



QUOTATION MARKS

THE GOSPEL OF MARK



CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| PURPOSE OF THE SERIES | 1 |
| AUTHOR | 1 |
| TITLE AND GENRE | 2 |
| PURPOSE OF MARK | 2 |
| THEOLOGY | 3 |
| KEY PEOPLE | 6 |
| GOSPEL DISTINCTIVES | 7 |
| OUTLINE | 8 |
| RESOURCES FOR STUDY | 8 |
| KEY VERSES | 9 |
| NOTES | 10-13 |

PURPOSE OF THE SERIES

“Without question, Mark’s Gospel is one of the most exciting and intriguing of ancient Christian documents. It may then come as something of a surprise that this Gospel was neglected for many centuries of Christian history, from at least the early Middle Ages until the nineteenth century.”¹

It is often said that if you want get to know a person, study what they do and what they say. The Gospel of Mark paints a strikingly focused portrait about the words and actions of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the series “Quotation Marks” is to examine the life of Christ from a primary source. This is a needed and timely evaluation. If most were honest, the bulk of our beliefs about the Messiah do not germinate from the Word of God but from tradition, history, culture, or the perspectives of other’s. May the life and words of Jesus Christ awaken your heart afresh to the Gospel.

AUTHOR

Comparable to the other canonical Gospels, the text of Mark does not identify the author nor the occasion of address. However, all it not lost. The early church father Papias described the author of the second Gospel as “Mark [who] became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered.”² It is safe to conclude that the author of Mark is none other than John Mark, son of Mary (Acts 12:12), He helped house an early church, provided the location of the Last Supper (Acts 1:13), interpreter of Peter, and traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25).

¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 1.

² Papias, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15.

TITLE AND GENRE

If Mark has a title it is found in 1:1: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

Traditionally, the Gospel according to Mark is so named due to the author being known to us in the New Testament as a witness to the life of Jesus.

The word “*genre*” means a category of composition characterized by form, style, or subject matter. Mark is an ancient bios, or ancient biography. Greek bios focus on one individual and present an adequate and accurate characterization of an important national hero or king. The aim of these biographies concerned movements, historical developments, causes, and effects. Because of its genre, “we should not be surprised that Mark seems unconcerned about explicating how event A as related to event B. Rather [Mark] sought to answer questions: Who was Jesus, what was he like, and why is he worth writing a biography about?”³ In short, the literary style of Mark points us to the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ through his everyday life.

PURPOSE OF MARK

The purpose of Mark is also found in the opening verse of the text, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Very simply, the gospel points the audience to Jesus of Nazareth, the expected Christ, and the Son of the Most High. Chapter one is paradigmatic of the writer’s intent, when he immediately recalls the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Why would Mark desire his readers interact with a seven hundred year old prophecy?

³ Witherington, 4.

From the start, the gospel wants the reader to know that Jesus is the fulfillment of the expected Messiah. Isaiah prophesied concerning one who would “make the paths straight for the Messiah.” John the Baptist, who fulfilled the prophetic decree, in turn, readies the world for Jesus. Why is this important? Mark wants his readers to know that the entire counsel of the Lord, from the prophetic voice of Judah to the preparatory call of the wilderness, readies the hearts of men for the Root of David.

THEOLOGY

Christology Who is this man? An overwhelming characteristic of Jesus Christ in the book of Mark is His *exousia*, or His sovereign freedom and magisterial authority. His initial action, the baptism in the Jordan, clearly displays His heavenly mandate and authority as the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and the voice of the Father speaks. Jesus has complete heavenly authority (Mark 1:8-11).

Additionally, the first dialogue of Christ, His calling of the fishermen, demonstrated His ultimate *exousia* upon the earth (Mark 1:16-20). This influence has extreme effects. Clearly, the Messiah reorders social and political priorities of His followers. Secondly, the authority of the Messiah redefines and fulfills Torah Commandments and Jewish traditions. (Mark 7:8-23). Thirdly, the divine authority of the Son of God in Mark evidences the fact that Jesus makes claims and performs miracles that only belong to God (Mark 4:25-41; 3:27; 2:10; and 14:26). Mark does not want his audience to miss this overwhelming leitmotif; Jesus is God and has the full authority of His heavenly Father from heaven and upon the earth.

Secrecy Motif In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus frequently instructs those He impacted—disciples, onlookers, recipients of divine healing, and even demons, to be silent (Mark 1:25; 5:45; 8:26). Why would Jesus desire to keep His name quiet? If Christ is the messenger of good news, why not spread the message quickly and deafeningly? This question has long puzzled readers and captured the attention of scholars. Several reasons help our understanding.

First, the command to silence protected the Son of God from false messianic expectations. Throughout history, even after the time of Christ, many have claimed the title messiah, among them Simon Bar Kokhba, Moses of Crete and Sherini. In Second Temple Judaism, the Christ-title carried militaristic and political expectations. The command to silence was a reminder that Jesus rules, “not with the warrior’s sword, but the servant’s towel, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah.”⁴

Another purpose of the rule to quietness concerned the importance of faith. The crowd gathered to see miracles and experience the power of Jesus. Yet Jesus constantly instructed that signs and wonders do not coerce faith. Truly, “not sight, but insight into Jesus’ life and purpose could evoke truth faith.”⁵ Saving faith is not found in what Christ can do for you, but founded upon the Messiah Himself.

