

Workshop: Discipling with Mark's Gospel

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Preacher: Chris Wylie

[0:00] Well, it is time, so if you know anyone who is still outside, could you start calling them back in? So if we begin to take our seat and if anyone is outside.

And you know they are outside, please call them back in. Please do come back in. James, anyone still outside? JB is having a look outside.

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may may may I mean, this one is still tied to Mark's gospel, but you can see on the screen, Chris is
going to talk to us a little bit about how we might disciple with the gospel of Mark.

So not just learning the gospel of Mark for ourselves, but how we can use it, if you like, as a discipleship too with others. So that's what this session is going to be about. Maybe I'll just say a quick prayer and then I'll hand the time straight to Chris.

Father, thank you again for all the riches of the word that we heard this morning. We thank you so much for how you have fed us. And we pray now that as we learn and be equipped a little more about how we can use Mark's gospel as a tool, as one of the things we can use in our arsenal to help others to know Jesus better.

[1:58] We pray that you help Chris to guide us through and indeed that this can be something we can do better in our own walk and in our own discipling here at KEC. We pray all this in the name of Jesus.

Amen. I'll hand over the time to Chris. Okay, thanks Brian. I think I'm just going to pivot myself a little bit because I'm going to need to be able to see what's on the screen as I'm going along. I can also encourage those of you at the back, everyone move forward a couple of rows. There's going to be a lot more text on the projector later. We've already tried to make it bigger and I'm worried that it's going to be a bit too small for those in the last two, three rows to see clearly. So as you're doing that, let me throw up a question for you. That is, how were you discipled? How were you discipled? Think back, maybe some of you have been Christians for decades. Did someone disciple you early on?

How did they do it? What resources, tools did they use? 30 seconds, tell the person next to you. How were you disciplined? What was used in your discipleship?

[3:07] Okay, 30 seconds up.

I'm sure there were a variety of things mentioned. I don't want you to think I'm a Mark-only man. I'm not. And I'm very grateful for someone who used the gospel of Luke to disciple me when I was a very young Christian.

That was the first one-to-one Bible study that I ever did. And it was going through Luke, passage by passage, story by story, and applying everything there to my life.

So, so helpful. So, this is not just about using Mark, but Mark is one of the great books in the Bible we can use for discipling. And when I asked this question to my church members a few months

ago, I was interested to find out that Pastor Ong Meng Chai, who's been mentioned, when he was the pastor in my church, and this is going back probably about three decades or so, he was discipling a group of young people with John's gospel.

And they could still remember it. It still made a great impact on their lives that they could remember. Well, there are many ways to do it, but we're going to think about Mark's gospel. And if you do use Mark's gospel to disciple people, it's good that you know something about this book that they may or may not ask you.

[5:01] And so, just equip yourself with some knowledge, some background knowledge and understanding about Mark's gospel, and that will prepare you better for discipling them. So, here's a quick quiz.

And you can attempt this with the people on your row or the people next to you. What do you know about Mark's gospel? All right. So, take maybe three minutes to see if you can answer these questions, and then I'll give you the answers.

Sorry, no prizes. No surprises either. Just for the fun of it. Okay. Three minutes. All right.

Anyone think they know what that is a picture of? Manuscripts. Manuscripts. Okay. Good, good. Do you know the name of the manuscript?

No, of course not. It's not. It's not. That's okay. Okay. Which of the four gospels is the longest? If you had to take a guess, which one is the longest?

[6:00] Well, let's go for words, and not just in English, but in the original language. Chapters is too easy, isn't it?

Yeah. So, not so sure. Which one is the shortest? Oh, that one you know, right? Yeah. It's one of the reasons I love Mark's gospel. Which apostle is Mark's gospel traditionally associated with? Because Mark is not an apostle, right? Okay. Okay. All right. Sounds like you know that one. All right. So, who is Mark's gospel probably written for? Now, that's an odd question, isn't it? But the original audience, who would have been the very first readers of Mark's gospel?

Any idea? Okay. Can you be more specific? Maybe. Okay. I'm hearing one or two ideas. I'm going to give the answers in a second.

What makes Mark's gospel controversial? Ah, right. Okay. So, this is P137. I can't believe you didn't know that, Brian. I'll show you a bit more closely what that is in a moment.

[7:08] Luke. Luke is the longest. Doesn't have the most chapters, but it is the longest when you actually count the words in the Greek. Mark is the shortest. I'll give you more stats in a minute.

Yes, Peter is the one. Mark is the one. And for good reason, and I'll try and show that to you in a moment. We can be a bit more specific. It looks very much like Mark was writing to Roman Gentiles first and foremost.

That perhaps he himself was in Rome, writing for the Christians in Rome, and the Christians were mainly Gentiles. So, we'll see some clues in a moment why that might be the case.

And yes, of course, the ending. So, we've got to talk about that. And that could come up if you're using Mark to disciple someone. You don't want to be caught off guard with a question about that. So, here's that manuscript up a little bit closer.

I don't know if you get excited by scraps of papyri that are found in the deserts of Egypt, in places called oxyrhynchus and things like that. I get very excited about these things.

