

The Message of Mark

Mark 1:1

Rev. Brian Bill

September 12-13, 2015

Recently I shared a very interesting article that led to some great discussion during our staff team time called, "[Is Your Church a Cruise Ship or Aircraft Carrier?](#)" You can find the post on the sermon extras tab on our website. Here are a few excerpts.

People who attend "cruise ship churches," much like cruise ship passengers, often come to be entertained and catered to by the staff. Very little is expected of these church attendees. In fact, they tend to rate the quality of their experience – the music, the sermon and the way it made them feel – much like cruise ship passengers rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their trip.

Cruise ship churches tend to be internally focused on the needs of their regularly attending members. The main goal in these churches, as on a cruise ship, is to keep the "customer" happy and the complaints to a minimum. Leaders in a cruise ship church focus on the existing members rather than pursuing those far from God or encouraging others to do so. Very little of a church's calendar, training or communication is spent on activities to reach the lost or help those in need outside the church.

There are, however, churches that are more like aircraft carriers. These churches are designed to empower all members to find their God-given purpose in life, to equip them and to send them on missions into the world to reach and serve those who don't know Jesus, much like the crew of an aircraft carrier is all about launching military planes and equipping them well to carry out successful missions.

Did you know an aircraft carrier is the same size as many cruise ships, housing thousands of people? But what distinguishes an aircraft carrier ship isn't its size; it's the efficiency on the flight deck. The crew of an aircraft carrier can launch a plane every 25 seconds—all in a fraction of the space of a typical landing strip. The mission pervades every aspect of the ship. From the pilot to the person who restocks the ship's vending machines, everyone on a carrier knows his or her particular role and how it supports the mission—to equip, prepare, launch and receive aircraft back from their crucial assignments.

An “aircraft carrier church” has a clear mission that stems from the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Everyone in the church knows why their church exists and plays a role in the mission.

I am so glad that Edgewood is an “aircraft carrier church”! Instead of meandering, you are living on mission! Instead of just living for pleasure you are focused on your God-given purpose. Instead of just cruising through life, you are committed to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

I believe Edgewood is the most generous church in the world. You tell your friends about Jesus and invite them to gather with us. You care about what the Bible says and strive to live by it, even when it is countercultural. Many of you are planning to participate in the Walk for Life this Saturday and others of you have already supported it financially. I’m hoping that we have a great turnout from Edgewood.

Just this past week, the Celebrate Recovery band played in the Labor Day parade, AWANA kicked off with a carnival on Wednesday and Second Winders and Entrusted with a Child’s Heart started again on Thursday.

It’s a privilege to serve on the flight deck with the people of the U.S.S. Edgewood as we live on mission by gathering, growing, giving and going with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of God!

BTW, let me be clear that I’m not saying that going on a cruise is a bad thing. I’ve heard that they’re a blast...I just don’t want our church to become one.

We’re beginning a brand new series this weekend called, *“The Gospel of Mark: Servant and Savior.”* While I’ve preached many sermons from the gospels, I’ve never preached verse-by-verse through one of them. It’s going to take us some time but we’ll also be taking some breaks as well. Lord willing, we’ll finish chapter two at the end of November. In December we’ll camp in a series that will get us ready for Christmas and then we’ll pick back up with Mark 3 in January.

Let’s kick it off with the very first verse and then we’ll look at some of the unique elements of Mark. Grab your Bibles and turn to Mark 1:1: ***“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”***

It's interesting that Mark starts with the launch of Jesus' formal ministry, unlike Matthew and Luke who begin with the birth narratives. The word "**beginning**" can refer to the cause, or head of something. Jesus is before all things as John 1:1 says: "***In the beginning was the word...***" Beginning can also refer to the start of something, like a road. At a deeper level, Mark is telling us that He is about to begin something brand new, much like Genesis 1:1: "***In the beginning...***"

"**Gospel**" literally means the good news that God has provided salvation for everyone through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The use of this word would have surprised his readers in at least two ways.

