

## Gospel of Mark Introduction and Chapter 1 – John Karmelich

1. I felt God leading me to take on one of the Gospels, which is the main reason why I am starting this study of the Gospel of Mark. If you know why God is leading me, you're ahead of me. ☺
2. Let me start by giving a little background on this book.
  - a) Of the four gospels, most scholars consider this one to be the oldest. That is debated, and since I believe all four gospels are God's word, personally, it is not an issue to me.
  - b) The man who wrote it, is known in the book of Acts as "John Mark". The writer was not one of the 12 disciples, nor did he spend time with Jesus before the cross. He was an early convert and was an assistant to Paul on his first missionary journey. The Gospel of Mark is best associated with Peter and scholars believe Peter is Mark's source for information.
    - i) So how do we know Peter was his source? We have writings of early church leaders quoting Mark's gospel (and calling it that) going back to the second century. We also know that the most detailed stories in Mark's gospels involve Peter. By studying the book from that perspective, one can see how Peter was Mark's main source.
  - c) What was the purpose of Mark's gospel? In other words, how is it distinct from the other three gospels? The short answer is Mark's gospel emphasizes Jesus role as a servant. Yes Mark teaches that Jesus is God and is the Son of God. At the same time, the most emphasized role of Jesus in this Gospel is to teach us how to be His servants.
    - i) For example, Mark's gospel does not have any genealogy. For the life of a servant a genealogy is irrelevant in that no one would care about a servants background.
    - ii) Mark's Gospel emphasizes what Jesus did far more than the other gospels. In other words, there is a big emphasis on the miracles and on "action".
    - iii) Mark's Gospel has very little space dedicated to sermons. At the same time, this Gospel does not ignore the fact that Jesus' mission is to preach the "Good News" of His coming and the miracles are Jesus validation of who He is and claimed to be.
    - iv) The goal of Mark's Gospel is to lay out proof to the non-Jewish reader that Jesus is really the son of God and is God. Because it is written to the non-Jewish reader, there is very limited "stuff" on Jesus' Jewish background. That is why the focus is far more on Jesus' miracles, ministry and purpose for dying for our sins.
  - d) Let me finish the "who, where's and why's and then we'll start Chapter 1:
    - i) The "where" is in Israel. In particular, the stories take place in two locations: First, is it takes place in Jerusalem and the surrounding area of "Judea". This was the Jewish equivalent of the "bible belt". In other words, the most religious of the Jews lived in and around this area.
    - ii) Second, it takes place in the "Galilee" area. This is the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee. This area is a mixture of Jewish towns and Gentile towns.
      - a) While Jesus was born in a town near Jerusalem, He was raised in this area near the Galilee. Most of Jesus' disciples also came from the Galilee area.
      - b) Know that separating these two areas (Judea and the Galilee) is where the Samaritans lived. While there are references to Samaria in Mark's Gospel, Jesus does not stay there.
    - iii) Finally a few words on "when". The book is not dated. It was within a few decades of Jesus' death and resurrection that was in 32 AD. The best we can tell, it was probably written in the "50's" or "60's". It was definitely sometime after Mark traveled with Paul and probably soon after the time when he met Peter.

