

Who Is He?

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[0 : 0 0] Mark's biography of Jesus is written about 65 AD. It's about 35 years after the death of Jesus. And Mark writes really vividly the stories and the sayings of Jesus and there are people who are still alive who had witnessed those events.

And they were events which were so significant to those who witnessed them that they told the story over and over and over again. It's the first and it's the earliest account of Jesus.

Really unusually a number of the New Testament letters are written before the Gospels are written down. A Gospel.

It's a declaration about who Jesus was and what he came to do and Mark is so important and so accurate that Luke and Matthew will later write their own biographies biographies based on large parts of Mark.

Matthew and Luke use lots of Mark in them. I was surprised as I prepared for today because I saw that this is an Italian Gospel.

[1 : 0 9] It's written to an audience like us, people in the Western world, people from the Western world, people not from the Jewish world. Mark tells the story about a Jewish man called Jesus but he uses Roman words and expressions and ideas.

He talks about legions of demons, about the army as the praetorium, the commander as a centurion. He uses Roman money and expressions when he talks about a denarius and two small copper lepta, two Roman tiny coins that the widows put into the treasury.

And even when he talks about the trial of Jesus, he tells the events in an Italian way, in terms of four watches of the night instead of the Jewish way with three watches.

And I think if he was here telling us the story this morning, he would be painting the picture with terms that we understand. He'd be telling the same story but he'd talk about dollars and cents and army and SAS and parliament and lieutenant colonels to tell the story about Jesus in ways and means with which we could readily identify.

So you ask this question, who is Mark? Colossians chapter 4 tells us that he's Barnabas' cousin. Acts chapter 15 tells us that he is the source of a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas.

[2 : 3 6] He'd been part of Paul and Barnabas' team on the first missionary journey and it seems like he got cold feet along the way and he came home. And they're getting ready to go out on their next journey and Paul feels let down by him and says, I don't want him to go with me.

So Paul and Barnabas divide over Mark. And later on in 2 Timothy chapter 4 when Paul says, get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry, it clearly shows that they'd been reconciled.

Perhaps even more significant is Mark's connection to Peter and you get a glimpse of that in 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 13. Peter writes, It's strange language but there's this clear connection between Peter and Mark.

When you hear Babylon in the Bible you have to think evil empire. Peter is using hidden language. He's writing from the capital of the world.

The capital of the world at this time is Rome. So when he says, She who is in Babylon it's a way of saying the church who is in Rome sends greetings and so does Mark who's here as well.

[4 : 09] 1 Peter is probably, this letter is probably written just before Peter's death and history tells us that he was crucified in a similar way to the Apostle Paul upside down in a Roman circus by Emperor Nero.

Mark has been a companion. So you see out of Acts and you see out of the New Testament letters that Mark has been both a companion of the Apostle Paul and a companion of the Apostle Peter.

And he's also been on ministry assignment with Barnabas, his cousin, as well. And so he's heard the gospel preached by these men.

He's heard them tell first hand about their experiences with the Lord Jesus Christ. They were eyewitnesses. They heard what Jesus said. They saw what Jesus did.

And Mark has probably seen both of them die. And so he writes down this gospel. Key witnesses are dead.

[5 : 13] And what he does, he commits their preaching and teaching to writing. He writes down the message which has been seeing men and women and boys and girls from different ethnicities and nations coming to know and believe in Christ all over the world.

So it's multicultural, it's multi-generational preaching which has brought many people to faith. and Mark is a preacher who just wants to grab people's imaginations and hearts with the importance of this message about Jesus.

And so he begins. The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And we are so familiar that we just do not see the glory of what he's saying.

He makes a stunning declaration from the centre of the evil empire where the so-called God-King Nero has his home. Mark announces the beginning of the ministry of Jesus the King who is the actual Son of God, the one and only Son of God.

Calling it gospel is loaded as well. Gospels are common enough word outside the Bible. It means glad tidings but there is only one known place outside the Bible where it is written in the singular where it says glad tidings and it is used to declare one really big bit of good news.

[6 : 41] Archaeologists found a calendar inscription from about 9 BC referring to the birth of Emperor Augustus. He was the king when Jesus was born. And the description describes the birthday of Augustus the king the God as the birthday of the God was for the world the beginning of tidings of joy on his account.

That's a politician in Rome. Emperors in Rome were worshipped as deities North Korean type dictators their birth was seen to be an event of world shaping significance.

And so with a very understated beginning Mark shouts the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ the son of God he's saying this is a history shaping moment.

The king from heaven the son of God is Jesus Mark announces a joyous moment when the son of God steps onto the stage of world history as king. It's a momentous moment and this news has power it has already transformed the existence of many people he's been watching what's been happening in Peter and Paul's preaching.