[8:12] This one is a tiny little scrap. I mean, it really, I think it's something like the size of a credit card. But it's two-sided. So, what you're seeing is the two sides of the same scrap of papyrus.

But they can clearly identify, this is from Mark chapter 1, verses 7 to 9 on one side, 16 to 18 on the other. And it's been dated as early as the 2nd or 3rd century. That's the 100s to 200s AD.

And if you look into this topic of manuscripts, you'll realize that that is very, very early. And that's the earliest scrap we have of Mark's gospel.

And almost perhaps one of the earliest of any gospel that we have in our hands. That is supposed to impress you. If you look into this topic, you'll realize it is incredibly impressive manuscript evidence.

And of course, this was found not in Rome and not in Israel. It was found in Egypt. And it tells you something about the spread of the gospel in very, very early stages of Christianity.

[9:23] So, Mark's gospel is thought by scholars. It's the general theory at the moment that it is the first gospel that was written. I can't prove that to you. But it looks pretty likely.

And I think for some people that's an intriguing idea. Oh, I get to read what was probably the first account ever written about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And we date it. We can be fairly specific. We're talking about the early 60s, around maybe 64, 65 AD. That would be the time of Emperor Nero in Rome.

Perhaps you know something about Nero, that crazy emperor who began to persecute Christians quite horribly. And really most likely dated before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

So, we're in quite a small window of time where we think this gospel was written. For good reason, we think that. Those are all the gospels in their different lengths. If you wanted the stats, just to prove it to you.

[10 : 23] So, Luke, Matthew, pretty close actually. But Luke wins just about. And notice Mark's gospel, almost half the length of Luke. You probably don't feel like that when you look at it in your Bible, but it really is.

Much, much shorter. And therefore, I think if you're talking about reading an entire gospel with someone, that's perhaps a bit more encouraging for them.

It's a bit more manageable for them than launching into something that is so long like Luke or Matthew. It's not to say you can't do it with any of these. Of course, you can disciple anyone with any of these.

But if you're looking for something shorter, more manageable, Mark's going to be a great help. But here's the interesting thing. Despite that statistic, perhaps Mark isn't quite what you think it is.

Mark is not the summarized version of the gospel, the simplified version of the gospel that we might quite imagine. You know the story of Legion? Remember Legion? The guy who has many demons and Jesus casts them out.

[11 : 26] It's a fantastic story. And I want to show you that story in three, it comes in three gospels, what we call the synoptics, Matthew, Mark, Luke. Now, I know you're not going to be able to read the words on the screen, on the next slide.

Doesn't matter. I just want you to see the size, the shape of what I'm showing you. Which one is from Mark's gospel? It's the middle one.

That's Mark's account of Legion. This is Matthew. Matthew, one of the longest gospels, the second longest gospel, but that's how Matthew treats that story. And this is how Luke treats it.

And this is Mark. And if you actually read it and you go through the detail, you'll realize what Mark is so good at is fleshing out the detail, painting stories vividly, using adjectives and adverbs that bring things to life and fire your imagination.

And the story of Legion, I think, is a wonderful example of that. It is a gripping story in Mark's gospel. He takes us really into the heart of it, what's going on, the emotion, the feeling.

[12 : 40] Actually, it's a horror story in the first few verses. It's terrifying. And so Mark really draws us in with his storytelling. He is a wonderful storyteller.

So don't think you're just getting the simple summarized version, very plain and boring, but quick and fast. What else is good to know about Mark's gospel?

By the way, I think in your booklets, you do have some outline for this. And if you wanted to jot down some notes, some of these things are in there. Some of it you'd have to write down yourself if you want to.

So it is traditionally ascribed to John Mark. That's the slightly fuller name as we know him in the Bible. And we know a fair bit about John Mark from the Bible itself.

So we know his mother is called Mary. That she has a home where the disciples are meeting at one point in Acts 12. He's related to Barnabas.

[13 : 39] Of course, he goes on that mission trip with Paul and Barnabas early on. And there is some incident between Paul and Mark. And yet we find out in, for example, Paul's letter to the Colossians, we find out that that relationship between Paul and Mark must be healed, restored, reconciled by the power of the gospel.

And there's a connection with Peter as well. And we see that in 1 Peter where Peter seems to describe him as a kind of a spiritual son. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, as so does my son Mark.

Mark. And we think that when Peter says Babylon here, and basically what he's saying is that he is in Babylon, in Babylon, and those who are in Babylon with Peter are sending their greetings to the Christians that he's writing to, that Babylon is a kind of a code word by this point for Rome.

That Rome has become the new Babylon in the New Testament. And so this seems to indicate that Peter and Mark by this point are in Rome.

And that's a very key factor that brings them together. So there is therefore this association between Mark and Peter and that Mark's gospel may have a lot to do with Peter and his recollections of his life and experiences as a disciple of Jesus.

[15:09] And so we actually have some external evidence that links Peter and Mark very closely. So if you're interested in that, you see you're not going to find a statement in the Bible that says this is John Mark who wrote this gospel, who was associated with Peter.

You're not going to find that explicit statement in the Bible. But all of this corroborates well with what we know outside the Bible, particularly the writings of somebody called Papias.