- For those with a Jewish background or an understanding of the Old Testament, they would have been stunned because they would have thought of a verse like Isaiah 52:7 where we read of the coming of God to a people who have been in exile: "***How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'***"
- For those from a Roman background they would associate "**gospel**" with some significant event that would change world history, like the birth of an heir to the Emperor. One historical inscription reads like this: "*The birthday of Augustus was the beginning for the world of the 'good news' that come to men through him.*"

Not only was "**gospel**" a powerful word, it also came to be known as a literary genre. This chart [put up on screen] helps us see the different types of literature that make up the different sections of the Bible – In the Old Testament we encounter Law, History, Poetry, the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. The New Testament contains the Gospels, Church History, Letters and Prophecy.

We commonly say that there are four gospels but really, there is only one gospel of, and about, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's better to say that we have four accounts of the good news. In that sense, it's not really Mark's gospel, it's the good news of great joy about Jesus Christ. One paraphrase of verse 1 puts it like this: "*The beginning of the preaching of the joyful tidings.*"

Mark wastes little time by getting to the identity of his subject, using three names and titles.

- **His Person** - “*Jesus*” is his given name, which in Hebrew is *Yeshua*, which means “*Yahweh is salvation.*” The angel of the Lord told Joseph in Matthew 1:21: “*...you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*” His name is descriptive of His mission.

- **His Position** - “*Christ*” is the Greek title for Messiah, which means Anointed One. The question of Jesus’ identity is the hinge point of the book. Turn to Mark 8:29: “*And he asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Christ.’*” Everything written before this confession of Christ focuses on Jesus as Servant and the verses that follow set the scene for his work as Savior. It’s really the hinge of the book and the hinge of our lives. Peter confessed Jesus as Christ. Have you done that?

- **His Power** - “*The Son of God.*” This bold title conveys full divine status. Look at 1:11: “*And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’*” 3:11 tells us that when demons saw Him, “*...they fell down before Him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’*” We also see this in the Centurion soldier’s confession in Mark 15:39. If Peter’s confession is the hinge point of the book, this military man’s declaration is the high point: “*And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’*”

The Person of Mark

There has never been any serious question regarding the human author of this gospel. His official name was John Mark. John was his Hebrew name, which means “*grace of God*” and Marcus was his Roman name, which means, “*the hammer.*” We could call him the Holy Hammer.

His mother’s name was Mary and she owned a large home in Jerusalem. We don’t know anything about his father. Perhaps Mark’s mom was a single parent. BTW, Chris James is leading our “Single and Parenting” class that meets on Wednesday nights. A number of you are parenting solo and could really use some support and encouragement. Check the bulletin for more details.

Peter who was like a father to Mark, led him to faith in Christ, and mentored him as a man. In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter calls Mark his “*son.*” Although Mark was not

one of the 12 disciples, he learned about the Lord through Peter. There are two highlights (or lowlights) from Mark's life that are worth mentioning.

1. He fled from Jesus. On the night before Jesus was crucified, Mark 14:51-52 gives us an autobiographical comment: *“And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.”* While Peter ended up denying Jesus, Mark ditched Him.

2. He folded on Paul. Years later, the Apostle Paul and his cousin Barnabas took Mark on a short-term missions trip. In Acts 13:5 he's referred to as an assistant or helper. When things got messy Mark folded and ended up going back home. This caused some conflict on the flight deck between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas gave him a second chance but Paul was not willing to do so. Later on, however, Paul chilled out and saw that God loves to redeem and restore those who fold on Him. Check out this amazing statement from Paul in 2 Timothy 4:11: *“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”*

Mark fled and he folded but because of God's faithfulness, he got back up and followed Christ. I find it interesting that Mark bailed and Peter failed and yet both got back on mission. Aren't you glad that our past failures don't disqualify us from following Christ?

We've looked at the person of Mark. Now let's consider the purpose of Mark's account.

The Purpose of Mark

Do you ever feel angry when you consider what's happening in our culture? Do you get afraid when you see Christianity becoming increasingly marginalized in our secular society? Something very similar but far worse was happening to first century Christ-followers. After Rome suffered a huge fire that was likely set deliberately by the emperor Nero, Christians took the blame for the flames. Persecution was unleashed and things became very precarious for believers.

