

**THE GOOD NEWS
OF JESUS CHRIST
THE SON OF GOD
ACCORDING TO MARK**

Bible Reading Plan for the Gospel according to Mark (Part 1)

Given that these are longer readings, you might want to spread them over two days, which you are welcome to do. Mark though has a unique way of telling the story of Jesus: sometimes, he'll juxtapose two stories side by side so that their meaning together is greater than their individual significance. I've tried to preserve those juxtapositions so that you can get both 'the forest and the trees' as you're reading.

February 20 – Mark 1:1-20

1. Mark 1:1 tells us that the book we are about to read is all about the 'good news' of Jesus (the word he uses is the word his contemporaries would have used to describe a great victory or the ascension to power of an important person). According to verses 4 and 15, how should we receive this good news? What's the difference between John's answer (v. 4) and Jesus' (v. 15)?
2. We often think of 'Jesus dying for our sins' but the reality is that Jesus was identifying with us well before Easter. He was baptised, not because He had sin to repent of, but because we have sin that needs to be washed away. In a sense, He was baptised 'for us.' Then He went out into the desert for forty days, echoing the forty years that Israel (symbolic of humanity) spent in the desert. We all stumbled 'in the desert,' but not Him. If anyone asked Jesus if He's in your corner, He'd say '100%!' Are you identifying as freely and completely with Jesus as He does with you?

February 22 – Mark 1:21-2:12

1. Today's reading records a number of healings – the demon-possessed man, Peter's mother-in-law, the man with leprosy, the paralysed man. Which of these healings resonates with you most? Why? Are there people in your life who need to experience Jesus' healing power? Take some time to pray for them.
2. The paralysed man's friends brought him to Jesus for physical healing; Jesus' priority was His spiritual health. Jesus forgave His sin *and* healed his disease. Does your prayer life reflect this dual focus, praying for people's spiritual well-being as well as the physical?

February 24 – Mark 2:13-22

1. In verses 15 and 16, the NIV puts the word 'sinners' in quotation marks. Why do you think that is? Does it have anything to do with the Pharisees being there?

2. Have you ever received a 'phishing' email where a scammer tries to con you out of money? How do you feel about that scammer? How would you feel if he had drained your life's savings? That's how people felt about Levi (and it was his JOB to do it on Rome's behalf – making him both a crook and a traitor!). What does that tell you about the kind of people Jesus came to save? And how would you feel if they came to our church?

February 27 – Mark 2:23-3:6

1. Jesus says that the Sabbath was 'made for man,' ie. for our benefit. Are you practicing Sabbath in a way that receives that benefit?

2. How do you think the Pharisees came to have such cold and stubborn hearts? How do we avoid the same condition, putting 'righteous tradition' above 'compassionate service'?

March 1 – Mark 3:7-35

1. How would it feel to be one of Jesus' disciples, to walk with Him daily and to be always with Him? How can you foster the awareness that Jesus is still always with you now?

2. Why is Jesus' family so unsupportive? In what ways can family help your faith? In what ways can it hinder?

March 3 – Mark 4:1-34

1. What kind of soil are you? Do you need rough parts broken up? Maybe an infusion of fertilizer or living water? Invite God to do that work.

2. Which of today's parables resonates with you most? How can you apply its message in your life?

March 6 – Mark 4:35-5:20

1. Think about the 'storms' that are causing turmoil in your life. You may be 'freaking out' but Jesus is so in control of the situation that He could just as well be napping on a pillow. Invite Him to bring His calm to your life.

2. Notice the destructive power of evil at work in the account of the demon-possessed man. He himself is tortured by the evil spirit and it is the evil spirit's idea to inhabit and destroy the pigs (v. 12). Jesus simply allows them to do so. When Jesus taught us to pray 'deliver us from evil,' He wasn't speaking hypothetically.

March 8 – Mark 5:21-43

1. Today's reading is a great example of Mark's practice of juxtaposing two stories to make a bigger point than each story would on its own. He could have told the stories of Jairus and the woman one after the other; instead, he preserved the 'sandwich' nature of the event so that the woman who had been bleeding for *twelve years* (v. 25) and Jairus' *twelve year* old daughter (v. 42) both received the healing they needed at the same time. What's the significance of the twelve years? Who do you identify with more – the bleeding woman or Jairus?
2. What does Jairus' experience tell you about trusting Jesus' timing?
3. The last two readings have shown us Jesus' sovereignty of the natural world (the storm), the supernatural world (the demon), sickness (the woman) and death (the girl). Is there anything outside of His control? Use this knowledge to cultivate confidence in Him whatever your circumstances.

March 10 – Mark 6:1-30

1. Why is Jesus' community so reluctant to believe Him? Can familiarity breed contempt? How do we prevent that in the Church?
2. Jesus sends His disciples out and their experience is quite positive. That story though is followed immediately by the tragic story of John the Baptist's fate. What might this juxtaposition tell us about the realities of living for Jesus in a hostile world?

March 13 – Mark 6:31-56

1. Verse 52 says that the disciples 'didn't understand about the loaves.' What were they missing? What does this miracle tell us about Jesus' character and mission beyond the fact that He can multiply bread and fish?
2. Verse 52 also says that the disciples' hearts were hardened, despite seeing Jesus do miraculous things! How can we guard our hearts and keep them soft?

March 15 – Mark 7:1-23

1. "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men" (Mark 7:8). That's something I never want to hear! Think about your life, our church; are there places where we are putting human wisdom before God's will?

2. We often have a 'sliding scale of acceptability' when it comes to sin and yet Jesus puts murder, greed, envy and arrogance side by side as 'SIN.' What does this tell you about the pervasiveness of sin? And what does this tell you about the importance of loving 'all' 'sinners'?

March 17 – Mark 7:24-8:10

1. If Jesus told you 'not to tell anyone what He had done for you,' would you listen to Him? What's the difference now versus then?

2. Today's readings all involve Gentile people – the woman is definitely Gentile and the deaf man and feeding of the four thousand both appear in Gentile regions (the Decapolis = the 'Ten [Greek] Towns'). What does this say about Jesus' ministry not just to Jews but to Gentiles like us?

March 20 – Mark 8:11-26

1. In today's readings, the disciples are (yet again) obsessed with how they will get their 'daily bread.' Are there areas in your life where you need to 'seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness,' trusting that God will provide all the rest that you need?

2. We've finally reached the 'watershed' moment in Mark's Gospel. From this point on, Jesus is headed straight for the Cross. The healing of the blind man serves as a transitional story; up to this point, the disciples have not seen clearly who Jesus is. To them, He is still just like 'a tree moving around.' But from this point on, their eyes are opened and they realize the significance of who Jesus is. In the very next verses, Peter rightly identifies that Jesus is indeed the Christ (ie. the Messiah). Are you seeing Jesus clearly? Or do you need Jesus to lay His hands on you to see Him clearly?