3. Let's say we already know the gospel message fairly well. Why should we study this book?
  - a) I believe where God is leading me is to teach and emphasize the concept of Jesus as the "servant of mankind" and how we are to follow suit as His servants.
    - i) Let me explain further the concept of "servant of mankind". This does not mean Jesus gives everyone what they wanted. Jesus was a servant in that He performed miracles in order to validate who He was. I believe Jesus also did "things" in order to teach us as believers to follow suit. That does not mean we can go around doing miracles the same way Jesus did. It does mean that we are a living witness for Him. If we are willing to humble ourselves, and put the needs of others before our own needs, than we too can be a servant like Him.
  - b) Does this mean we have to live the life of a lowly servant? We do in the sense that we make God a priority over all we own and all we control, including our own families. It means that God comes first in our life, no matter what. As far as our "stuff", if we have given our entire lives to God, then all we have now belongs to Him. God then turns around and gives us the responsibility of acting wisely with the resources He has provided us. In most cases, God does not require us to sell all we have. What God does want is a willing heart to be a servant of Him and His desires for our life.
  - c) That is the underlying message and the key to studying the Gospel of Mark. It is to understand that Jesus took the role of the "lowest of servants" so that we as His followers also take that attitude and put the needs of others as priority over our own needs.
4. Let me talk a little about Chapter 1 and how it sets up the "flow" of the Gospel of Mark.
  - a) What one senses from Chapter 1 is how this Gospel focuses on action. There is no mention of Jesus' Jewish heritage. There is no discussion of how Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The opening chapter gives a brief mention about John the Baptist and a brief mention how Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days prior to starting His ministry. The book then starts telling stories of miracles Jesus did.
  - b) One of my favorite ways to describe Mark's gospel is a "shooting script". This is a term used in Hollywood that describes a movie or television script, which focuses on the action and not the actual dialogue. A "shooting script" tells the camera and lighting crew how to set up and shoot each scene. It's a good analogy, as again, the emphasis is on action, just like the Gospel of Mark focuses on action.
  - c) So, why have a Gospel focusing on the action? What purpose does this serve? By seeing the "action orientation" of Jesus, we see how He has lived His life for the "service of man".
    - i) First and foremost, Jesus gave up His life as a ransom price for all of our sins. That fact should not be taken lightly and is a major point of this book.
    - ii) Second, all the miracles show that Jesus cares about the lives of individuals and not just their salvation. The idea as it relates to us as "servants of God" is that we too, should care about the lives of individuals and as a witness for the true God. We live to make a difference for Him by caring about and helping others.
5. OK, I've written almost two full pages, and I haven't even given my title for this lesson. It is simply, "Understanding Jesus' purpose as a servant and what that means for our lives."
  - a) Again, Mark's gospel emphasizes Jesus role as a servant. It doesn't mean Jesus was literally a slave to everyone and anyone. It means that Jesus understood His role and destiny to serve the payment for all sin and that anyone who believed in that payment would have eternal life. (Yes, there is more to it, but that's the key idea.)
  - b) We already know that Jesus died for our sins. This leads to my favorite question to ask in these bible studies: OK, so now what do I do?
    - i) The answer is to do "likewise". It does not mean we die for the sins of the world. It means we have the attitude of a servant and live to make a difference for God in all that we do. The "humility of a servant" is a key point of the Gospel of Mark and a key point as we work our way through this lesson.

6. Chapter 1, Verse 1: The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
  - a) The best way to understand this verse is to think of it as the title of the book.
  - b) Mark's gospel does not describe Jesus entire life and everything he did. Mark just wanted to present the Gospel message primarily to the non-Jewish person.
  - c) Let me briefly describe what is the "Gospel". The word literally means "good news". The idea is that Jesus was God, is God and became man for the sake of paying the price for sin.
    - i) Mark's story begins when Jesus ministry first began, which is essentially when Jesus was baptized. It was at that time when Jesus started to preach that believing in Him as the Son of God and the belief that the price He paid for all sin gives one eternal forgiveness. That is the "Gospel" message.
  
7. Verse 2: It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" --<sup>3</sup> "a voice of one calling in the desert, `Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"
  - a) Verses 2 and 3 are an introduction to John the Baptist.
  - b) Mark starts by saying in effect that the purpose of John the Baptist was to fulfill what was written by a Jewish prophet (Isaiah) hundreds of years before John was born.
  - c) So, if Mark is written to a non-Jewish audience and Mark is focusing on the Gospel, then why give this quote? Would a Gentile audience understand who was Isaiah?
    - i) I suspect the answer is that the non-Jewish world knew that the Jewish people believed in a single God and they believed that this God spoke to people.
    - ii) By this quote, Mark is saying John's mission was predetermined by God.
  - d) Those living in the Roman world may not have understood about John the Baptist, but they would understand about the idea of having someone lead the way for a king.
    - i) It was common in ancient times, before a king (or other dignitary) would show up at a place, to have a spokesman come out and preparing the way for the king.
      - a) It would be a time to fix the roads prior to the king using those roads.
  - e) One of the proofs that John the Baptist was sent by God is the fact that if someone is way out in the desert and saying, "Make way for the king", the way to know if that speaker was respected is if people showed up and responded to His message.
    - i) Let me put it this way: If John the Baptist was crying out by Himself in the desert and nobody came to hear Him speak, John would just be another "nut case". The fact that multitudes of Jewish people came out to hear John preach and be baptized by him is a sign that John was "God-ordained".
  