It was into this setting that Mark wrote. He's encouraging a minority group of people to live on mission just like our Master did, no matter how difficult it becomes. They needed to be reminded that even if the world seemed like it was falling apart, God would work through their witness. Likewise, we are called to

live holy lives in an increasingly hostile environment. When we suffer we must remember that our Savior suffered. And when we get angry and afraid we must keep serving those around us.

Fellow shipmates, as our society continues to slide toward Sodom, following Christ will become increasingly costly, but totally worth it.

The Gospel of Mark can be read in about 90 minutes and contains poignant and declarative statements that will help each of us get recalibrated in order to live on mission.

Mark is not only the shortest and earliest gospel, it also has some very unique features that we'll uncover together. Mark's gospel is an ideal introduction to the Christian faith. When getting the gospel into other languages, Wycliffe Bible translators often start with Mark because of its brevity and its clear message. BTW, if you're a newer believer, Mark is a great book to read. Let's look now at some of the peculiar things about this gospel.

The Peculiarity of Mark

1. Mark focuses more on the works of Jesus and less on His words. Mark records nineteen miracles, but only four parables. Interestingly, each of these parables has serving as its key theme.

2. The language Mark uses is emotive and often abrupt. We read in 8:12 that Jesus "*sighed deeply*" and that He was "*moved with compassion*" in 6:34. He "*marveled at their unbelief*" in 6:6 and in 3:5 He looked "*around in anger.*" At the same time, when He saw the rich young ruler in 10:21 we read: "*And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...*"

We also see that people had strong reactions to Jesus. I count over 15 individuals who decided to follow Christ when coming face-to-face with Him. People were never passive about Jesus or bored with Him. There's no way to just ignore Him. He either made people angry or astonished or amazed or in awe. People fought against Him or they put their faith in Him. The same is true today. You will reject Him or you will receive Him. There's no middle ground. Check out these 12 reactions that people had to Jesus and see if you can remain neutral.

1. *And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves (1:27)*

2. *And they were filled with great fear (4:41)*
3. *He ran and fell down before Him (5:6)*
4. *And they were overcome with amazement (5:42-43)*
5. *And many who heard Him were astonished (6:2)*
6. *And they took offense at Him (6:3)*
7. *For they all saw Him and were terrified...and they were utterly astounded (6:50-51)*
8. *The people ran about the whole region (6:54-55)*
9. *And they were astonished beyond measure (7:37)*
10. *And they were amazed...and afraid (10:32)*
11. *For they feared Him because, because all the crowd was astonished (11:18)*
12. *And they marveled at Him (12:17)*

So here are some questions for you. What's your response to Jesus? Have you made the decision to follow Him? What's your reaction to what He has done for you?

3. Jesus acts quickly to meet needs. We see this in the use of the word "*immediately*" or "straightway." Used 42 times, this conveys a sense of vividness and excitement! Let's just look at a few examples from chapter one (1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23). The Gospel of Luke, which is much longer, only uses "*immediately*" seven times. We also see that 2/3 of the verses begin with "**and**" to communicate the speed at which the Savior ministered (notice 1:29, 35, 40, 2:1). Mark has been called "*a moving picture of the ministry of Jesus.*" Don't you love that Jesus is all about forward motion?

This week I talked to Jerry Patterson, who retired from the Navy. He helped me understand that aircraft carriers are all about "forward deployment" and "presence." He described their purpose to defend *and* to go forward and also be ready to help during catastrophes. We see clearly in Mark that Jesus was all about "forward deployment." How about you? Are you on mission to respond immediately to needs or is there some "mission drift" going on in your life?