⁴ Edwards, 19.

⁵ Ibid.

Lastly, “Mark employs the secrecy theme in order to teach that until the cross, Jesus cannot be rightly known for who He is.”⁶ The cross fulfilled and declared the total message of the Messiah. Isaiah predicted the suffering servant. The eschatological reign of Christ necessitated the curse of the tree. The command for silence anticipated the capstone of Jesus’ communication, the cross and resurrection. The Son of God beckoned His followers to rely upon costly grace not, “cheap grace that is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”⁷

Journey As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold I will send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before you.” So begins the Gospel of Mark with an emphasis on the way. In the first half of the narrative, the journey or way is indeterminate. Jesus crisscrosses the sea of Galilee, frequently journeys into Gentile areas, and has unspecified routes. Everything pivots when the disciples and the Messiah reach Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27). Following the bold declaration of Peter that Jesus is the Christ; *on the way* becomes the thematic refrain for the remainder of the Gospel (8:27; 9:33-34; 10:17; 11:8).⁸ The journey or way motif describes the manner in which Jesus must go, and the way disciples must follow, if they are to fulfill the plan of the Lord.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

⁸ Edwards, 20.

KEY PEOPLE

John Mark The author of the Gospel according to Mark. His mother hosted a house church (Acts 12:12), departed Paul early journeyed with Paul on the 1st missionary endeavor and left, he was a companion of Barnabas on the 2nd missionary journey, he renews relationship with Paul (2 Tim. 4:11), is associated with Peter in Rome (1 Peter 5:13), and according to tradition, died a martyr.

Jesus Other than two passages focused on John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-8; 6:14-29), every pericope centers on Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, the Messiah is the uncontested substance of the Gospel. Mark is the Gospel of action and the audience primary learns about Christ through His life more than His words. Jesus' humanity is emphasized, including His earthly sorrow (14:34), displeasure (10:14), anger (11:15-17), amazement (6:6), and even fatigue (4:38). Mark focused the reader to acknowledge that Jesus is fully divine with the clear implication that He is simultaneously completely human.

Peter The first disciple, along with his brother Andrew, to heed the call of Christ (1:16). He was part of the inner circle of disciples who drew closest to Jesus (5:37). Peter was the follower who triumphantly confessed that Jesus was the long-awaited Christ at Caesarea Philippi (8:29). The disciple who was often rebuked (8:33, 14:30, 14:37) or found lacking in obedience. The one disciple named as the group waited on Christ in Galilee following His resurrection.

Gospel Distinctives

Action and Narrative Compared to the other Gospels, Mark has minimal dialogue. Thus, the audience learns about the Messiah through his life, journeys, miracles, and actions.

Gospel for Gentile Christians Mark's explanation of Palestinian customs, emphasis on Peter, use of Latinisms, translation of Aramaic terms, and focus on the humanity of Jesus, make the Gospel strategic in reaching a Gentile audience.

Gospel of Candor Mark's opening depicts the humanity of Jesus Christ, the rejection of the good news, and the many failings of the disciples. The honest candor of the text emphasizes the difficulty of true discipleship.

Balanced Christology The Gospel's emphasis on the humanity of Christ works to present a balanced picture of both Jesus' deity and humanity. This Christology is rooted in the actions of the Messiah. Consequently, the audience will not find a birth narrative or a detailed explanation of Jesus' actions post resurrection.

Centrality of Peter's confession Prior to Peter's declaration that Jesus truly is the Messiah at Ceasarea Philippi (Mark 8), most are encouraged to remain silent concerning Jesus as the Christ. This confession is the hinge of the Gospel. Immediately following the declaration, Jesus set His face towards Jerusalem and the Cross.

Outline

Prologue: Events preceding the ministry of Jesus (1:1-13)

Galilee (1:14-8:26)

The early stages of the Galilean ministry (1:14-3:6)

The later stages of the Galilean ministry (3:7-6:13)

The ministry outside Galilee (6:14-8:26)

Jerusalem (8:27-16:8)

The journey to Jerusalem (8:27-10:52)

The ministry in Jerusalem (11:1-13:37)

The death of Christ (14:1-15:47)

The resurrection (16:1-8)

Epilogue (16:9-20)

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

James Brooks — Mark (New American Commentary, 1991).

R. Alan Cole — Mark (The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1989).

James R. Edwards — The Gospel According to Mark (The Pillar New Testament Commentary, 2002).

R.T. France — The Gospel of Mark (The New International Greek Testament Commentary, 2002).

William L. Lane — The Gospel According to Mark (The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 1974).

Ben Witherington III — The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (2001).

Key verses

1:2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. 3 A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!

1:11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."

1:17 "Follow me," Jesus told them, "and I will make you fish for people."

8:29 "But you," he asked them, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

16:6 "Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they put him."

16:15 Then he said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