8. Verse 4: And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.<sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.<sup>7</sup> And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."<sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
  - a) Here is John the Baptist, looking strange and baptizing lots of people.
  - b) Let me start by explaining "baptism" from a Jewish perspective. That word "baptism" simply means to be dunked in water. In the Jewish world, they would baptize a non-Jewish person converting to Judaism. It was unheard of for a Jew to be baptized.
  - c) So why were this multitude of Jewish people agreeing to be baptized by John? For starters, they believed that the Messiah ("king") was coming soon. The Jewish people wanted a Messiah to overthrow the Roman government and set up a kingdom where the Messiah would rule the world from Jerusalem. (That is part of Jesus Second Coming).
  - d) Understand that the purpose of John's baptism was a ritual for the confession of sins. It is to say, "The Messiah is coming, so prepare and spiritually cleanse yourself."

- e) A Roman reading this story may not get all of the Jewish details of a baptism, but they would be respectful of the idea of a "forerunner" of a king doing his job. The fact this forerunner (John) was respected enough that multitudes of Jewish people would go through this baptism ritual teaches us that John the Baptist did his God-ordained job.
  - f) John gives a brief description of the coming Messiah (again Messiah means king). John says that this Messiah is so powerful, that I (John) am not worthy enough to even be the lowest slave in His presence and tie His sandals for Him.
    - i) Again, think about that from the perspective of a non-Jewish person. Whoever this Baptist "character" was, he was popular enough that people came to the desert to see Him. Whoever is this Messiah that John preaches, He is so prominent that John the Baptist didn't feel worthy to do the lowest chore for Him.
    - ii) One has to remember that the Romans and the Greeks had a multitude of gods. They had a set of rituals on how to approach these gods and the rituals they must perform to serve those gods. Now here is John the Baptist preaching about a single God so powerful that John feels he is not even worthy to be his lowest slave.
  - g) Let me give one more set of details and then I'll get into the significance for us: The text mentions that John wore camel hair garment and a belt and ate locusts.
    - i) If you've ever smelled a camel, this does not make John attractive to approach. ☺
    - ii) The appearance of John made him a "wild man". My favorite description of John is that he was the "wild hippie" of his day. The fact that crowds were willing to come to him to be baptized (for the forgiveness of sins) despite his strange looks and habits is simply more proof that God was behind John's purpose.
  - h) OK, enough background. Most of us are familiar with the role of John the Baptist. We may have learned a few new facts in this lesson, but basically we as believing Christians understand what is his role in preparation for Jesus coming. What am I to get from this?
    - i) Over and above learning how to explain John to a non-Jewish person, there are lessons for us in how to preach Jesus to others.
    - ii) John's first words he preached were essentially "repent and believe the gospel".
    - iii) This is essentially the same thing Jesus spoke when He first started His own ministry, which was, "repent and believe the gospel". (See Matthew 4:17.)
  - i) Yes the Gospel message is about a one time thing when one first commits their lives to serving God and trusting in Jesus' complete payment for one's sins.
    - i) At the same time, "preparation for Jesus coming" is a life long process. The idea of repenting is to regularly contemplate the sinful aspects of our lives, and give those thoughts to God. We are to live with the belief that God is completely in charge of our lives and we live to make a difference for Him. It is also to understand that we as Christians will be rewarded based on our faithfulness to God in whatever capacity He has called us.
9. Verse 9: At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."
- a) Time for a quick review of an important question: If Jesus was sinless, why did Jesus have to get baptized? The answer is to identify Himself with the sins of the world.
  - b) The voice of God the Father spoke audibly at this point and said in effect He is well pleased with Jesus. It is the fact that Jesus was willing to pay the price of sin for humanity.
  - c) The reason God the Father stated His pleasure at this is not because it was a surprise to Him. This plan was laid out before time began. The point is for the world to know that God the Father is "pleased" with this plan and the price is acceptable for all sin.
  - d) Therefore, when John baptized Jesus, it was not for the forgiveness of any of his sins. It was so Jesus could be identified with the sins of the world and the price could be paid.