And he is, you can see, extremely early, 60 to 130, 80. I mean, he is like just a second generation Christian after the original apostles and disciples.

And he gets quoted by one of the earliest church historians, Eusebius, who's writing a couple of hundred years later, compiling all the records that the Christians have been writing over the last two centuries, preserving them for the sake of Christians in his time and those after him.

And he has some information that he puts together. And the key part is here, and it talks about Mark becoming Peter's interpreter and writing down accurately what he remembered of what was said or done by the Lord.

[16:29] And he acknowledges that Mark had not heard the Lord or followed him. Mark was not one of those original disciples. But later, he did Peter, meaning he became, he associated with Peter and followed Peter and then made his teaching fit his needs without, as it were, making any arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things down as he remembered them, as Peter remembered them.

For to one thing he gave careful attention to omit nothing of what he heard and to falsify nothing in this. And so that's just a little bit of extremely early church history evidence we have that links Peter and Mark together.

So to the best of our knowledge, the best of our knowledge, that connection is true and right. How do we know it's written to Gentile Roman readers?

There are, one of the features of Mark's gospel is how much he explains things. He will say something and then he'll say that is to say da da da and there'll be some additional editor's comments.

So for example, when he mentions Golgotha, he'll explain that that's the place of the skull, right? So he doesn't think that his readers would understand Aramaic.

[18:02] And Aramaic would have been perhaps the common language of the Jews at that time. We think perhaps Jesus spoke Aramaic. But he doesn't think that his readers would know Aramaic because, well, they're Gentiles and they don't live in Israel or any in that part of the world.

But not only that, he also goes into great deal explaining some of the Jewish customs like the washing. If you look at chapter 7, there's a whole passage about the traditions of the elders.

And Mark, compared to the other Gospels, explains that in great detail as if his readers just wouldn't know that, wouldn't have that background info. He takes the time to explain it.

He's not writing primarily to Jews. So he has to flesh that out. But also, another interesting hint is that there are certain, it's all written in Greek, Mark's Gospel, all the Gospels are written in Greek, and yet Mark goes a step further and then explains a Greek word to do with the palace where Pilate is in Jerusalem by explaining it with a Latin word.

There are Latin words in the Bible. Now, it's a Latin word that's been transliterated into Greek, but this word praetorium was the Latin word. That's the word that Gentiles living, Rome, Roman citizens would understand.

[19:24] And so Mark deliberately explains with a Latin Roman word so that his readers get the idea because they're trying to picture what's going on in Jerusalem having probably never been there in their lives and not knowing what it looks like.

So let me explain it to you with a Latin word. So I think these are very strong clues that Mark was writing to Roman people. And then there's that questionable ending.

So what do we need to know about that and how are we going to handle it? I'm very convinced that the original ending for Mark's gospel is verse 8, that that's what Mark intended.

I think the evidence points us in that direction. And you would, if you look in your Bible now, maybe do that now, go to Mark 16. How does it look in your Bible?

What do you notice about the way it's been put in your Bible? Yeah, so there's a footnote about some manuscripts.

[20 : 28] Maybe the style of writing changes. Maybe it uses italics. Some Bibles, they use italics for the last part. Some Bibles have a line. They sort of do a line to separate the text.

I think all of those things are there for good reason, for fair reason, that it really doesn't look like this was part of the original Mark's gospel.

However, having said that, it looks like the 9 to 20, and there are actually different versions of the longer ending, so it's not even as simple as saying it's this or that.

There is a variety of different endings that exist in different manuscripts. But having said all of that, it is interesting that some of the quite early church fathers mention something about a longer ending. They don't necessarily quote it. In fact, generally, early on, they don't quote it, but they mention that they're aware. So perhaps early on, someone, some Christians, thought it helpful to add on a kind of a summarized conclusion to the book of Mark.

[21 : 39] Perhaps they were struggling to know what to do with Mark's gospel when it ends at verse 8, as in fact, perhaps we struggle to know. But hopefully, we'll see later on that Mark's gospel still makes a lot of sense when it ends at verse 8.

In fact, it ends in a very challenging way that is good for our discipleship. So I think 9 to 20 is more of just a kind of a summarized, edited conclusion to just round things out for the benefit perhaps of those who don't know the bigger story, but not really what Mark originally intended.

If you're going to read Mark's gospel with someone, you've got to break it down into manageable parts. And if that's a struggle to know how much to read and where to start, where to stop, you want to do it in meaningful chunks.

So this is one suggestion. I think, yeah, breaking Mark into about 20 parts, 20, 21 parts is a reasonable way to do it. Now, this is not totally random.

I've got some help here from, and I'm going to talk more about this in a moment, Christianity Explored, you know something about that, and Rico Tice, who's involved in Christianity Explored.

[22 : 58] So they have these little Mark's Gospels, and in the introduction to Mark's Gospel here, they have broken it down into these very sections. So I'm just syncing what I'm sharing today with what Christianity Explored suggests and recommends, and I think this would work very well.

And I think in your handouts, you'll see not just these portions, but little headings. these have not come from Christianity Explored, this has come from me. This is my attempt to give you just a little pointer.

