

Lesson 1: Who was Jesus?

Key Concept: How was Jesus? Answer: God

Bible Study: Mark 1-4

Objective

- ❖ Learn how to share who Jesus is in the first 4 chapters of Mark

Note: I am indebted to the Christianity Explored Material and have incorporated the shell of the outline that follows for the next 6 weeks from Christianity Explored.

Bible Study

The next six lessons are designed to show you how to help a friend or neighbor explore Jesus over coffee or lunch by reading through the book of Mark. This lesson will be written as if your friend has already agreed to meet with you to read through the book of Mark for 6 weeks. What follows is a transcript of how the first session often goes. You will also find a one page outline. Once you have a friend to take through this, you should become so familiar with the one page outline that you have it almost memorized. You can take it with you if necessary, though it is better if you can do it from memory and just allow the conversation to flow so that it doesn't feel so scripted.

Transcript for Chapters 1-4

What would you ask God? Let's begin our time with a question. If God were to walk through the door of this coffee shop and sit down next to us, what is one question that you would ask Him?

2 Underlying Questions: Your question falls into one of 2 categories that catch almost all questions about our spiritual journey. First, is there a God? And second, if there is a God, how do I relate to he, she, or it? Really, those are the questions that Mark addresses in his gospel. So, over the course of the next 6 weeks, we're going to guide our discussion around those 2 big questions.

1. Is there a God?

Is this a question that you have wrestled with? Where are you on this? Either way you answer, the next 6 weeks will help us address this question.

2. How do I relate to God?

This one is a struggle for all of us at some point. To begin with, let me start with my struggles in relating to God, and then, you chime in with any struggles that you have had in the past.

***Coaching point: Think of struggles that you have had in relating to God and share those. You need not use the struggles I list below, but I provide these in order to give you a few examples just in case you need them.

Common Struggles

Boring Church: Growing up, church was exceedingly boring. So here is what I did to make it interesting. I rolled up little spit balls and sent them down the balcony to see if anyone else noticed or if they were falling asleep. Or there was hangman. Or just endless time staring at the ceiling. If church was supposed to teach me to relate to God in some way, then the lesson I deduced was that God was pretty boring.

Hypocritical Church: And even worse than a boring church for most people is a hypocritical church. You have all these so-called Christians who are leaders and pastors and they get caught up in sex scandals with little boys in their church. And you just think—I want nothing to do with it. In fact, Gandhi put it really well when he said, “I would be a Christian if I ever met a real one.” Or a friend of mine put it this way, “The biggest thing keeping me from becoming a Christian is Christians.” Sex scandals with priests, judgmental Christians, and we could go on and on—so many people I talk to end their journey with the church or God because of the hypocrisy they see.

Irrelevant & Culturally Regressive Book: Here is another problem that so many people have. The Bible. After all, it was written 2,000 years ago and 2,000 miles away. What relevance could it possibly have for us? And isn't this book demeaning to women and culturally regressive?

Faith & Science are Contradictory: To become a Christian means that I am going to have to stop using my brain, stop believing in science, and just believe everything on “Faith.” Life is going to be one blind leap of faith after the next because I certainly can't believe in science anymore.

Guilt Induced Religion: Let me give you one more problem that people have with Christianity. But this is a huge one. Getting involved with religion is like ordering a double McGuilt Value Meal, Biggie size. People view the church and Christianity as just one big set of rules that heaps guilt on for not following the rules. It ends up being empty ritual, served with a double order of guilt. No thanks!

The Big Change: But, I am a Christian, and I have grown to love Jesus, so something changed for me. What changed it all for me was Mark 1:1. Mark 1:1 says, “The beginning of the gospel.” The word “gospel” means “good news.” Good news of Jesus Christ. Mark 1, verse 1 doesn't say the beginning of the gospel about **keeping rules**, **about ending science**, about hypocritical followers of Jesus. No, this whole thing hinges on the person of Jesus.

It's also not the beginning of the gospel about "throwing your **brain out of the window.**" You don't have to suspend your mental faculties to believe in Jesus, because he is a real person who lived and walked and talked in human history. He is someone who can be investigated.

One of the great things about Jesus Christ is that when we look at him, the **guessing games about God stop.** Because the Bible says that God has shown us what He is like by sending his Son, Jesus Christ. Colossians **chapter 1, verse 15** says that Jesus is "*the visible image of the invisible God.*"

*****Coaching Point: Pick any really famous person that you like.**

I am a big fan of U2. One thing that would I would really enjoy is to spend some time with Bono. I think he is exceedingly interesting and I'd really enjoy getting to know him. Imagine me trying to get to know him personally.