10. Verse 12: At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert,<sup>13</sup> and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.
- a) In Mark's Gospel, we get a grand total of one sentence (two verses) that describe Jesus entire 40-day period of being tempted by Satan in the desert.
  - b) Let's go back to looking at this from a non-Jewish perspective: I would suspect a good portion of the Greek and Roman world had a basic understanding of the Jewish faith (Jews were scattered around the Roman empire). They would understand that the Jews believed in a single God. I believe a lot of people would also understand the concept of an "adversary" to God, which is called Satan, at least in the Jewish religion.
  - c) So why mention this part at all, from a non-Jewish perspective?
    - i) First it is to show Jesus had the God ordained power to survive such a test. It took the power of God for Jesus to survive with no food or water for forty days and resist the temptations by the devil himself during that time frame. (Just so you know, the human body can go about 10 days without water and 40 days without food. After that, we are literally starving to death.)
    - ii) All the world would understand the principal of being tested and being found worthy of a great assignment. While a Greek or Roman may not understand the symbolic significance of a forty day test period, they would understand that it would take someone special to survive such a test.
  - d) So, what does this testing mean for us? After all, I know and believe Jesus survived this test. For starters, it is a reminder that if Jesus could survive being tested by Satan and His dominion of demons, so can we. God never allows us to be tested beyond what we can handle in the first place. (See 1st Corinthians 10:13.) Further, I have yet to see a person who is mightily used by God who is not tested in some way.
11. Verse 14: After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.<sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"
- a) Sometimes I admit, I am more fascinated by what is not said than what is said in the text:
    - i) There is no mention of why John was put in prison, just the fact he was.
    - ii) There is no mention of why Jesus went from town to town after John was in prison, just that he did go from town to town.
    - iii) It's almost as if the text is saying to the non-Jewish reader, "Hey, remember that guy who was the forerunner of Jesus and was baptizing people? Well, he was put in prison, and therefore, Jesus had to go at it alone proclaiming His message."
      - a) The point is the good that Jesus did, did not come with the benefit of John standing next to Jesus saying, "Hey everyone look, here is that guy!"
  - b) Here's another thing "not said" in these verses:
    - i) Jesus did not walk around saying, "I am the Son of God, come follow Me." Not that this information is not true. Jesus just wants people to figure that out by themselves, which is why Jesus rarely stated that fact.
    - ii) Instead, the focus is on the term "repentance". The idea of that word is to change one's way of living to a way that is pleasing to God. It is to think about some aspect(s) of our life, realize it was not pleasing to God and confess it as wrong.
    - iii) Jesus also said to "believe the good news". Well, making a statement like that would get people to wonder, "OK, what is the good news?" That question would get people to, at the least, ask Jesus what He meant by "the good news".
    - iv) With someone wondering what Jesus meant by the "Good news", we can then explain how one does not have to work to earn their eternal salvation. Since there is no work involved, that would be "good news".

12. Verse 16: As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.
- a) These are the verses where Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew first followed Jesus.
  - b) Think about Jesus' statement of "come follow me". It's easy to say to someone "come follow me". It's another thing to get people to give up their life and their way of making a living and now dedicate their lives to following Jesus.
    - i) My point is the text shows the power of Jesus to change lives simply by the fact that people were willing to quit their jobs for the sake of Jesus.
    - ii) That story is repeated millions of times throughout history. People are willing to dramatically change their lives and spend the rest of their lives living for and following Jesus. The question is, "What makes a person so convinced that Jesus is God that they are willing to drop their lives for His sake?". The fact that Simon and Andrew did this is another sign that Jesus is more than an ordinary person.
    - iii) To put it another way, some people are willing to change their lives for the sake of a religious or political leader. It is another thing when multitudes of people are willing to change their lives based on someone they have never seen or heard. This is simply another sign of the spiritual power of Jesus to change lives.
  - c) Let me address the "newer" believer at this point. Let's say you are now convinced that Jesus is God. How do I now follow God like they did? Do I have to quit my job too? The short answer is you seek God and let Him guide your life. Don't make any changes because your local pastor (or priest or any advisor) says you have to. The key is to seek God through prayer and I promise that He will guide you on what to do with your life. I'll also add to start reading God's word. If you are not sure God is telling you to do something, know that God will not say anything contradictory to His word.
    - i) My point is, if you get a feeling you should for example, stealing something, that is not the voice of God. If on the other hand, you feel God leading you to make some significant change in your life, I find that that change will become obvious. I find that especially for newer believers, things just work out easily as God is guiding you in the way you should go.
  - d) Getting back to Simon (Peter) and Andrew, Jesus told them that they would be "fishers of men". What Jesus meant by that is that both Simon and Andrew would be evangelists.
    - i) This is not what God calls every Christian to do. God does call some people to be evangelists and these two guys were the first to be called. Yes, all Christians are called to spread the good news about Jesus, but some are given a special gift to get people to accept the Gospel message. How do one know if one has that gift? The answer is simple. If people are willing to change their lifestyle for God based on what you do or say, that is a sign you have that gift.
13. Verse 19: When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.
- a) In Verses 19 and 20, we have the story how two other disciples started followed Jesus. These two disciples are brothers named James and John. This John is not John the Baptist but it is the John who wrote the Gospel of John. As for James, this is not the James who wrote the book of James, but it is the same James who was killed by Herod for being a disciple of Jesus. (See Acts 12:2).
  - b) What is interesting about these two disciples is not just that they quit their jobs to follow Jesus, but the fact they quit their family business. The text says they left their father and left the hired men to go follow Jesus.