What are you going to look for in this section? What are you going to think about in this section? Of course, you can just read it and discuss with the person that you're reading with, but maybe you want to just have something to hook onto, and so that's what I'm offering here.

And so I think in the first part, as we saw yesterday, very much there is this idea of Jesus coming as the king, bringing in the kingdom, and the call to follow him.

So you've kind of seen how that plays out yesterday. In the next section, I think there's a good question to ponder, that is, now why has he come? Because if he's the king, we expect all kinds of things to happen.

[24 : 13] And all kinds of things do happen, but perhaps not the things that we were expecting, perhaps not the things that the person you're reading with, expects. Why has he come? And the question of priorities comes up quite strongly in that section.

So I'm not going to spoil everything, but I'm just saying that's what you perhaps want to look for in that section. He does amazing things, but what's the priority? Mark's gospel is rapid.

One of the most commonly repeated words in Mark's gospel is immediately. So immediately Jesus went to it. Immediately, Jesus healed the person. Immediately. I can't remember how many times it comes up, but it's all through Mark's gospel.

And it's amazing how quickly Jesus goes from appearing on the scene, doing amazing miracles, and then being strongly opposed. So that by chapter 3, verse 6, there are already people who want to kill him.

Now if you get to chapter 3 in Luke or Matthew, you've only got as far as Jesus' baptism. baptism. He's not even really done anything yet. He's only just got baptized, and then Luke has a long

genealogy. In Mark's gospel, people are out to kill him already by chapter 3, verse 6.

[25 : 26] So why, that question, why? Why are people opposing him? What is it? What's wrong with Jesus? Or what's wrong with these people? That's a good thing to think about. The next section, I think, deals with who's in, who's out.

There starts to be this separation and sorting out who are the followers, who are not the followers. Even to be part of Jesus' earthly family, does that mean you're in or out?

That's a question. As his family start to say, he's losing his mind. We've looked at this this morning, right? Chapter 4, full of parables.

And the parable of the sower, it's not the only parable about hearing and listening, actually. I think that's a big theme of that chapter. And it's interesting how at the end of chapter 4, it ends not with a parable, but with a miracle where Jesus calms the storm.

And effectively, I think that the irony is that, you know what? Even the wind and the waves obey Jesus. That is, they hear Jesus and they obey.

[26 : 34] But what about the people? The wind and the waves hear him and obey, but what about people? What about me? Do I hear him? Do I obey him? This is Jesus with Legion.

So I put that as a section all by itself. It's a gripping story and it's an amazing demonstration of Jesus' power. When you think about how many demons were actually in Legion, you can read it and find out for yourself or come to a conclusion for yourself.

Have faith, not fear. this is a big theme in Mark's Gospel and it plays out in this section where there are people who are afraid and there are people who are exercising faith.

There's a challenge in chapter 6 to preach repentance and expect rejection. And it's illustrated with a flashback to John the Baptist who himself preached repentance, as we know from chapter 1.

In fact, you wonder what happens to John the Baptist. He disappears very quickly in chapter 1 and he comes back with a flashback in chapter 6. So it's really interesting to see why that story comes back at that point in Mark's Gospel and I think it's to do with this point, that preaching repentance will often lead to rejection.

[27 : 51] And so this is to do with counting the cost of being a disciple of Jesus and being faithful to his word. There's the theme of the Exodus and how that relates to what Jesus is doing.

Let me move a little bit faster. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. That's chapter 7. And then we get to Peter confessing that Jesus is the Messiah.

And so we get kind of to the end of part 1, I think, with that point where Peter says, you are the Messiah. Because remember how Mark's Gospel begins? It's the beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

And it's a spoiler, isn't it? Mark 1, 1 tells you everything you need to know about Jesus, all in one verse. You don't even need to read the rest of the book. But it takes eight chapters for Peter to be able to say, oh, you're the Messiah.

And we, the fortunate readers, knew that from verse 1. But the thing is, you're the Messiah. But what does that mean? Follow him and die with him.

[29 : 00] So he needs to teach something about death before glory in chapter 9. Learn how to serve. And how to enter the kingdom.

So there are really crucial topics being dealt with in the part two. And I think the crucial verse that you need to hook onto there is Mark 10, 45. Some people say this is the key verse in the whole book, which is, for the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That is a key that unlocks this book, Mark's Gospel. By chapter 11, Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the last time.

Mark's Gospel doesn't have all that back and forth. He goes to Galilee, goes to Jerusalem, goes to Galilee, goes to Jerusalem, goes to this festival, goes to that festival. John's Gospel has a lot of that.

Mark's Gospel really has Jesus in Galilee the whole time, and then only focuses on one trip to Jerusalem, which is the one fatal trip.

[30 : 12] And that starts in chapter 11. And the king is looking for fruit. Do you remember the fig tree? He sees a fig tree, no fruit. He goes to the temple, no fruit.

Then he teaches in the temple and teaches the people how to, how they should respond to their king, and how his disciples must endure to the end as suffering will come and trouble will come.

