt in various parts of the story.
4. What was their response to Jesus' actions in calming the storm? Why was that?

What does it mean?

in today's world

1. What does the story tell us about the King and the Kingdom?
2. Jesus is the King who both knows our problems and is able to do something about them. What are some of the things in your experience that you care deeply about, but are UNABLE to do anything about?
3. If this were the only story you had of Jesus, what would you think of Him? How true is this 'snapshot' of who Jesus is?

What does it look like? *in my life*

1. What evidence is there in our lives that the King is present? Be specific!
2. The disciples found Jesus to be caring and present in their physical storm. Very often we have 'storms' of different kinds. What kind of 'storms' do we experience and what are we to believe about Jesus and what can we expect from Him in our times of need? Do you sometimes feel there is a gap between faith, expectation and experience? And do you wonder why?
3. How would you respond to someone who says 'God is too busy for me, He doesn't really care'? What personal evidence do you have for your belief?

Prayer time

Go to <http://alturl.com/n3wcx> to listen together to ***I will praise you in this storm*** by ***Casting Crowns*** –let it lead your prayer time.

I was sure by now, God, that You would have reached down and wiped our tears away, stepped in and saved the day.

But once again, I say AMEN and it's still raining as the thunder rolls
I barely hear You whisper through the rain, "I'm with you" and as Your mercy falls
I raise my hands and praise the God who gives and takes away.



And I'll praise you in this storm and I will lift my hands for You are who You are
no matter where I am and every tear I've cried You hold in your hand
You never left my side and though my heart is torn I will praise You in this
storm

I remember when I stumbled in the wind You heard my cry to You
and raised me up again my strength is almost gone how can I carry on
if I can't find You? and as the thunder rolls I barely hear You whisper through the rain
"I'm with you" and as Your mercy falls I raise my hands and praise
the God who gives and takes away

I lift my eyes onto the hills where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth

Study 4 – 27th Feb onwards

A different kind of Kingdom Mark 6.14-29

This week we're studying an unusual story, but one I'm sure you've heard before: the beheading of John the Baptist. We get an amazing insight into a different kind of kingdom where pride, arrogance and excess, peppered with a little bit of religion is the norm in King Herod's palace.

What does it say? *Mark 6.14-29*

1. Notice the sections before and after (Mark 6.7-14 and 30). Remember Mark wants to explain who the Jesus, the Christ is, and what His Kingdom is like. Why would Mark put John's execution sandwiched in between?
2. Read the story again carefully – can you imagine what kind of occasion it was? What kinds of things indicate that it wasn't a wholesome event?
3. Herod seemed to be interested in John and in his message (v20) and also in Jesus (Luke 23.8) - why then does Herod have John executed?

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." Mark 6.14-15

What does it mean? *in today's world*

1. What are some of the indications of people who like a 'little bit of religion' but refuse to allow true faith to grow in their lives?
2. From what we have already studied about the life and work of Jesus in Mark's gospel, what are the differences between Jesus' life and values and those of Herod?

What does it look like? *in my life*

1. In what ways can we, even as those who want to follow Jesus, find that we 'bolt on' our faith rather than allow God to penetrate our whole being?
2. Which bits of the teachings of Jesus would you rather were not there!? Go on, be honest and be specific!
3. Look out in the news this week for examples of 'Organised Christianity' in society which has little or nothing to do with following Jesus. Do you feel it

is helpful to have this kind of activity, or might it hinder the progress of God's Kingdom? Be prepared to share your views in the group next week.

Prayer time

Bend us, O Lord, where we are hard and cold,
In Your refiner's fire, come purify the gold.
Though suffering comes and evil crouches near,
Still our living God is reigning, He is reigning here.

Graham Kendrick

Study 5 – 12th March onwards

Friends and Foes

Mark 8.1-21

“During those days” (Mk8.1) loosely connects the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand with the healing and teachings of the previous chapters. We are to understand that this event is part of the Kingdom of God coming that Jesus promised.

The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus... Mark 8.11-12

What does it say? *Mark 8.1-21*

1. The large crowd gathered to hear Jesus. From where had they come? How long had they been there? And what was Jesus' reaction to them?
2. This is the second feeding narrative in Mark. Skim Mark 6.30-44. In what ways are they similar / different?
3. Doesn't feeding four thousand people with a small amount of food count as a sign? (v11) What do you think they might have been really questioning? And what sort of answer would have satisfied them?

What does it mean? *in today's world*

1. It is no coincidence that Jesus feeds the crowd with bread, and then warns the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees. About what exactly is Jesus warning the disciples?

2. Is there a difference between the kind of sign that the Pharisees are demanding and people who want to 'see a sign to know God is real'?

