**Life Group Study Notes**

**Uniquely Jesus: Who he is and why he matters** September 11, 16

Timothy Keller writes: *“The whole story of the world - and how we fit into it -*

*is most clearly understood through a careful, direct look at the story of Jesus.*

*Jesus’ life makes sense of ours.”* King’s Cross, p.x.

As we go to our coffee/question time, would you talk with another person about this statement: “Jesus’ life makes sense of ours.”

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**In your opinion is Keller’s statement true, and why?**

**Have you found this statement to be true in your life,**

**and if so, how?**

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As we begin our study of Mark, let’s ask some introductory questions.

**Who was Mark?**

According to Acts 12:12, Mark’s mother Mary had a home that was sufficiently large that that many of Jesus’ followers were meeting there. The apostle Peter went there often. We know this because when he knocked at the door of the house in the middle of the night after being released from prison by an angel, a servant girl named Rhoda, *“recognized Peter’s voice.”* v.14.

We know that the apostle Peter had a significant relationship with Mark.

In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter calls Mark *“my son.”*

We learn from Papias, who lived from 60-135 AD, and was the bishop of Hierapolis, that Mark was a secretary and translator for Peter.

Hierapolis is located at present-day Pamukkale in south central Turkey.

In the first century it was part of the tri-city area of Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis. Paul refers to Hierapolis and Laodicea in Colossians 4:13.

Papias said, *“Mark wrote accurately all that Peter remembered.”*

It was Peter who was Mark’s source of information about Jesus.

And so as we read and study the gospel of Mark, we must constantly remember, we are looking at Jesus through the eyes of Peter.

Some wonder if Mark himself was present in the Garden of Gethsemane the night Jesus was arrested. Mark 14:50 says, *“Then everyone deserted him.”*

Now look at v.51. Since everyone had already deserted Jesus, could the young man mentioned be Mark? Who else would know such details? It makes you wonder why anyone but Mark would slip in this detail?

In Colossians 4:10 we learn that Mark was the cousin of Barnabus, who followed Jesus with such great distinction.

In Acts 11 Barnabus was sent by the apostles to Antioch to help with the revival that had broken out there. Needing help, because the work was so great, Barnabus went in search of and found Saul of Tarsus and together they met with the church there and taught great numbers of new believers.

 A year later, Acts 13 tells us that Barnabus and Saul were chosen by the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the church in Antioch to undertake a mission trip.

These two took Mark along with them. But for reasons that are not explained, we learn from Acts 13:13, that Mark *“left them to return to Jerusalem.”*

On the second missionary trip Barnabus wanted to give Mark another chance by taking him with them. But Paul said no. Listen to what happened. Acts 15:38-40.

The rift between Paul and Barnabus and Mark was enormous.

But it was resolved. Mark went on to prove himself to be a reliable ministry companion and a faithful servant of Jesus.

Paul said of him (12 years later) in Colossians 4:10: *My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does* ***Mark****, the cousin of Barnabus. (You have received instruction about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)*

Philemon 23-24: *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do* ***Mark****, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke,* ***my fellow workers****.*

2 Timothy 4:11: *Get* ***Mark*** *and bring him with you, because* ***he is helpful to me*** *in my ministry.*

**When was the gospel of Mark written?**

Scholars say between 55-65 AD because they are not certain whether it was written before or after the martyrdom of Peter in 64 AD.

**Who was the intended audience?**

Mark wrote for Roman readers.

This is why his gospel doesn’t include information that would not have been meaningful to Gentiles - ie. there is no genealogy of Jesus, no emphasis on fulfilled prophecies, no references to the Law, and Jewish customs that are found in the other gospels.

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**What can we learn from Mark about how to share the news of Jesus to people in Canada?**

**What needs to be included/not included?**

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**Important features about Mark’s gospel.**

Mark’s gospel is not a biography, but a topical narrative.

