

Lecture 31 – Introduction to Mark

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the son of God. Mark 1:1

Key Terms

Emperor cult, *euangelion*

Objectives

- *To identify, locate, and describe unique characteristics of the Gospel of Mark
- *To provide a brief outline of the Gospel of Mark

Lead Questions

What are some characteristics of Mark that have stood out to you in the past? In what ways might Mark be used more effectively with a modern audience than other Gospel accounts?

Introduction to Mark

I. Mark among the Gospels

- A. Why 4 Gospels? Why not one authoritative account? Great events merit multiple interpretations.
- B. Church's traditional answer: Ascribe a face to each Gospel (Burrige).
 1. Matthew the human Jesus as teacher
 2. John the eagle Conflict and vision, soaring for view high above narrative
 3. Luke the ox Strong and gentle, bearing burdens of all people
 4. Mark the lion Christ roaring over the fast-moving, violent Gospel

II. Mark and the Four Gospels

- A. All four Gospels have same basic message, yet each has its special interests.
- B. All four Gospels are authentic and received by the church universal.
 1. "Apostolic" in that they contain the story and teaching Jesus established in apostles.
 2. Gospels are coherent with the tradition of the life of Christ as guarded by living witnesses.
 3. Factual: the power of memory
 4. Gospels instantly had canonical status whenever they arrived.

III. Date, Occasion, and Location of Mark (Optional)

- A. Options for date
 1. Wenham, in the 40s
 2. Carson, in the 50's
 3. Lane, in the mid-60's
- B. Is Mark written for Romans?
 1. Known presence of Peter and Mark there (1 Peter 5:13)
 2. Large number of Latinisms: widow's 2 coins in 12:42 equal a *κοδραντη*, a Roman coin
 3. Mark explains Jewish customs (7:1 ff.) and Aramaic expressions (15:22, 34, etc.).
 4. The rapid pace, activism said to appeal to Roman mind

IV. Literary Style

- A. Graphic detail
 1. Hundreds of unique details in Mark: nicknames (3:17); pillow (4:38); green grass (6:39)
 2. Report of emotions: crowds (1:27) disciples (9:5, 10:42) Jesus (1:41, 3:5, 7:34, 14:33-4)
- B. Raw language, unexplained statements compared to others (10:17, 14:37)
 1. 3:21, Jesus' own family: "He is out of his mind."
 2. 4:38, "Don't you care if we drown?" versus "Master, we perish!"
 3. 5:31, The disciples speak abruptly, almost rudely, when He asks who touched Him in crowd.
 4. 6:1-6, "He could not perform any miracles there" when He came to Nazareth.

5. 3:5, 7:34, 9:19 Sighing or angry: “How much longer must I be with you, put up with you?”
- C. Omniscient narrator (All Gospels have this; Mark is more pronounced).
Jesus reads thoughts (2:6, 5:28, 6:20-6), knows fears (3:5, 21, 5:15).
- D. Flow and pace of narrative
 1. Mark’s apparent artlessness: parataxis (καὶ - “and”) and historical present. But it accelerates pace.
 2. Effect of Mark’s redundancy and the use of *παλιῶν* “straightway” or “immediately”
- E. Result:
Mark is the least “interpreted” and fastest moving Gospel. The listener faces many mysteries and has to become actively engaged to try to understand the story as it rushes to its conclusion.

Theology of Mark

- I. Introduction: Matthew, Mark, Luke are Essentially Similar, Yet Have Significant Differences.
 - A. Mark tells the same story, in much the same order, as Matthew.
 - B. But Mark is shorter, has less teaching, more detail. Examples.
- II. Christology in Mark
 - A. The same Christ with differences in presentation
 - B. “The Messianic Secret”
 1. The issue: “Tell no one”
 2. A critical explanation by Wrede: Jesus never claimed to be God.
 3. A conservative explanation
 - C. The title, at Mark 1:1
 1. A striking opening, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God.”
 2. Meaning of *εὐαγγέλιον* (*euangelion*) in the emperor cult
 3. Gist of Mark 1:1 for Roman reader
 - D. From opening, reader of Mark knows who He is. But when will anyone in the story know?
 - E. Peter’s confession: high point and pivot of Mark
 1. The first true confession of Jesus by a disciple
 2. But Peter defines his confession wrongly. Jesus: “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (8:33)
 - F. The centurion’s confession, 15:39
 1. If Mark was written for Romans, it is fitting that clearest confession comes from a Roman.
 2. Jesus is finally recognized as Messiah precisely when He dies.
- III. The Disciples in Mark
 - A. What is the significance of the dull disciples? Some scholars’ suggestions.
 - B. Early days, simple problems
 - C. Failure to learn. The lessons of doubled episodes in Mark
 1. Failures on the water: 4:35-41 and 6:45-52
 - a. Jesus calms first storm, but two chapters later disciples cannot recall the lesson.
 - b. The episodes clarify the disciples’ position in Matthew and Mark.
 2. Feedings of multitudes: 6:30-44, 8:1-13
 3. Three failures to understand the cross (8:27-38, 9:30-34, 10:32-45).
 4. Failures with children: 9:35-37, 10:13-16
 - D. Whose side are you on?
 1. While Pharisees oppose Jesus, disciples side with Him imperfectly. See 7:1-23, 8:1-21
 2. Disciples’ culpable ignorance: string of eight rhetorical questions in Mark 8:17-21
 3. Peter’s confession and “Get behind me Satan.” (8:33) (cf. Matthew)

4. Disciples addressed as if level of ignorance and unbelief were same as crowds in Mark 8:34, “He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them...”
- E. Hopeful sign #1 in the same section (6:30-8:30): Healing of a deaf mute (7:31-7)
 1. Difficulties
 2. Eventual understanding
- F. Hopeful sign # 2: Healing a blind man, and the confession of Peter (8:22-6)
 1. Unusual details include two stage healing
 2. Connect with Peter’s two stage understanding
- G. Failures in final hours
- H. Summary of disciples in Mark
 1. Failures of disciples leave Jesus standing alone. Disciples never said to have faith.
 2. By contrast, Matthew encourages audience to identify with the twelve.
 3. The disciples fail Jesus in his last hour in Mark. There is only a hint of restoration.
 4. Therefore harder for reader to identify with the twelve in Mark.
 5. Mark begs for question, “Who then will stand with Jesus? Will you?”