- c) It is one thing to quit one's job to follow a religious teacher. It is another to leave one's parents and one's family's business in order to follow Jesus. Again, it is showing the power of Jesus to persuade people to change their way of living.
    - i) Is there more to the story? Did these two brothers see any miracles or signs that convinced them to leave their father? Probably. The point is that Jesus did and said things that got people to be convinced He is the Promised Messiah.
    - ii) That leads back to you and me. I'm convinced the greatest way to get people to change for Jesus is not so much our preaching, but to get others to simply read the Gospel stories and think about them. Nothing changes a person's heart like hearing the words of the gospel for themselves. Does it work 100% of the time? Of course not. However, it has convinced millions or billions over the centuries.
  - d) One more thing about James and John. The text says that they were "mending their nets". A few verses back, the text said that Simon and Andrew were "casting their nets".
    - i) There are many wonderful sermons preached on that point. The idea is that God calls some people to "cast their nets" which is a metaphor about sharing Jesus with nonbelievers (i.e., be an evangelist). The idea of "mending their nets" is a metaphor for working with existing believers to help them strengthen their faith.
    - ii) Again, that does not mean all Christians are called to either be "fishers of men" or called to be "menders of Christians". It means that God calls us to do specific things for Him to make a difference for Him. For some, that means to primarily focus on leading others to Jesus. For others, that means to work with other Christians to get them to strengthen their faith. It also means that God gives every Christian gifts to help strengthen and grow the Christian church.
  - e) If God gives us all gifts, how do I know what my gift is? Start by asking Him. Another way is simply to observe one's life and see what one is good at. Ask your friends what is your gift and they will usually know what you do well. The joy in this life is to be able to combine what one's gift with something one enjoys doing to make a difference for God.
    - i) Another way to tell what is one's gift or calling is to ask yourself, "What can I not stand not doing?" (Pardon the double-negative. ☺) For me, it is this writing ministry. I write because I can't stand not doing it. The point is if we are willing to make a difference for God, He gives us gifts (abilities) to do things for Him and guides us into situations that help to make a difference for Him.
14. Verse 21: They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.
- a) Again, let's look at this from the standpoint of a non-Jewish reader. It says Jesus went to a town called Capernaum. Even if you knew nothing about Israel, you would believe Capernaum is a town in Israel. When the "Sabbath" came, Jesus went there to teach.
    - i) A non-Jew might think, "Well, I don't know much about the Jewish religion, but I do know that on the seventh day of the week, the Jews get together to worship their god. The Jewish people call the 7th day their "Sabbath".
    - ii) Therefore, here is Jesus going to one of these Jewish-worship places and teaching with His own authority. That means Jesus was not quoting other people saying how one should live, but He is speaking as He knows what one should do.
    - iii) In Christian sermons, it is common to quote other Christian scholars as support for one's arguments. The religious Jews do the same thing. Jesus didn't quote any other scholars, but simply preached as if He knew what is right to do.
  - b) The point of all of this is, is that the fact that Jesus "spoke with His own authority" is another sign even to a non-Jew that Jesus is different from other religious figures.
  - c) Meanwhile, back at a synagogue in Israel, about two thousand years ago: ☺