What does it look like? *in my life*

1. In what ways can we be like the Pharisees when we 'preserve and protect our religion'? Do we ever make it difficult for those outside the Church to hear about, understand, and respond to Jesus?
2. Jesus had compassion on the crowd. In what ways do we / can we show compassion in our lives and service?
3. Jesus calls us to be His people wherever we find ourselves. Identify three key areas of your life or people where you can intentionally 'be Jesus'. What will you do, how will you act? In the next Group session be prepared to say something about how this might have affected your life this week.

Prayer time

Read Psalm 145.8-9 – use these verses to pray for one another in those areas you have just identified.

Study 6 – 26th March onwards

The Values of the Kingdom Mark 10.35-52

One seemingly obvious question links these two passages. At first glance they may not seem to have anything to do with each other, but the question “what do you want me to do for you?” forces us to consider why it is that Mark wants us to link these two stories.

What does it say? *Mark 10.35-52*

1. Look briefly at the two stories. In what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different?
2. When Jesus refers to ‘cup’ and ‘baptism,’ (v38) what is He meaning?

What does it mean? *in today's world*

1. When the brothers made their request about sitting at the right and left of Jesus, do you think Jesus’ reply shows that what *He* meant by glory and what *they* meant were different? Were they talking about the same thing?
2. Why does Jesus answer one request positively, and one negatively?



Henri Nouwen is a wonderful modern example of a servant heart. He was a Roman Catholic priest who studied not only theology but also psychology. After several years of teaching pastoral practice he ended up teaching at Yale University, and was widely acclaimed as an eminent theologian with many academic books published. But in December 1985, Nouwen received a 'call' to become part of the Daybreak L'Arche community in Toronto Canada. In August

1986, Nouwen joined the Daybreak community, living and working with six disabled people and their assistants. Nouwen was to remain here until his death in 1996. The journey was not an easy one for Nouwen. He no longer could rely on his books, his lectures or his reputation as the foundations for his self-identity. He was among people who had never read his books, for whom his lectures meant nothing and who had never heard about him. What was important for them was whether he loved them and "whether he was going to be in tonight". Nouwen was helped into a new self-identity through the witness of a severely disabled man, Adam Arnett. Nouwen realised, as he cared for this man every day, that Adam was being used by God to

...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10.42-44

minister to him. Through Adam's vulnerability and reliance on others, God was showing Nouwen what it meant to truly be a servant.

What does it look like? *in my life*

1. In what ways is the story of Henri Nouwen a good illustration of v 43-44?
2. As we embrace the life of the servant, how do we ensure that we aren't Christian doormats?
3. What does generosity mean? Financially with our time, with our love, with our forgiveness, with our best thoughts and with our energies?
4. In what specific ways does the Lord call you to be generous? To whom? What will it mean?

Prayer time

Re-read verse 43-45 and use them as a basis of your prayer time.

Programme for Spring 2012

1 st	Sun	New year, new Start	
3 rd	Tues	Prayer Evening	
8 th	Sun	AM: Announcing the Kingdom	Mark 1: 1-8
		PM: Life in the Kingdom	Mark 1: 9-13
9 th	Monday onwards Home Group study 1		Mark 1: 1-8
15 th	Sun	Called for the Kingdom	Mark 1: 14-20
17 th	Tues	Church Meeting	
22 nd	Sun	Marks of the Kingdom	Mark 1: 21-39
23 rd	Monday onwards Home Group study 2		Mark 1.21-39
29 th		Subjects of the Kingdom	Mark 2: 13-17
February			
5 th	Sun	Redefining the Kingdom	Mark 2:18 – 3:6
7 th	Tues	Prayer Evening	
12 th	Sun	AM: The Nature of the Kingdom	Mark 4: 26-34
		PM: The King of the Kingdom	Mark 4: 35-41
13 th	Monday onwards Home Group study 3		Mark 4:35-41
19 th	Sun	Subjects of the Kingdom	Mark 5: 21-43
26 th	Sun	A different kind of Kingdom	Mark 6: 14-29
27 th	Monday onwards Home Group study 4		Mark 6:14-29
March			
4 th	Sun	The reaches of the Kingdom	Mark 7: 1-23
6 th	Tues	Prayer Evening	
11 th	Sun	AM: Friends and foes in the Kingdom	Mark 8:1-21
		PM: Life and Death in the Kingdom	Mark 8: 31-38
12 th	Monday onwards Home Group study 5		Mark 8:1-21
18 th	Sun	The Mission of the King	Mark 9: 2-13
20 th	Tues	Church Meeting	
25 th	Sun	The values of the Kingdom	Mark 10: 35-52
26 th	Monday onwards Home Group study 6		Mark 10: 35-52
April			
1 st	Palm Sunday The Coming of the King		Mark 11: 1-11
2 nd -5 th	HOLY WEEK MEDITATIONS		
8 th	EASTER SUNDAY THE KING IS BACK!		Mark 16: 1-8
9 th	Monday onwards Home Group Social events		
A new Home Group series for the Summer will begin during the week of Monday 23rd April onwards			