

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 39 – February 27-March 5

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalm 115-117

Mark 5-8

Readings in Class:

Isaiah 44-59

Introduction to Mark

Mark's Gospel is the shortest Gospel and often considered the first one to be written (around 50 AD). The author is John Mark, who shows up in Acts a few times. According to tradition, Mark's Gospel is actually the teachings up Peter that Mark just wrote down. Some also believe that the young man who runs away naked when Jesus is arrested is in fact Mark, though there is no clear indication of that in the text.

Something noticeable in this Gospel is the focus on the action. The word "immediately" is used quite a bit. Unlike the other Gospels, he jumps straight into John the Baptist preparing the way. No genealogies, no birth narratives. He also wastes little time getting to Holy Week, the main event of Jesus' life. Over a third of the book is devoted to it. There is also the assumption that the reader knows what Jesus is teaching. He mentions teachings, but spends most of the time talking about the actions and deeds of Jesus instead.

A brief summary of Mark

- Intro & Purpose (1:1-13)
- Christ's Ministry in Galilee (1:14-3:12)
- Reception of Christ's ministry: Faith & Unbelief (3:13-6:6)
- Conclusion of Christ's Public Ministry in Galilee (6:7-8:26)
- Peter's Confession of Christ (Turning Point of Book) (8:27-30)
- Jesus' 1st Passion Prediction & Response (8:31-9:29)
- Jesus' 2nd Passion Prediction & Response (9:30-10:31)
- Jesus' 3rd Passion Prediction & Response (10:32-52)
- Holy Week (11:1-13:37)

- Christ's Passion, Death & Resurrection (14:1-16:8)
- Long Ending to Mark (16:9-20)

Who is Jesus?

A big question in the book is who Jesus is. For the first half, Jesus won't let anyone reveal that he is the Christ, lest people misunderstand what that means. We see this clearly when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ. Immediately after, when Jesus tells them that to be the Christ means He must suffer and die, Peter rebukes Jesus, but Jesus in turn rebukes Peter, calling him Satan.

It is actually the centurion at the foot of the cross, a pagan, who is the first one to understand that Jesus is the Son of God. Interestingly enough, the centurion makes that confession after Jesus had "breathed his last." In John's Gospel Jesus breathes on the disciples and says "receive the Holy Spirit." It is only through the Holy Spirit that we are able to believe in Jesus.

The End(ing)

The ending of Mark often leaves people perplexed. In most Bibles it will say that some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9–20. If you leave it at verse 8, the book ends with the women being told that Jesus has risen, but they are too scared to tell anyone. If that is in fact where the book ends, it does fit well with the theme of the book, which is that Jesus' words come true. We are left only with Jesus Christ's word that he is risen from the dead.

It is likely that the ending tacked on at the end of the book was written by Mark. There probably wouldn't have been just one copy of the book. Perhaps it was an addendum on some of the copies. Many manuscripts leave a blank space after verse 8 as if a longer ending should exist. Our own Lutheran Confessions quote from the longer ending (Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned). While we can't know for sure if the ending should be there, nothing in it contradicts anything else from Scripture. Even the picking up of snakes happens to Paul in Acts (28:3-6).