Mark doesn’t tell us everything that Jesus said and did, for the same reason John didn’t. John 21:25: *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

Mark’s gospel is concise and fast paced.

Mark uses the historic present tense 151 times to depict action in progress.

The word “immediately;’ “at once,” “as soon as” are used 42 times.

Mark does so because he wants us understand that Jesus was a man of action who lived with a profound sense of purpose and destiny.

But here’s the other thing we will see again and again: who Jesus was and what he had come to earth to do, wasn’t always understood by even those who were closest to him.

Mark records a wide range of emotional reactions that people had about Jesus based on their interaction with Jesus.

1:27 - *the people were all so amazed*

4:41 - *they were terrified*

5:40 - *they laughed at him*

6:3 - *they took offense at him*

7:37 - *people were overwhelmed with amazement*

No one could remain neutral after meeting Jesus - you either loved him or you hated him.

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**Is the same true today? If not why do you think that is?**

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Mark also writes of Jesus’ own emotional reactions towards people and situations: Jesus experienced compassion, anger, grief, sorrow, warmth, distress, sympathy, and indignation.

Jesus didn’t walk around with a halo on his head, with a serene expression on his face. He was very much emotionally engaged and involved; the things happening around him impacted him.

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**Which of Jesus’ emotional reactions surprise, trouble, even shock you? What does that say to you about who Jesus is?**

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Mark lists 18 (over half) of Jesus’ 35 recorded miracles, each one demonstrating not only the power of Jesus, but also his compassion, for both the physical and spiritual needs of people. Mark also captures people’s response to these miracles.

Mark 2:12 - “*We have never seen anything like this.”*

There is no mistaking as one reads Mark’s gospel - Jesus was no ordinary man.

He lived no ordinary life. E. Stanley Jones in his book, “The Christ of the Indian Road,” speaks of a great number of ways in which the gospels present just how extraordinary Jesus is.

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**Of all the features regarding Jesus, which are listed below, which three most caught your attention; or have caused you to think differently about Jesus; or give you the courage and desire to relate to him differently?**

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1. Jesus didn’t talk about the sweet by and by. The electrifying news he announced was, *“It’s happening. The kingdom of God has come near.”*

2. Jesus wrote no books. The only time we are told he wrote was in the sand.

But he did write on the hearts and consciences of people... and to this day, transformed lives are his living testaments.

3. Jesus didn’t just verbally affirm the worth of children. He raised them from the dead - a 12 year old girl; a teenage boy. He said that to enter the kingdom of God one had to become as a little child. He insisted that the children be allowed to come to him. And when they did he wrapped his arms around them and blessed them.

4. Jesus didn’t debate whether or not God answers prayer. Instead, he prayed... sometimes all night. And because he did, as Luke 5:17 says, “*The power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.”*

5. Jesus didn’t argue that women should have equal rights. Instead, he treated them with infinite respect. In a culture where women were regarded as second class citizens, Jesus invited them to be part of his ministry team, see Luke 8:1-3.

And when he rose from the dead, who did he first appeared to? A woman!

6. Jesus never tried to prove the existence of God. But he did say that to see him was to see the face of God; to hear him was to hear the voice of God; to have his healing hands touch one’s body or soul or heart was to be touched by God.

7. Jesus didn’t give pep talks on how ordinary people could do extraordinary things. Instead he called as his followers, a most unlikely group of individuals, those whom no one would have expected to succeed, and he transformed them and sent them out to begin the mightiest movement of redemption and restoration this world has ever seen.

8. Jesus said the human soul was worth more than the wealth of the entire world put together. And then he sailed across the Sea of Galilee to find a man tormented by a legion of demons (3-6K). When Jesus met this man, he didn’t hesitate to sacrifice 2000 pigs to save and restore him. See Mark 5.

9. When Jesus taught about humility, he did so by *“wash[ing] his disciples’ feet and drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”* John 13:5.