- I could write him a letter;
- I could call his fan office;
- I could go to a concert and stand outside afterwards with a big sign asking him to have dinner with me.

But, none of this would do much, because there are millions of people like me trying to spend time with Bono. My only chance of getting to know him would be if he came out to meet me.

Well, Mk. 1:1 says God has done just this by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. He came down to meet His fans and his life is recorded here in Mark (and the other 3 gospels).

One quick word on verse 1 because it sets up how you will read the entire book. The word "Christ" isn't Jesus' surname; He wouldn't come under "C" in the Nazareth phone book. Christ means "God's Anointed King." Now that was an outrageous thing for Mark to write. Mark had every incentive not to say this. Writing this could, and did, get him killed because it was a direct threat to Roman authority. The Romans believed that Caesar was ruling on behalf of the gods. So to say that He was God's Anointed King would be a direct challenge to Caesar. But, right at the start, **Mark says that there is a higher authority than the emperor.** According to tradition, Mark ended up being dragged to death in front of the pagan idol, Serapis, for what he wrote and believed.

Now, a really wise man named Blaise Pascal put it this way, "I tend to believe those who get their throats cut." What he meant is that we believe people who have every reason to change their story and stick with it. Powerful. And what Mark does over the first few chapters of his book is stack up layer after layer of evidence that he saw, as an eyewitness, to justify his claim that wound up killing him - that is, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That is what we'll consider, the evidence put forth about Jesus by Mark.

And, it does come forth in evidentiary fashion. Mark writes his gospel much like an attorney would write. It is as if he is presenting the evidence that he saw as an eyewitness that convinced him that Jesus was God. So, let's process these first 4 chapters by considering the evidence Mark puts forth that convinced him that Jesus was God.

***Coaching point for disciple-makers: Move Through Exhibits A-C fairly quickly. If you forget one, don't worry about it. Make sure, however, that you cover Exhibit D. Exhibit D is critical.

Exhibit A: The POWER AND AUTHORITY OF JESUS' TEACHING

The first exhibit that Mark gives to show that Jesus is God is that He has the authority and power in the way He teaches. In our culture, what gives authority to teach? Degrees, expertise, experience with subject matter are the norm. Every once in a while a boy genius comes along that changes the whole game. The Einsteins, the Mozarts - they don't need training, they just have it. In fact, they usually teach their teachers who have all the credentials and training. One of my favorite films about this is Good Will Hunting - here you have a southy (from south Boston), a rough kid with no schooling who roamed the streets and beat up people. And at nights he would clean the floors of MIT - one of the most prestigious math institutions in the country. The professor put a problem on the chalkboard in the hall that took the faculty 2 years of work to solve. Matt Damon, playing the part of Will Hunting, solved it in a few seconds.

Here you have a noted professional, who won the Fields award, which is the equivalent of the Nobel Peace Prize for Math (only it is given every 4 years), and he realizes his abilities, in comparison to this boy genius, are like comparing the abilities of a 4 year old playing chopsticks to Mozart.

This is what happened with Jesus. Turn with me to Luke 2:46-47 and we'll read something from another gospel that Mark didn't record. Jesus was 12 and He went to the temple to talk to the religious teachers and experts. No 12 year old did this. And look at verses 46-47. People realized there was something different here in the way He taught as a boy that continued on when He grew up.

The same is true in our text in Mark 1: 21-22. What set Jesus apart from the other teachers of the law was **the way He taught** and **His lack of formal rabbinic training**. He was a carpenter, yet He amazed the rabbis and teachers of the law. The teachers of the law did not come up with their own material. There was nothing original in their teaching. They never taught without quoting other sources. They hid behind the great rabbis of the past and claimed no authority of their own. But Jesus did not teach like that. He didn't hide behind anybody else's authority; He claimed authority of His own. He said, "I tell you on my authority; you can take it from me." So we see in Verse 22 **that the people were amazed at his teaching**.

Exhibit B: JESUS HAS POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER SICKNESS (& DEATH)

And then, Mark begins to lay out the things that Jesus has authority over in the chapters you read. Please look at Mark 1: 29-31. Here Jesus demonstrates absolute authority over sickness. Just a touch of His hand and the fever is cured. And this is not an isolated incident. Three verses later, in verse 34, we read that Jesus cured whole crowds of sick people. A few days later His touch cured a man with leprosy, the ancient equivalent of AIDS in terms of its severity and the stigma attached to it.