The gospel will finish with a similar declaration an Italian centurion attending Jesus' crucifixion will cry out surely this man was the son of God in Mark 15 39.

[8 : 08] Mark moves and it would be really helpful if you got your gospels open Mark chapter 1 Mark moves very quickly to tell us about three different voices that testify to Jesus first comes from the past from the Old Testament verse 2 it is written in Isaiah the prophet I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way a voice of one calling in the desert prepare the way for the Lord make straight paths for him it's been seven or eight hundred years since God has shown his way shown himself by way of miracle or voice there hasn't been much for a long time the events have been few and far between maybe some of the miracles with Daniel the sun's shadow going backwards for Hezekiah some of the really big miracles in the time of Elijah and Elijah God defeating the prophets of Baal or tucking

Elijah away in a rock crevice while he passed by but it really had seemed as though God hadn't shown his face or moved his arm in a very long time and Mark quotes Isaiah prophesying about a future day when God would appear again he uses the personal name of God to declare a future day when Yahweh the Lord would show his face again God is going to come in person so when Mark describes the second voice of John the Baptist he is the one that Isaiah said would come immediately before the appearance of the Lord and so in verse 4 and so John came baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him confessing their sins they were baptised by him in the Jordan River and you get this picture of people coming from all over the place to hear and to respond to

John's preaching they're coming 40 or 50 kilometres on foot to get ready for God's coming they're cleaning up their act they're cleaning up their act can you imagine the risen Jesus coming in the flesh later today coming to the AGM that would be interesting really interesting and looking into your eyes and you won't be looking back in his eyes saying aren't they beautiful brown eyes aren't they beautiful blue eyes or whatever we'll be like everybody else in the Bible who will be on our knees overwhelmed by his goodness and purity and deeply aware of how broken and sinful we are but when they get to John these people they're confessing their sins they're receiving baptism they're being washed outwardly outward indicators of inner cleansing a change of heart and when they come

John preaches a powerful message which points them to a much greater one he doesn't just let them stop with him he's pointing beyond himself to someone far greater verse 7 this was his message after me will come one more powerful than I the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie I baptise you with water but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit coming after me is someone so great that I am not worthy even to do up his shoelaces and he will bring a washing not with water he will baptise you he will wash you with the Holy Spirit of God he will empower you with the power of God himself so Isaiah declares the coming of God John the Baptist declares the coming of God and then while Jesus is being baptised heaven is torn open and the third voice comes from

God the Father himself in heaven you are my son whom I love with you I am well pleased God appears in all his persons at the baptism of Jesus the son is present in the flesh the spirit descends on him in power and the father in the most extraordinary way speaks and declares him to be his son deeply loved and delighted in the father and the son are united in the father's love the son is not abandoned to this world he comes with the full power and the love of God himself and that spirit enabled power is about to be demonstrated in the most extraordinary ways in the life and ministry of Jesus in the story that Luke Mark will now tell and so very soberly the stage is set and a story is about to be told where people who receive the son receive the love of his father and those who reject the son reject the love of

[13 : 30] God his father you cannot ever say that you believe in God and not believe in Jesus they are absolutely inseparable and so Mark begins to preach about Jesus because he knows that if you come to know and understand and receive Jesus then he will bring you safely to his God and father who is the almighty God of the universe do you want to know God know Jesus when you read the opening of Mark's gospel it moves really quickly it covers significant geographical distance in the first 13 verses within the first 13 verses people have travelled many kilometres to where the action is Jesus himself travels about 100 kilometres south from Nazareth in Galilee and in a few more verses he'll be back there again

I don't think he used astral travel I think he walked and it would have been a journey that took many days but Mark's not interested in the details of the journey he's into events so verse 12 at once the spirit sent him out into the desert and he was in the desert for 40 days being tempted by Satan and he was with the wild animals and angels attended him Matthew takes the preaching ministry in Galilee verse 15 Jesus announces his ministry begins his ministry the time has come the kingdom of God is near repent and believe the good news it's begun I've always been troubled by the next bit charismatic preacher walks along the shore of the lake it's the workplace of fishermen and the way Mark tells it Jesus says follow me and they do and I've heard messages on this passage in the past and people say hear the call of Jesus and respond which is a true thing to say but it never sits quite as easily as that on such a brief description we've got children and we've got grandchildren we live in a world of charlatans and where child protection matters and it doesn't seem right to be teaching people to respond to the most powerful persuasive voice that comes along and we see here that disciples left businesses and they left families to follow