15. Verse 23: Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"
- a) Here was Jesus speaking in a synagogue. Notice there is little reference to what Jesus actually taught. Again, the Gospel of Mark focuses on action and not actual dialogue.
  - b) The next thing I want you to notice is that a demon can cry out in a synagogue. Do I believe a demon can cry out at a church as well? Yes. As a matter of fact, if things are never "going wrong" in a Christian gathering, it can be a sign that Satan does not want to waste his resources on something that not making a difference for Christ.
    - i) This leads to the issue of why was a demon in the synagogue in the first place? After all, if a synagogue is a place where people worship God, you would think it is the last place a demon would want to be. The point is demons are not afraid of being near God as then they can "cause damage" to those who are seeking God.
  - c) Next question: How do we know when a person is "demon possessed"? As a Catholic priest said many years ago (I don't know the source) is the way to tell if one is demon possessed is to eliminate every other possibility and then assumes the demon possession. There are signs as well. The bible teaches a demon possessed person cannot say, "Jesus is Lord". (See 1st Corinthians 12:3 as support). Bible scholars point out demon-possessed people suffer from violent reactions. (Note Verse 25 coming up on that point.)
    - i) The point is one should not take this lightly. The few people I have heard who have been involved in fighting demons describe it as a difficult and painful.
    - ii) I don't believe a Christian can be demon possessed. Once a person is saved, they are embodied by the Holy Spirit. I don't believe both the Spirit of God and demons can take up residence within a person. Satan's forces can still influence us to make bad choices. That is different from actually being demon possessed.
    - iii) Again, let's go back to the fact this Gospel was written to non-Jews. I suspect even the average "multiple-god" believing Roman or Jew would understand or could visually picture when a person is controlled by some sort of demonic force.
  - d) The demon spoke and said in effect, "We know that You (Jesus) are the son of God." Most scholars believe this demon was speaking on behalf of all demons who knew who Jesus was. (As opposed to a multitude of demons in that synagogue.)
    - i) The point is Jesus had the ability to control the demons and not allow them to speak on His behalf. So why did Jesus silence the demon?
    - ii) The quick answer is that Jesus did not accept the testimony of demons. If demons are capable of lying, why accept their word as truth even if they are telling the truth at this moment? Jesus wants people to come to Him because they figure out that Jesus IS God and that by coming to Jesus, they can inherit eternal life.
    - iii) So if Jesus wouldn't accept the testimony of demons, why mention the demon's speech to begin with? It is to show Jesus has power to block the power of demons.
16. Verse 25: "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.
- a) As I just stated, Jesus has the power to control demons. If Jesus said to the demon they have to come out of that person, the demon has no choice but to obey.
  - b) What separates demons from believers is that life is about making the choice to follow and obey God willingly. This demon obeyed Jesus here because it was told to directly. That demon didn't want to obey Jesus. Demons like people, apparently have the free will choice to obey or not obey God.
  - c) Last thing on demons: Why did this demon cause the man to shake and why did the demon shriek when it came out? I suspect it is because demons want to embody someone and that demon didn't like the fact it was ordered to leave. In other words, the demon was doing something that was against its will, and that caused the "shriek".

17. Verse 27: The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.
- a) Here is the first of a number of references to word spreading quickly about Jesus. The locals are impressed by the fact the evil spirits obey Jesus and by the fact that Jesus' teaching style does not quote other famous authorities. In summary, Jesus was impressing the locals and His fame is spreading.
  - b) Don't take lightly the fact that Jesus went to a synagogue service, not so He could "take over", but also to show us that we should not ignore our regular time to worship God.
  - c) A few words about synagogue services. Any guest who has something to say is welcome at a synagogue service (if asked) to get up and speak at such a service. Given Jesus' desire to teach, I'm sure the synagogue leaders were willing to give Jesus a "listen" at service.
18. Verse 29: As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. <sup>30</sup> Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. <sup>31</sup> So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.
- a) Remember that so far, Jesus has four disciples. Now that the synagogue service is over, it's time for everyone to go home. Since these four disciples are following Jesus, they decide to go to the home of Simon (Peter) after the service.
  - b) We also discover here that Simon (Peter) is married and his mother in law is sick.
  - c) If you read this story in Luke's Gospel, Luke (who was a doctor) mentioned the fact that the mother in law had a high fever. (See Luke 4:38.) In a world without aspirin a high fever was a deadly thing. Further, anyone who has ever been around sick people knows that a person is most contagious when the fever is still high.
  - d) Despite the high fever and the risk of catching it, Jesus simply went into her room, took her hand and helped her stand up. Immediately the fever left and she (the mother in law) began to wait on them.
  - e) Stop and think about the last time you had a fever. Even when it went away, did you or I immediately have the strength to get up and do anything? Usually we are still tired for another day based on how our bodies are drained from the fever. The fact that mom-in-law got up immediately and had the strength to work is a miracle all unto itself.
  - f) So does this mean when someone around us has a fever, we should not give them medicine but just pray for them? No. God gave us medicine as a form of healing. Yes we should pray for that person and a miracle is always a possibility.
    - i) My point is God does miracles when and how He wants to. There is no guarantee that God has to perform a miracle on someone just because we pray for one. Prayer is about God's will being done and not our will. When it is not God's will for some miracle to happen at that moment, it is because God has other plans for that person. It does not mean we ignore prayer, nor does it mean God doesn't want to help that person. It just means that God works His way on His timing.
  - g) What struck me was that if Jesus was with Peter at the synagogue, why didn't Peter say to Jesus in effect, "Let's skip the service and go help my mother in law get better". After all, Peter already saw Jesus do other miracles, he must have thought that Jesus could help mom. Maybe Peter had the normal relationship "problems" with his mother in law. ☺
  - h) The point for us is to not treat any issue lightly that can be brought to Jesus in prayer. It shows that Jesus not only cared about salvation, but cares about our well being.
  - i) Also consider the fact that mom-in-law immediately got up and served Jesus. There is the Gospel message in a "microcosm". When we get saved from our old life, out of gratitude, we then turn around and work for Jesus. In other words when we are saved, we are technically free to go about our lives, but we should choose to follow God in gratitude for what He has done for us. That is what "mom" did when she got cured.