4. Mark uses the historical present tense over 150 times. In the original, instead of writing, "*Jesus came*" Mark wrote, "*Jesus comes.*" Mark's all about, "*Jesus says,*" not "*Jesus said*" and "*Jesus heals*" instead of "*Jesus healed.*" Jesus did all those things in the past but He's still doing them in the present! He saved then and He still saves now! Tim Keller writes: "*Jesus is not merely a historical figure, but a living reality, who addresses us today.*"

5. Mark holds up the cost of discipleship even though the disciples fall short. In Mark 8:34 we read, ***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*** Jesus continually calls his followers to complete commitment and when they cave, He comes alongside and urges them to get back on mission. Sometimes the disciples question and complain like in 4:38: ***“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** We have met the disciples, and they are us, right?

Here’s the deal. We will never water down the message. Jesus is calling us to take up our cross, which means to go as condemned criminals to our death. Randy Alcorn writes, *“Following Christ means taking up your cross daily, which means little sacrifices made repeatedly.”* But aren’t you glad that Jesus gives us grace and mercy when we fall down? If God can use a denier like Peter and a deserter like Mark, He can use flawed disciples like you...and like me.

6. Mark is a missionary book. Mark omits language that someone living in Rome would not understand. He explains Aramaic words and Jewish customs (see 7:3-4). The bottom line is that Mark is all about making the gospel message accessible to those considered “outsiders.” We must do the same because it’s so easy for us to just focus on us insiders. We must remember that the church is the only organization in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members!

Churches tend to count their seating capacity. I think a better metric is to count our sending capacity. Mark’s account opens with, ***“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”*** and closes in 16:15 with, ***“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”***

7. Mark’s emphasis is on the last week of Jesus’ life. The events surrounding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ make up 40% of Mark’s manuscript. Someone has described Mark’s gospel as *“a passion-narrative with an extended introduction.”* Jesus was born in order to die. His death was not a tragic accident but part of God’s plan from the very beginning. Jesus is our Selfless Servant *and* He is our Suffering Savior.

Kent Hughes, in his commentary on Mark, tells about a world-renowned scholar of classic literature, Dr. E .V. Rieu. He is known for a fantastic translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* into modern English for Penguin Classics. An agnostic his entire life, Penguin publishers approached him at the end of his career and asked

him to translate the gospels. That raised some eyebrows because people wondered how an agnostic classical scholar could translate Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

When Rieu's son heard about it he had a great reaction: "*It will be interesting to see what father will make of the four Gospels,*" then he paused, "*It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels make of father.*" He didn't have to wonder very long - when he translated them he came face-to-face with Christ, and became a committed Christian. His story is a testimony to the transforming power of God's Word.

Let's go back to the metaphor of a church as an aircraft carrier. I also learned about life on a carrier from Erik Flaker who spent four years on one and from Abby Steele, who also served in the Navy. They both mentioned the importance of teamwork and that everyone must do their job. If a shipmate doesn't open the right valve someone could die. If orders aren't followed, planes could crash. Everyone has a job to do and must do it faithfully if the mission is to be accomplished. No one is just along for the ride or to see the sights. The key is for every member of the crew to always be ready and to maintain "high up tempo."

Mark's gospel will equip us to live on mission. Let's break out of our patterns of self-absorption and self-centered living and serve like never before so people will be drawn to the Savior.

Communion Calibration

The night before Jesus died, He gathered His shipmates for a meal and for some final mission calibration. It's likely that the Last Supper was held in the home of Mark's mom.

Jesus dined with His disciples before he deployed them. It's interesting that he chose community right before he died. One again he demonstrated that He is a servant by serving His team during their last meal together and then He died as their Savior, urging them to live on mission by completing His mission.

The word "commission" comes from the world of shipbuilding. A commissioned ship is one deemed ready for service. When a ship is ready to sail it is "*placed into active service and sent on mission.*"

Jesus desires for us to commune with Him right now so that we can be calibrated and commissioned to live on mission for Him. It's not about our comfort but all about our commitment to Christ. Let's use this time to get off the cruise ship and jump aboard the carrier under the command of our captain, Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Transition Prayer for Communion (deacons come down)

I draw our attention to Mark's account of this meal in 14:22-24: *“And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”*

Communion

Closing Song: **“Jesus Paid it All”**

New Member 10:45 – Chasity Holmquist