There's a new Exodus in chapter 6. There's a new Passover. Jesus totally redefines the Passover for his disciples in chapter 14. Then we have Jesus on trial, but actually, juxtaposed with Jesus, you've got Peter on trial.

So it's very interesting to see the comparison between Jesus and Peter in that section. And then, of course, we have the crucifixion of Jesus. And yet, there's all this talk of king of the Jews, king of the Jews, and they even gave him a crown and a robe.

And the question I think Mark wants us to ponder is, is this his crucifixion? Or is it actually his coronation? And then, finally, we have to respond to the resurrection.

[31 : 26] So I hope you find those little, just teasers, helpful, if you were to read this with someone, that you're not too lost and you've got something to focus your attention on going through Mark's gospel.

So that's all in your handout. You didn't need to write that down. I thought that was too much to write. And then, Rico Tyson and the Christianity Explored guys, they have, I think, very helpfully, three big questions.

Just to keep things simple, three big questions that you can always ask when you're reading something in Mark's gospel. And the three questions are, one is to do with identity. So Mark's gospel is all about identity and that is the question of who is Jesus.

So always have that question in mind. Who is Jesus and what am I learning about Jesus in this passage? Secondly, mission, that is, what did Jesus achieve? What did he come to do? There are lessons about that all the way through.

And then there's something about call, that is, what does it mean for us today? Or how should I respond? Or what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus? These are really the three big questions that I think drive this book on chapter by chapter.

[32 : 39] So have those in mind. And we'll see how this works in a couple of ways. So in one sense, if you were to think about the whole book of Mark and the parts, the two parts, it's really a book of two parts, I think very clearly.

Chapters 1 to 8 and then 9 to 16. Part 1 is mainly, I think, about who is Jesus. That's the driving question. As I said, verse 1, it's announced who Jesus is, but it's going to take some time to figure that out.

What does that actually look like until Peter can say, you are the Messiah. But then part 2 is then a bit more focused on what did he achieve.

That is, okay, he's the Messiah, but what kind of Messiah? What does it mean to be the Messiah? What does a Messiah do? And I think Jesus has to totally redefine all of that for his disciples.

And then this question of what does it mean for us today really just cuts through everything. This is a book that is meant for discipleship. It's meant to challenge us again and again.

[33 : 45] What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? As you see how the disciples follow Jesus and you reflect on yourself and what it means for your life. Now, having said that, actually, I think those three questions can apply to any part of Mark's Gospel.

There's always something to learn about who is Jesus, what did he achieve, what does it mean for us today. So much so that I think you can go to any part of Mark's Gospel and see the connection.

So let's just do a little experiment now. Give me a number from 1 to 20. Someone just call out a number. 1 to 20. 14. Okay, give me a number from 1 to 16. 5.

Okay, so 5, 14. So chapter 5, verse 14. Okay, everyone go there now. Chapter 5, verse 14. Mark's Gospel. Okay, so 5, 14 says, those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside and the people went out to see what had happened.

Hmm, okay, now how am I going to answer those questions? Okay, so what you need to do is you need to go perhaps one or two verses before or after and then find a connection. Okay, so actually what's going on here?

[35 : 11] Those tending the pigs, why are they running around? What has happened? The pigs have died.

Why did the pigs die? The demons were sent into the pigs and they all died. Okay. How many pigs? 2,000. I mean, that's something to report, isn't it? When 2,000 pigs die in one incident. And then just look at verse later, verse 15, when the people do come, they get the people to come, see what's happened.

And when the people came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons sitting there dressed and in his right mind and they were afraid.

Okay, now just from that, do you learn anything about who is Jesus or what did he achieve or what does it mean for us today? Is it pointing to one of those questions more than another perhaps?

[36:14] What do you think? I think it tells you something about his mission, doesn't it?

Something about what he achieves. I mean, what has he done for this man? He's totally transformed. He's in his right mind.

He had a legion of demons and now he's in his right mind and he's sitting there. And you might think, what does it mean for us today? Because look at their response.

How did they respond? They were afraid. And you might think, why? Why are you afraid? Why are you not celebrating? And so it challenges us to think, well, how would we respond?

What's the issue here? But perhaps the power that Jesus displayed was so terrifying. This guy can do anything. What's he going to do with that kind of power?

[37:21] What if he gets angry with us and starts sending us off into the abyss? Who is this Jesus who is so powerful? I mean, it's actually touching on all of these questions.

Okay, why don't you do this with the person next to you? So one person, you ask the other person, give me a number from 1 to 20, give me a number from 1 to 16, that will give you a verse and a chapter. And then look it up together and you figure out how it answers these questions.

Perhaps you have to go forwards a verse or backwards a verse, but see the connection. Do it with the person next to you. A number from 1 to 20 and a number from 1 to 16. On track, I believe, wherever you are in Mark's gospel.

But yes, take things out of context and you'll be in trouble. Okay. Now, if you do get stuck in Mark's gospel, perhaps you are trying to answer those three questions and you're still not sure how to make sense of what you're reading, let me just give you some tips and some resources that might help you along.

I don't want you to get stuck. So I think one thing to remember is that Mark is both an inspired and a skilled writer. I think we have to believe both of these things.