10. When Jesus taught about the equal worth of all people, he went to the poor and the outcast and ate with them, and became known as their friend. See Matthew 11:19.

11. When his cousin, John the Baptist, from Herod’s prison, sent a messenger to ask, *“Are you really the One who was to come?”* Jesus’ answered: *Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.* Matthew 11:4-5. His point? Who else could do these kinds of things?

12. Jesus never answered the nagging question each generation asks - how can a loving God allow evil to exist? Instead he took on himself at the cross, everything that was broken and twisted, everything that causes tears and despair, and in doing so, he showed just how far the love of God would go to rescue us.

Where we would debate philosophically, Jesus acted decisively.

13. Many religions speak of what is wrong with the human heart. Jesus alone cures it.

14. Many speculate on the many ways to approach God. Jesus alone declares,

“I am the Way.”

15. Many ask, along with Pontius Pilate: “What is truth?” Jesus alone answers,

“I am the Truth.”

16. Many wonder what is the source of life and how can a life be well lived.

Jesus alone says to us, “I am the Life.”

I say it again: Jesus was no ordinary man and he lived no ordinary life, and he accomplished no ordinary things.

Testimony of Emile Cailliet, professor of philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary. King’s Cross, p.xv-xvi.

Jesus is not just an historical figure.

His physical remains are not buried in some unmarked grave.

He was not just the hope of people 2000 years ago.

The One whose story is told in the gospel of Mark is alive...today.

The people of our world need Jesus just as desperately as those who were his contemporaries when he walked the roads of Galilee and Judea.

My hope as we study the gospel of Mark is that each of us would come to know and to experience the living Jesus Christ.

We will not go verse by verse through this book.

Instead, each week we will deal with a chapter.

My plan is to dig into key statements made by Jesus or things done by Jesus or observations others made about him.

Then in your Life Group you will have the opportunity to grapple with other aspects of each week’s chapter. I will include some questions that you may choose to discuss. Or there may be other emphases of the chapter that you will want to interact with. But remember - as we study and discuss, we want to engage not just our mind, but also our heart and our will.

I don’t want us to just learn facts about Jesus.

I don’t want us to simply be able to better argue who he is.

I want our lives to become so immersed in Jesus’ life that his life in us would be the fragrance of life; an aroma that bring life to others who don’t yet know him.

**Other questions?????**

Random Thoughts

When we follow Jesus he does not call us to debate with those who don’t yet know him. Rather 2 Corinthians 5:11 tells us we are to *“try to persuade others.”*

2 Timothy 2:24 says, *“The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone...gently instructing...”*

Those of us who follow Jesus are to use persuasion.

Jesus compels because he is compelling.

Jesus is the Savior because he saves.

He is the Lord of heaven and earth, because there really is no one greater than him.

We announce Jesus.

He draws people to himself.

In the very first sentence Mark wrote that God broke into history.

History is more than just the telling of what humans have done.

Most importantly it tells us what God has done and is doing on the earth.

Through Mark we will learn that because Jesus came to the earth, anything is now possible; anything can happen.

How people responded to Jesus was also extraordinary.

Great crowds of people followed him and hung on his words.

But Mark also describes the steady building of hostility and opposition to Jesus, and he connects it to the mission for which Jesus had come to earth - to serve and to sacrifice. Mark 10:45: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom.*

Mark devotes almost 40% of his gospel to the telling of what happened during the last 8 days of Jesus’ life - his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion and death. Finally the book culminates in Jesus’ resurrection.

While Mark presents Jesus as a man of action, he also presents him as a teacher extraordinaire. Jesus did not speculate. He never used words such as “perhaps,” “maybe,” “I think so.”

Out of 70 parables Jesus spoke, Mark records only 18, and often these are in an abbreviated format. Mark wanted his readers to see what kind of teacher Jesus was. It was said of Jesus by those who listened to him that he spoke with authority. Mark 1:27: *What is this? A new teaching - and with authority!*