

STUDY 1

Introducing Mark's Gospel

1. We use the word gospel in different ways. What are they?

There are three main ways in which the word gospel is used, all connected.

- Gospel can mean the message of the good news of the Kingdom of God through Jesus – as in *He preached the gospel*.
- Gospel has also come to mean the name for the four accounts in the New Testament (as in Mark's Gospel or John's Gospel). In this sense it is a genre (as opposed to a letter or poetry).
- A third way in which the word is sometimes used is as a short summary of the steps to *get right with God* – as in *Paul explained the gospel to the man and led him to Christ*.

The gospel is good news! The gospel is an invitation. God wants everyone to hear the good news about Jesus!

2. Mark's Gospel is history. It is not fiction. What are some of the details of the gospel written by Mark that show it is an account of something that actually happened?

The personal detail of Peter's mother-in-law links Mark's account to a specific living person who would have been known to some of the readers of the gospel. The mighty deeds that Jesus did, and His crucifixion were 'public events'. Mark's sources were eyewitnesses. The honesty of the accounts is very striking. Peter, for example, was rebuked by Jesus, attempted to walk on water and denied Jesus three times. A fictitious story would surely not have included events that reflected negatively on its leaders. Pilate and Herod are historical figures attested to in other places.

3. Mark's gospel is more than just a simple historical account. Why?

Its purpose is not simply to inform us about the past. It connects us with the living Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel goes beyond what is interesting or academic to the significance and purpose of our lives and the salvation God has provided.

It presents us with an account of the most important person in human history and invites us to make a decision. Was He whom He claimed to be? If so, how will we respond?

4. What is the difference between a personal-fulfilment programme and the gospel?

A personal-fulfilment programme is centred on the needs and feelings of man. The gospel is centred on the purposes of God, the creator of the universe.

There is much that is valuable in self-fulfilment literature but it has three limitations.

- a. It has the wrong **centre**. Paul wrote:

'For to me, to live is Christ...'

Philippians 1:21

- b. It does not consider the **eternal** dimension. It is limited to the here and now. But Paul looked

beyond that:

‘For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.’

Philippians 1:21

This is foolishness to the wisdom of the world, but Jesus said something very similar:

***“Whoever finds their life will lose it,
and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”***

Matthew 10:39

- c. It is *limited* to what we can achieve and control by our *own efforts*. But God knows what we need and as creator He is able to provide for us. He is not limited by the normal workings of nature. His mighty power goes beyond that, something that is demonstrated repeatedly in the gospel. Who better to care for us than our creator and maker who has known us before we were even born? If we live with Jesus as Lord and seek to find His will for our lives, He will care for us and meet our needs.

***“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well.”***

Matthew 6:33

So whilst we can learn some things from books on how to improve our lives - such as how to manage our time, balance our work and leisure, have clear objectives and the like, we need to note the limitations of such advice. The gospel deals with matters of values and motivation, whereas self-help literature focusses more on issues of efficiency and effectiveness.

5. Does Mark’s abrupt ending surprise you?

It has puzzled many people and provoked many suggestions – all speculations. Some people think that there was an original ending that got torn off. Others think Mark was arrested or died before he finished writing. Yet others think he deliberately stopped where he did. It may be a puzzle, but it is not a matter of great practical importance, since we have three other gospels and the Book of Acts to add more detail. Questions like this are discussed in introductions to the New Testament (for example, Carson and Moo, 2005).

6. What do you think the difference is between ‘knowing about Jesus’ and ‘living on Jesus’?

Knowing about Jesus is a matter of information (in our minds). Living on Jesus is a personal relationship with (involving the mind, heart, and spirit.) Mark wrote his gospel, as did the other gospel writers, not just to inform us but to help us cultivate a *living relationship* with Jesus Christ.

7. What, for you, is the most striking point in this study and why?

Answers will, of course, vary. Some of these could be followed up if time allows. People should be encouraged to think more deeply on what particularly speaks to them and it is good to pray into such things.