19. Verse 32: That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.<sup>33</sup> The whole town gathered at the door,<sup>34</sup> and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.
- a) Apparently, word got out about Jesus. ☺ Now everybody in town who had any sort of sickness was lining up at Peter's door to get healed.
  - b) Stop and think what would happen in your town if someone had the power to instantly heal anyone and everyone who asked. Before we know it, there would be crowd trying to break down our front door. Nobody likes suffering and everyone would want an instant cure of whatever bothers them. Notice that nobody was refused at this point.
    - i) Here's the point: Did all of these people then change their lives to follow Jesus? I suspect that some did, but I also suspect that a lot of people just went back to their lives. In other words, a lot of people gave "thirty seconds of gratitude" for God for helping them out, but the "saved" are the people who realize that God is the one who makes a difference in their lives and uses the healing to now live for God.
  - c) These verses also have a lot of demon healing. I always wondered "how did people know they had a demon in them?" I suspect people just came to Jesus because they had "issues" and Jesus responded by casting demons out of them. That makes me consider my own prayer life a little. Like everyone else, I pray for healing in issues. It rarely occurs to me to also pray for the release of any demons that are causing the suffering.
  - d) These verses also make me wonder, "Why would so many demons want to be in the same place where Jesus was located?" The only answer I could think of is that demons like to go where they can do the most damage. If Jesus is leading people to salvation, then demons want to be nearby so they can work to draw those people away from Jesus.
  - e) The final comment in these verses is that Jesus would not let the demons speak. This comes back to the idea of not letting demons testify of who Jesus was.
20. Verse 35: Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.<sup>36</sup> Simon and his companions went to look for him,<sup>37</sup> and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"
- a) Let's remember the scene: The whole town is excited as this "person" with the power to heal all diseases is hanging out in Simon's (Peter's) house. I suspect the whole town still was banging on the door wanting to be healed by Jesus. By this next morning, other people who had doubts about Jesus power had now seen the healings Jesus did the night before, and I believe a large multitude are now desperately searching for Jesus.
  - b) Meanwhile, Jesus snuck off somewhere for prayer. If you ask me what was Jesus' secret for doing God the Father's will, it was Jesus' prayer time. Yes there are always needs to be dealt with, but the priority and key to success is to make private prayer time.
  - c) Personally, I'm big on early morning prayer. I believe every Christian should take the time daily to stop and pray. I know people who pray all through the day. That is good and nothing is wrong with that. It is also a good thing to stop and spend time alone with God. As I said, I believe prayer was Jesus' secret to "success" and it can be ours as well.
  - d) Does that mean if we pray daily we can do all sorts of miracles and be successful in life? Remember that the purpose of prayer is for God's will to be done and not our will. Since we don't know God's will, it is ok to ask for things. It is up to God to show us what is His will for our life. (He will, if we ask Him!) God may perform miracles or make us financially successful (or whatever!). Spending time alone with God helps us to let go of our will and turn our issues of the moment over to Him to deal with.
  - e) Meanwhile, the whole town is still looking for Jesus. These four apostles and whoever else was living in Simon's house found Jesus and said in effect, "Everyone is looking for you". The next verse is what happens next.