Then, in chapter 2, His word healed a paralytic: bones, muscles and tendons knitted together before people's very eyes without a hint of surgery. By verse 12 of chapter 2 everyone is amazed, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" There are, in fact, thirty healings recorded in the Gospels, all showing us that Jesus has power and authority over sickness, even over death as we'll see a bit later. And, you may be interested to know that non-Christian sources of the day also speak of Jesus' healings. Josephus, the Samaritan historian, notes this in his work.

Exhibit C: JESUS HAS POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER NATURE

The third exhibit Mark presents showing that Jesus is God is in Mark 4, verses 35-41. **Read 4:35-41.** Jesus and His followers are in a boat on the Lake of Galilee and, in verse 37, "a furious squall" blows up. As the waves break over the boat so that it's nearly swamped, Peter and the other seasoned fishermen, who have spent their lives on the Sea of Galilee, say to one another, "We're done for."

In their terror, they wake Jesus, who was in the stern sleeping on a cushion. Note the eyewitness detail - He was sleeping on a cushion! And they say: "Teacher, don't You care if we drown?" What does Jesus do? Grab the helm and steer them out of the whirlwind? No. He gets up and says: "Quiet! Be still!" Immediately, we read in verse 39, the wind dies down and all is completely calm.

Try this yourself. You don't even need to go to the ocean. Try this in the bathtub or in the sink. Get the water all choppy and then say, "Quiet! Be still!" See how you do.

Exhibit D: JESUS HAS POWER AND AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS

Turn back to Mark 2: 1-12. Once again, Jesus is healing people right and left, but notice He says to the man whose legs are paralyzed in verse 5, "Son, your sins are forgiven." If I was the paralytic on the mat, I probably would have said something like, "Thanks Jesus, but that isn't really why I came. My problem is the leg."

But notice how the religious people, the teachers of the law, respond in verse 6: "*Now some teachers of the law were sitting there thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'*" The teachers of the law were so offended by this because they knew that no one could forgive sins but God alone. Sure, other people have performed miracles and healings, but no one forgives sin. That is God's business.

This brings us to an important topic in Mark: sin. Sin is a word that has become incredibly charged in our culture. Most people I talk to who are skeptical about Christianity have some major hang-ups with this term. It is a term that you're going to see quite a lot in the Bible, so we need to take a few minutes and talk about what it means. Here is how I would define it, "sin is building your life around something other than God." God says in Exodus 20, in the 10 commandments, that we should not put any other gods before Him. Yet, all of us do so by building our lives around things other than Him. These gods aren't made of wood and stone, but they can be good things like careers, relationships, power, influence, acceptance, etc. - things that we build our lives around other than God. Or here is another way to define sin: it is taking a good thing and making it a bad thing by making it our ultimate thing. Only God is ultimate - not work, not your spouse, not anyone or anything.

Let me illustrate from the classic film *Chariots of Fire* how this happens (time stamp 1:37:26-1:38:43). In the film, you have the story of 2 runners. Harold Abrams is a Jewish boy who is trying to make it in high society in Britain. To win the gold medal in the 1924 Olympics will mean that he has made it, that he has arrived into the top tier of British society, that he'll be somebody. So he runs for fame and fortune. In many ways, we can all sympathize with his plight, because as a Jewish boy in Britain in the 1920s, he suffered extreme prejudice. There was a glass ceiling that would only let him rise so high, unless he could win the gold medal.

On the other hand, you have Eric Liddell, a Scottish missionary who runs because God made him fast and when he runs he feels God's pleasure. He doesn't run for fame. In fact, his life isn't about his fame, but about God's fame.

In the film, just before Abrams is about to race, he is in the dressing room with his trainer and says. "And now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. But will I?"

Abrams says that has **10 lonely seconds to justify his existence**. He gets his sense of self, of who he is, from winning. Abrams has made a **good thing (winning a gold medal) a bad thing by making it his ultimate thing**. Or to say it another way, "He has built his life around winning a gold medal, not God."

