

GEORGE W. TRUETT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2: THE CENTRAL MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS IN MARK

SUBMITTED TO DR. ANDREW ARTERBURY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THEO 7340: INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

BY
JACOB BRENTON
OCTOBER 31, 2016

As the shortest, and widely believed to be first, written Gospel of Jesus, the New Testament book of Mark serves as a modern reader's initial glimpse into the world of the Messiah and the story the Apostles were trying to tell. It is important to remember when reading such narratives that the Gospel authors did not intend to provide an objective, "video camera" feed of the life of their Savior; there was not enough time to recount every story, and the Apostles were not present at every moment of Jesus' life. John even admits at the end of his Gospel that "the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" had he attempted to record all the actions performed and lessons taught by the Christ (John 21:25). Because of this practical limitation, every Gospel writer had to select a few scenes from the life of Christ in their narratives, thus crafting from the life of Christ a specific image of the Savior for their audiences. In the Gospel According to St. Mark, the author portrays the Christ in a manner that is remarkably human, awe-inspiringly divine, and most importantly, the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah.

Though the narrative does not read as the same intentional, theological text that the author of John intends for his telling, Mark "emphasizes Jesus' human side and His emotions" more than any other Gospel.¹ As Jesus approaches abnormal situations in the book of Mark, the author continually gives us a quick, descriptive peak into the mind of the Son of Man, usually with a one word adjective. For example, Jesus cleansed the leper with "compassion" and "loved" the rich young ruler (Mark 1:41, 10:21). On the other hand, Mark says that Jesus looked at the Pharisees with "anger" as he healed on the Sabbath, "sighed deeply in his spirit" when religious leaders asked for a sign, and that Jesus became "indignant" when he saw his Disciples trying to silence children (Mark 3:5, 8:12, 10:14). These short descriptors are invaluable to the story,

¹ Ross McLaren. *Mark*. Holman Christian Standard Study Bible. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2009. 1677.

allowing the reader to get a rare window into the workings of a Christ who is fully human. Without these indications of Jesus' humanity in the text, the reader might be inclined to think that Jesus interacted with people in a detached, transcendent way that lacked real care and concern for mankind. Instead of this unemotional Christ, the reader can view a Jesus that is both compassionately involved in the lives of humanity, and even expresses a level of healthy anger and indignation at human injustice and misunderstanding. Mark intentionally shows an emotional, human Jesus to his readers in the ancient world, but he carefully works to not sacrifice or compromise the divinity of the Christ as well.

Amid this beautiful display of emotion from the human Jesus, Mark portrays a Christ who is also very aware of His Divinity; both through explicit explanations of His Divine role, and through the telling of the miracles performed by Jesus. Immediately upon Peter's pronouncement that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ begins to "openly talk" about His unique, divine role: suffering, dying, and rising again (Mark 8:31-32). This discussion of His immanent death startled the Disciples, however, and most likely would have startled the ancient readers of Mark's Gospel; therefore it is important to note that Mark's view of Jesus does not only includes a Christ who theologically teaches about His divinity, but demonstrates it through miracles. Mark records nineteen miracles of Jesus in the short sixteen-chapter narrative, laying much of the groundwork for how Matthew and Luke would later tell of the Christ.² These miracles were wide reaching, from exorcism, to healing, to power over nature, to the raising of the dead (Mark 1:21-28, 40-45, 4:35-41, 5:21-43). These powerful displays of Jesus' divinity were performed in intimate and crowded settings alike, allowing many to see the power of the Divine Christ. Though Mark records Jesus sighing deeply when asked to perform a sign, the author appears to

² Tony M. Martin, "The Thirty-Five Miracles of Jesus Christ in the Canonical Gospels". *Supplements for the Study of the New Testament*. Belton: University of Mary Hardin-Baylor: 2010. L8:S1

think that the miraculous events performed by Jesus are important enough for inclusion in the text, hopefully pointing the reader to an emotional, intimately human Christ, who was aware of His Own Divinity and displayed His Power mightily.

Perhaps the most important and obvious aspect of Jesus that Mark seeks to articulate in his Gospel is how the Nazarene fulfilled Old Testament Messiah prophecy³. Mark begins his gospel by quoting Isaiah's prediction of the coming John the Baptist (Isaiah 40:3, Mark 1:2-3). Before Mark even begins to chronicle the life of Christ, he is already demonstrating to his audience that Jesus and everyone who surrounded Him were direct fulfillments to the Old Testament prophecies from long ago. Throughout the rest of the text, Mark connects Jesus to the Messianic prophecies of their past, continually making subtle connections between the Christ and the Scriptures with which a Jewish audience would be familiar. Mark goes on to describe a Jesus who forgives sin, just as Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 43:25, Mark 2:5-7). As the transfiguration scene is described, Mark draws on obvious imagery from Daniel (Daniel 7:9, Mark 9:3). As Mark nears the end of his story, he even quotes Jesus telling a prophetic Psalm about Himself (Psalm 118:22,23, Mark 12:10-11). These numerous intersections with the Hebrew Bible would have been just as meaningful to the ancient audience as Mark's articulation of humanly emotional and divinely powerful Christ; in the mind of these readers, these references elevated Jesus beyond a compassionate and kind prophet, they crowned Jesus as Messiah. Though these references seem veiled into the study notes a modern reader's text, Mark's comparisons to prophecies would have spoken loudly to an ancient Jewish audience. Mark was making a declaration like Peter: "Jesus is Messiah!", without any reservations in his

³ Hans F Bayer. *Mark*. Gospel Transformation Bible. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013. 1317.

mind. The prophetic fulfillment of the Christ validated Jesus' ministry to this audience and made Him worth following, even at great cost.

Mark is a short Gospel; it reads in less than an hour, and doesn't occupy many pages in a Bible. This brevity however, should not be confused with complacency. The author of the Gospel According to St. Mark was intentional to present to his readers a Christ that was humanly relatable, divinely powerful, and the present fulfillment of the historical hopes, dreams, and longings of a battered Jewish people. In Mark's stirring rendition of the Gospel, the audience sees a Christ who has put on His sandals in an unconventional, yet perfect way to deliver the world, and for that one can give thanks.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bayer, Hans F. *Mark*. Gospel Transformation Bible. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013.

Martin, Tony M. “The Thirty-Five Miracles of Jesus Christ in the Canonical Gospels”.
Supplements for the Study of the New Testament. Belton: University of Mary Hardin-
Baylor: 2010.

McLaren, Ross. *Mark*. Holman Christian Standard Study Bible. Nashville: Holman Bible
Publishers, 2009.