21. Verse 38: Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." <sup>39</sup> So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.
- a) Jesus is saying in effect, "I've prayed about this and God the Father wants me to move on to other places and preach there". In other words Jesus is not there to cure everyone in Capernaum of whatever ails them at the moment. The miracles are signs that Jesus has the power of God, but the miracles are not meant as an "end all of end all". After all, everyone who got cured of whatever they had, still died and lived a normal life span.
  - b) Jesus is emphasizing the point that He did not come just to cure people, but to preach repentance and teach others of His purpose. Therefore, Jesus decided it was time to move on to other towns and ignore whoever else was asking for miracles.
22. Verse 40: A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."
- a) Like much of the Gospel of Mark, this verse is a great visual to picture. Just as Jesus was leaving this town, we get another healing story. This one is about the healing of leprosy.
  - b) A person with leprosy has white spots all over their body. A leper's voice is "drained" as the disease affecting their throats. All lepers (back then) eventually died from that disease. So here is this man with leprosy desperately begging Jesus on his knees to help him. Up to this point, we don't read of any leprosy healing.
  - c) Religious Jewish people associated leprosy with sin. It was probably a shock to everyone witnessing this event that Jesus would heal this person.
23. Verse 41: Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" <sup>42</sup> Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.
- a) Obviously Jesus healed him. My question is, why is this miracle singled out? The answer is in the next few verses.
24. Verse 43: Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: <sup>44</sup> "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." <sup>45</sup> Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.
- a) The purpose of this story is to point out the disobedience of the ex-leper. He didn't keep quiet about his healing and now "everybody" was trying to get close to touch Jesus. Because this healed man refused to do what Jesus said, now Jesus had a hard time going from place to place because everyone just wanted to be healed of things.
  - b) For those who have not studied Leviticus, there is a whole set of rituals dealing with the disease of leprosy. The book of Leviticus, or the bible in general never gives any instructions on how to cure leprosy. The instructions in Leviticus are on how to recognize the disease and how to recognize when it was gone. (See Leviticus Chapters 13 and 14.)
    - i) With that said, Jesus instructs the "ex-leper" to go to the priests in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and show to them that he is cured of leprosy as required in the Old Testament Law. The point of these verses is that this guy ignored those Levitical laws because he was too happy he was cured.
  - c) The real point of this last story is about the importance of obedience. Jesus did cure the man, but he also wanted the man to go "follow the law" and keep his mouth shut. Because the cured man didn't obey Jesus, Jesus Himself had to suffer.
    - i) It's hard to blame the "ex-leper" for spreading the news. If you or I were dying from some disease and we just got a miracle cure, we would want to share our joy with everyone. The point is doing what feels right often causes pain to others. Jesus wanted him to keep silent so Jesus won't be mobbed by requests for healing.
    - ii) I am saying we have to do as Jesus tells us, even if the joy in us, wants to do other things. Failure to be obedient does cause "pain" to the God of the Universe.

25. OK, let me wrap this up. If there is one main theme so far in the Gospel of Mark, it is about signs to show that Jesus is God.
- a) If you stop and contemplate each of the little stories within this chapter, they each in their own way point to evidence that Jesus was not just some holy man with special powers. It leads to the evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel and He wants to lead all people (Jews and non-Jews) into a new life of being forgiven of sins. It is to teach all of us that the greatest life one can live is that of obedience to God in all that we do.
  - b) What that life entails will come up more through this book. For now, we are simply establishing the fact that Jesus is a miracle worker and He has come to teach the world that the way to eternal salvation is to trust that Jesus is both God and man, and that belief in His payment for sins leads to salvation as well as giving us "purpose" in this lifetime.
  - c) All the miracles that Jesus does here are "short term". Let's face it, everyone who gets cured still died one day. The secret is that of Peter's mother in law, who when cured became obedient to God and follow Jesus as opposed to the leper who just wanted to share the joy of what Jesus did.
  - d) The point is we should take our own "miracle" of being saved and now use that miracle to make a difference for God. That is my primary point of this lesson.
26. Let's pray: Father, thank you for sending Jesus so that by believing in what He did, we can spend an eternity with You. Help us to use that knowledge to make a difference to the world around us. Help us to take the time to learn Your will for us today and live our lives in a way that is pleasing to You and make a difference for You in the world around us. May the answered prayers that we see draw us closer to You and understand that You are the true source of all the blessing we have in life. Help us to remember that all things do work out when we truly let go of them and put our trust in You to work them out. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.