[38:39] This is the nature of the Bible, isn't it? It's inspired by God. It is God's word and yet he uses human agents, human authors who have their own style, their own vocabulary and they're in their own setting and context and are writing to a particular audience.

And somehow God superintends this whole process in an amazing way. So that what we get is both a very human book and a divine book, a divine word from God.

So hold those two things together. So what does it mean? So if he's inspired, if Mark is inspired, then we're asking the Holy Spirit to help us.

So we're stuck. Well, pray. That should be our first response when we're reading the Bible, isn't it? To pray to the God who inspired this word that he might also enlighten our minds, illumine our minds to understand the very word that he inspired.

So do that. Don't skip that. Don't not pray. And I think if you're reading Mark's gospel with someone else, even if they're not a Christian, but they're willing to read the Bible with you, maybe not right at the start, but at some point in that relationship, that friendship and that reading together, I encourage you to say that, you know, I'm just going to say a short prayer before we start asking God to help us.

[40:00] Begin to make that a habit for yourself, but also for them to think that actually there is a God that I'm meant to be relating to here, and this is his word.

And so encourage them also to pray. But then on the other hand, understand that Mark is a skilled writer. In the history of biblical studies, Mark has been rather poorly treated, I think.

looked down upon as one of the less skilled writers. And people go into very technical things about the Greek that he used in his grammar and so on, and I can't even answer you about those things. But I'll tell you that when you look at how Mark is structured and you read how those stories link together, all I can say is, actually, he must have been a very skilled storyteller.

So I don't care so much about his grammar or the vocabulary, but he knew how to tell a story. He knew how to put it together. And of course, that is also by God's inspiration.

[41:02] But it just has Mark's touch to it. And I think you can grow in your appreciation of that style as you get more and more into Mark's gospel. And so therefore, when you know that, when you're reading the passage, the question to ask yourself is, why on earth did Mark write that?

So the Holy Spirit, yes, pray to the Holy Spirit for help, but also, why did Mark write that? Why did Mark write that here and not there? Why did Mark write this after what he just said there?

I mean, he's an editor of a sort, isn't he? He's arranging these stories. Obviously, he's skipping certain stories of Jesus' life. He's not trying to be utterly comprehensive. None of the gospels are. They are selective in what they present to us for good reason. So always ask, why? Why? Why is this here? Why did Mark put this here? And if you just keep wrestling with that question, I believe God will give you more and more insight.

Never think that something is there just randomly, pointlessly, by chance, or by mistake. I don't believe that's ever true.

[42:12] I believe there is great intention. And if you keep searching and asking that question, why? Why? You will uncover more riches in Mark's gospel. But then, yeah, it's okay not to know everything.

So I think when we get into reading the Bible with someone else, we should never try and set ourselves up as the expert on the Bible. Then you're really setting yourself up for trouble. And you're going to get caught out at some point because you don't know the answer to something or you're going to give a wrong answer to something. And so just be humble. And just, you know, I'm a learner.

You're a learner. I'm a learner. I want to read this. I want to understand it better. Do you want to read it with me as well? Let's learn together. I've done a bit of reading on this, but I still have things I'm trying to understand.

But let's read it together. I think we have to have that kind of attitude in one-to-one Bible reading. So focus on those three questions that I've given you.

[43:11] Focus on the big idea of each passage so that even if you don't understand everything in that passage for that week's reading, you're taking something away, something meaningful, something that Mark intended you to take away.

Yes, you don't know why that word is there, but don't make that the focus of your reading and your discussion. Just keep on track with the questions. questions. That would be very helpful.

Of course, there are things that you may really want to find out that really do bug you or bug the other person. And so by all means, do the homework either before or after.

And I'll point you to a couple of resources that I think are very helpful. The first one is free. That's always good, isn't it? Are you familiar with the Gospel Coalition? TGC Gospel Coalition?

If you go to their website, I think one of the most fantastic resources they've given us recently, is a commentary, online commentary of the entire Bible. I think they've completed the whole Bible now.

[44:11] Every book is covered. And it's a decent commentary. It's not a very, very brief commentary. It's a decent commentary on every book of the Bible.

And each book has been treated by a respected writer, scholar, or pastor. And Mark's Gospel in particular. The commentary has been done by someone called Mark Strauss.

And he has a PhD. And he's a great communicator as well. You could search YouTube for Mark Strauss. He's done a number of videos teaching on Mark's Gospel. And he's given us this free commentary on Mark's Gospel, verse by verse, section by section.

So if you want a commentary and you don't want to spend money or you don't know where to look, Gospel Coalition, any book of the Bible, you'll get a great commentary there for starters. So that's one. And secondly, this is a book that really, really helped me.

Especially when I was teaching that online course on Mark's Gospel five years ago. This was a book that I read and benefited from so much. and just illuminated so many things and got me asking the right kinds of questions about Mark's Gospel.

[45:20] So dig deeper into Mark. I don't know how easily available it is in Malaysia, but you can certainly get the e-book, which is probably the easiest way to do it now. And it treats quite, I broke Mark down into 21 sections.