Jesus but remember Mark's being brief very brief he's rapidly summarising the call the response John will later write and fill in some of the details that Mark doesn't give here some of these disciples were already disciples of John the Baptist Andrew would be the one who brings his brother Peter to hear Jesus Mark's not doing detail he's painting this very rapid picture and so for the rest of chapter one he will do what he does for the next half of the gospel I guess will unfold for us over the next few weeks he will paint a picture of the power of the son of God in action he will confront evil spirits and they will obey him he will show himself to be a absolutely good he overturns the effects of sin and darkness and disease and people will come from all over to see and to hear him the son of

God is powerful and the son of God is very good when Mark writes down his glad tidings about Jesus he does something incredibly strategic he changes the model of ministry that he had lived under he had experienced two teams of two great eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus he lived under the preaching of Paul and under the preaching of Peter he associated with people like Barnabas and what he does now is he commits their preaching to writing preaching from within 30 years of Jesus on the cross is in our hands and still proclaiming the wonderful son of God when we pick up Mark's gospel or when we give it to someone else these words preach and proclaim Christ these words in the

Holy Spirit's hands have power to change and transform people's lives these words in God's hands bring about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in one sense we are all preachers and I know when I say that it might sound a bit intimidating so a better word might be tell us tell us about Jesus we are all people who can tell about Jesus in our own way and in our own place I want to leave you this morning with a double challenge and it's one I'm taking up myself and I've already begun the first is we've got numbers of copies of these in the foyer this morning and the welcomers will have them at the door as we go out to morning tea written in easy modern English the Italian gospel in a contemporary way and what I want you to do if you will is take one and read it this week and not just read it little bits of time like we do sometimes but read the whole thing in one sitting one sitting and that might sound like a lot but you can actually read it in the time it takes to watch one episode of

[19 : 28] Modern Family or whatever it is you enjoy I don't watch it I read it in just over that sort of time this week myself so I've done it and as you read it treat it like an exercise book not a holy book just an exercise book with a pen in hand and put question marks over things that you don't understand or that you wonder about or other things that you notice and go wow I hadn't noticed that before and then take those questions to your Christian friend somebody else that you can share it with and tell them and ask them tell them about what you've been reading and ask them what you've got questions about and if that fails to satisfy bring your questions to me or one of the ministry team but not as first resort as second resort and do me a favour send me an email ring me give me a text send me a text whatever it is you won't get me on

Facebook to tell me you've done it because I think it would be an enormous encouragement for many of us to take up a challenge like that it's a fantastic way for us all to launch into the Mark series which is going to be preached for about the next 10 weeks until we get to the end of Easter second challenge is more difficult but it's doable it's to pray and it's to invite someone you know who isn't a believer to do what I've just asked you to do take one of these read it note your questions and will you sit down and talk with me about your questions I've got a friend that I'm praying for about asking to do that together tell you a secret that is one of my favourite ways of doing evangelism

I guess I get a door into relationship with people sometimes by virtue of my position but one of my favourite ways of introducing people to Jesus is to challenge them to read Mark's Gospel because if they take up that challenge they will sit under the very first preaching of the apostles as they proclaim Christ and over the years I've prepared many families for baptism in different places for the baptism of their children normally and they're often people who haven't been to church for a while they come because they have a general belief in God baptism happened for them and they think that baptism is something they ought to do for their kids perhaps they come from a Roman Catholic background or they've got Roman Catholic in-laws or people like that in their family and they think somehow or other baptism is going to be this magic rite which will protect our children from all danger into the future but when I meet with people like that I often ask them if they've read the

Bible recently and the usual answer is not since a child and that's okay just honest and I give them one of these and I say take it away read a few chapters with a pen in your hand and treat it like a textbook question marks against anything you don't understand exclamation marks against things you think well and next week when we come together we'll talk about your questions and it has been my joy on many occasions to meet with people a week later and find that they have read not just a few chapters I just say read a few chapters I'll go back next week and they'll have read the whole thing and they'll have a number of very good questions sometimes there's little response other times there's been an amazing response I met a woman and her husband the second time two of us turned up on the night and she had read the lot and she was waiting for us because she wanted to commit her life to

Christ she had questions but God's spirit had been doing an extraordinary work in her heart in the time between our two visits Mark is a preacher he's Jesus he tells us that the Old Testament told us that Jesus was coming he tells us that John the Baptist said that Jesus was coming he tells us that God the Father announced the arrival of his son he tells us that Jesus himself has said that the kingdom of God has come he tells us that Jesus is the son of God from heaven not a fake one a real one and those who heard what he said and saw what he did did not stop talking about him and what they had seen sisters and brothers may

[24 : 38] God give you great joy as you sit under this wonderful preaching about God's deeply loved son and may he give us joy as we tell people what others faithfully have told us amen