Eric Liddell, on the other hand, is just the opposite. He is every bit as talented and competitive; he loves to run and is passionate about it. However, **winning isn't the ultimate** for Him, God is. So, in this movie when the event that he has trained for his whole life - **the 100 meters** - is scheduled for a Sunday, he pulls out because he won't run on Sunday. Do you see how loosely he holds this event? The 100 meter dash has **gripping control** on one runner - Harold Abrams - and it has absolutely no control over the other - Eric Liddell - because one has made God his ultimate and the other has not.

***Coaching Point: Ask your friend to think of ways that he/she has built his/her life around things other than God? Share ways that you have done so.

Kids: Let me give you another example, one maybe more subtle - kids. Oh, I love my kids so much, and they are a wonderful thing. But if I make kids, even as wonderful as they are, the center of my life, then I am in sin. And, it will have devastating consequences. And the consequences can be severe on everyone. Think about how this affects the husband and wife. Slowly, over time, they grow apart. The parents stop dating one another because, well, everything revolves around Susie's soccer games and violin lessons. And it sounds so good and noble - it is with the aim that our kids will have a better life. We're sacrificing for them. But after years of not just sacrificing for them, but making them the center of your life, you realize that you no longer know each other anymore. The only way you relate to one another is through your kids. And then they leave and go to college, and this is why you see so many parents who hold it in the road until the kids go to college and finally they say, "Enough is enough. I don't even know you anymore and the whole reason we existed is gone."

So, my friends, when the Bible talks about sin, it means this: building your life around something other than God. And the staggering claim that Jesus makes to the paralytic in our text is this, "I have the authority to forgive you of your sin." Now, we don't know what he had built his life around. But, the central claim for us to recognize that Jesus is making is this, "I am not like you. I haven't built my life on anything else but God. Indeed, I am God, because, as the religious leaders have told you, only God has the ability to forgive sins."

Discussion Questions:

1. List and describe the problems that you have had in your journey of relating to God.
2. Read Col. 1:15 & Mark 1:1. Describe one really famous person that you would like to spend time with and discuss how spending time with them relates to Col. 1:15 & Mark 1:1.
3. What disincentive did Mark have for writing his gospel?
4. Read Mark 2:1-12. Exhibit D that Mark presents for the divinity of Christ is that He has the power and authority to forgive sins. Based on the lesson, define sin.
5. Describe one way that you have built your life around something other than God.
6. Read Mark 1:21-22. The first exhibit that Mark gives for the divinity of Christ is the way He taught. Discuss what qualifies someone to teach and then what was unique about the teaching of Jesus.
7. Exhibit B that Mark presents for the divinity of Christ is the power and authority that He has over sickness and death. List the examples of healing in chapters 1 & 2.
8. Read Mark 4: 35-41. Exhibit C that Mark presents for the divinity of Christ is that He has power and authority over nature. Describe what is most significant to you from this story.

Leading Someone to Jesus - Lesson 1

1. Underlying questions
 - a. Is there a God?
 - b. If so, how do I relate to he, she, or it?
2. How do I relate to God if He exists?
 - a. Problems people have in relating to God
 - i. Boring Church (ergo: boring God)
 - ii. Hypocrites who are Christians—Gandhi
 - iii. Irrelevant & culturally regressive book
 - iv. End of reason/science
 - v. Guilt
 - b. God's answer to the problems
 - i. Mark 1:1 - gospel (good news)
 - ii. Col. 1:15 *the visible image of the invisible God*
 - iii. Meeting Bono
3. Mark 1:1 Christ...Not Last Name
 - a. Martyr: Mark dragged to pieces
 - b. Paschal: throats cut
4. Big Question: Who was Jesus? Answer: God
 - a. Exhibit A: The power and authority with which Jesus teaches
 - i. What gives authority to teach in our culture?
 - ii. Good Will Hunting
 - iii. Mark 1:21-22
 - b. Exhibit B: Power and Authority over Sickness
 - i. 1: 29-31 (sickness)
 - ii. 1:34 (whole crowds healed)
 - iii. 1:40 (leprosy—AIDS)
 - iv. 2 (paralytic)
 - v. Josephus
 - c. Exhibit C: Power and Authority Over Nature
 - i. Mark 4:35-41
 - ii. Eyewitness detail (cushion)
 - d. Exhibit D: Power and authority to forgive sins (2: 5-12)
 - i. Only God can forgive sin
 - ii. Definition: building your life around something else
 1. 1st commandment—no other gods before me
 - iii. Chariots of Fire (1:37:26-1:38:43)
 1. 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence
 - iv. Ask how your friend has built his or her life around something other than God & share how you have