I can't remember how many they break. Also maybe about 18 to 20 sections, but not identical to the ones I gave you earlier. But similar. And each section, they really tackle it in terms of what are the questions you should be asking for this passage?

And what is the big idea that is being driven at here? So if you want to go further, that's a great resource that I can recommend. What do we do with the ending of Mark's Gospel?

At some point that's going to come up if you persevere to the end of Mark's Gospel. Bible. So yeah, just to illustrate what it might look like in your Bible, this is my e-Bible, but you can see there's a line under verse 8, and then there's some footnotes that have notes about manuscripts, and then everything 9 to 20 is now in italics.

So most Bibles will clearly indicate there's something different going on in the last part. You're not going to be able to avoid this. What are we going to say about it? Well, let me say these things.

[46:41] I do, as I've said earlier, I do really believe that Mark 16 verse 8 is the original ending. And, well, maybe before I go there, let's look at it.

Go to Mark 16 verse 8. Let's read it. Now imagine that this is the final verse in Mark's Gospel.

You've had such an exciting journey through Mark's Gospel.

So many things have happened rapidly. And towards the end, it's come to a climax with the death of Jesus. And you get to 16 verse 8.

And bear in mind, Jesus has not appeared after his death. And then you get to 16 verse 8, and it says, trembling and bewildered.

The women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. The end of the good news about Jesus.

[47:49] Curious, right? They said nothing to anyone? They're trembling? They're bewildered? They're afraid? They flee?

Anti-climax? Maybe? What do we do with an ending like that? Well, for one thing, although we haven't seen the risen Lord Jesus, it's not as if the resurrection is totally missing from Mark's Gospel.

So, how does Mark communicate the resurrection if he doesn't have an account of the risen Lord Jesus himself in person? I think there's a few things to say here.

There is a miracle in Mark's Gospel where Jesus raises a little girl from the dead. And the way that story works, it's very obvious that the girl has in fact died.

That because Jesus got delayed in going to see her, that now it's too late, but it's not too late.

Because Jesus has the power even to raise the dead. So, the idea of raising the dead is not foreign in Mark's Gospel.

[48:57] In fact, Jesus is the one who can do it. And so, that gives us some confidence that death is not the end. Also, Jesus repeatedly prophesies his resurrection.

Those are some of the, at least five times, Jesus himself. I think there may be even one or two more where Jesus quite explicitly says, after three days, I will rise again.

So, we are meant to be expecting this. We are meant to be looking for it. Even though the disciples are clueless, lah. Okay? There's also, it's also interesting that when Jesus is in the temple, he's teaching in the temple at the very end, he gets challenged by the Sadducees.

with their tricky question about someone who marries seven times, and then, you know, who's she going to be married to after the resurrection?

After the resurrection. So, the resurrection is right at the heart of that question. And the irony is, the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection. That's the whole point of their question, because they've just created a sort of a ridiculous scenario.

[50:11] they are scoffing at the idea of the resurrection. And Jesus deals with precisely that issue. And teaches, among other things, that resurrection is thoroughly biblical.

And so, the biblical argument for resurrection is embedded into Mark's gospel. And the example of resurrection is embedded into Mark's gospel, because Jesus raises someone from the dead.

And then, of course, the resurrection is there in chapter 16, because the tomb is empty. And the only explanation that's given for it is that he has indeed risen.

And, of course, as he said, he would. And so, the ending then invites us to ask the question, well, what has happened? What could be the explanation? What is a rational explanation for the end of Mark's gospel?

And although the women respond with fear, and that's kind of a little bit troubling in a way, but actually, if you've been reading Mark's gospel, you'll realize, no, this is just, this is biazala.

[51:17] This is what everyone does. They all, I mean, we saw it with the pig herders, right? And the people came, and they were afraid. And we even find the disciples see the things that Jesus does, and we're told they were afraid.

Everyone's afraid. Because incredible, wondrous, amazing things are happening. Fear is the response in Mark's gospel to miracles and amazing activities of God. And here is yet one more example. I mean, where is the body? He's gone. What has happened? And it stirs fear in people. Now, that's not to say that should be the only response that we have, but what I'm saying is that that's a common response in Mark's gospel to the power of God. And it's not so surprising, actually, that the women respond in that way at the end. But here's the thing, of course. If the women really never said anything, which is what Mark says, right? They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. If they really said nothing to anyone, how was Mark able to write chapter 16, verse 8? Why did Mark even bother writing this gospel? [52 : 31] How did Christianity spread across the Roman Empire so that in Mark's day, there is a sizable church in the heart of the Roman Empire in Rome where Mark is now writing for the Roman Christians?

How do you explain all of that if the women really never said anything to anyone? And so what we realize is that although Mark has given us a true ending of the gospel, it also isn't the ending, is it? That there is more. There must be more. And we want to know. And we want to understand. And we also want to think about how would we respond to all these things.

I mentioned Mark Strauss's commentary on Mark's gospel on the Gospel Coalition website. Well, I thought it might be helpful to see his commentary on verse 8 since this is such a crucial point. I think he says it very helpfully.

So let me just read what it says. The response of the women is fear, bewilderment, and silence. What is shocking is that the gospel ends at this point in our earliest manuscripts. There is a longer ending, verses 9 to 20, which describe various resurrection appearances.

[53 : 39] The problem is this longer ending was almost certainly not written by Mark. The vocabulary is different from Mark's. The grammar and style are different. The theology is different. Mary Magdalene is introduced as though readers do not know who she is, even though she has been in the previous three episodes.

And the stories that follow are summaries of resurrection appearances in the other three gospels. This passage was no doubt added by a later scribe to smooth over what seemed to be a very abrupt ending.

And I've got another slide to show in a minute, but just to say on this point, yes, a summary of the other three gospels. In particular, I think the person who added this was thinking about Luke's gospel, Luke and Acts.

I tried to map it out. And actually, everything mentioned there, you can find it in either Luke or Acts. And so I think probably an influence from there to just round out Mark's account in a way that Luke does for his gospel.

But then this commentary goes on. What happened to the ending of Mark's gospel? Did he not finish it? That seems unlikely, that Mark would get to the last page and stop. Was it lost? It's possible, but it seems unlikely that a page would be lost before the first copy was made.

[54 : 51] The most likely answer is that Mark intentionally ends his gospel abruptly. The women have the resurrection announcement, but they have not seen Jesus alive. Will they respond with faith or with fear?

That is a big question in Mark's gospel. Faith or fear? Faith or fear? Some respond to Jesus in faith. Many respond with fear. That's the same question confronting Mark's original readers who are suffering, even dying for their faith, persecuted under Nero.

It's the same question that believers throughout the ages must answer. How will we respond to the announcement of the resurrection? Will we respond with faith, boldly proclaiming the message, or with fear and silence?

And I think that's the point. It is a discipleship question that is being posed at the end of Mark's gospel. Okay, so we're almost done.

We're going to wrap up here in a moment. What I want you to do in response to this is think. Think, plan, and pray. Take up this challenge of perhaps reading Mark's gospel with someone in the coming months.

[55 : 56] So think about these questions. Who can I read Mark's gospel with? And I think it's perfectly suitable to do this with a Christian. Everyone needs to hear Mark's gospel again and again.

But also perhaps a seeker, someone who has shown some interest to know more about Jesus or Christianity. It would be wonderful to do it with them as well. So think of that person.

You've got to be practical when you're doing one-to-one. You've got to think about the where and the when. These things don't happen easily or automatically. Schedules are difficult to arrange. You've got to be realistic. Is it going to be weekly? Is it going to be every two weeks? I wouldn't suggest anything more than every two weeks because I think it just drags out too long. It loses momentum.

People begin to lose interest. Or if you miss one session, it's a month before you're reading together again. I think weekly is great if it's possible. You might want to just commit to Mark 1-8.

[56:59] I did that once when I was doing it with a group. We just said at the beginning, let's do 1-8 and see how it goes. But I tell you by chapter 8, they were just so keen to keep going.

And so we did the second half as well. But sometimes it's good to give people that off-ramp.

Otherwise, they're not going to get on in the first place. I know there's a chance for me to get off if I want to.

But you just see what God does as you go through Mark 1-8, whether they want to continue or not. And this would be just a prayer, I think, that we could pray that Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of David, have mercy.

Open blind eyes and turn evil hearts to yourself so that many more might deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow you. May the seed sown in good soil produce a crop 30, 60, or even a hundred times what was sown.

Amen? Amen. Now, last thing. Can I challenge you? I've got an offer and a challenge.

[58:04] I've brought with me 60 copies of Mark's Gospel. These are from Christianity Explored. They have that breakdown of Mark's Gospel exactly the way I shared with you earlier.

It has the big three questions clearly explained in here as well. They're really nicely printed. It's NIV, nice material. I would love to not take these back to KL in my suitcase.

So here's the offer. I'm giving these away for free. But here's the challenge. I'm only giving them in pairs. If you come to me, I will give you two. And you have to tell me that I want to try and ask somebody to read this with me.

So you don't take one. I'm not giving anyone one copy. If you want it, you get two copies. And you'll be thinking and praying about who you could give the other copy to and then say to them, hey, why don't we read this together?

Some strange Angmo from the UK was talking about Mark's Gospel. I'm kind of curious. Do you want to read this together? Let's do that. All right? That's the offer and that's the challenge.

[59:13] And so I'd be really happy if I can empty this box before I go back to KL. But please come and see me to do that. But let me pray for all of you right now.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word once again. And thank you that your word is a wonderful discipleship tool. We thank you for people who've disciplined us in the past, who've sat down and read your word with us and worked through all the implications of it in our lives.

And Lord, we're praying for an opportunity to do that with someone else. And perhaps we've tried before and perhaps it hasn't gone that well or we've given up for whatever reason.

But Lord, give us perseverance in this, that we would keep trying and keep looking for others, keep sharing the word with more people. Father, please put it in the hearts of many here today to want to do one-to-one reading with someone, whether it's a new Christian or even a non-Christian.

Christian and that you would be pleased to bless that time of reading together through your word and bless them with a knowledge of who Jesus is and what he came to do and what it means to follow him.

[60:21] So we ask and pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. All right. Thank you, everyone.