

UNDERSTANDING JESUS

who we are in him



SERIES COMPANION

INTRODUCTION

Mark's gospel is the action-oriented account of Jesus which progresses at rapid-pace, giving a constant sense of movement and activity. Indeed, Mark uses verbs of motion more frequently than the other gospels, and the word, 'immediately', appears 42 times in just the first half of the story. But as Jesus enters Jerusalem, narrative time slows down and we watch on as Jesus marches resolutely to his death.

From Mark 1:1 Jesus is identified as the Son of God, the promised king of Israel. We see Jesus displayed in glory and victory – exerting authority over sickness, sin, death, and demons. But as Jesus draws near to Jerusalem it becomes clear that he is the suffering Son of God, come to redeem a world living under the shadow of death. We see Jesus draw near to the broken and the downcast, and we see his deep compassion to attend to those who cry for mercy. Against the dark backdrop of cruel rulers and leaders, and those who would grasp for power to assuage their own fears and insecurities, Jesus calls his followers to a life of humility, generosity, sacrifice, and service. In a world that often feels chaotic and fearful, Jesus calls his followers to take courage and exercise their faith in him.

As we receive Jesus, we become his disciples, and so begin the lifelong process of discovering ourselves as we discover more of who he is – as he has revealed himself to us. Living as disciples of Christ will call us to live different to the world around us, and different to the patterns of the world that become normal and accepted. In Mark, we keep seeing the disciples struggle and fail to grasp how truly radical is the call to follow Jesus: That the way of

Jesus is the way of glory through suffering, of greatness through service. It's the way of losing your life in order to save it, of denying your self to take up a new self in Christ. It's the way of sacrifice and giving, and resisting the allure of worldly power and success. The 'Jesus Way' is different from the 'Herod Way' and the 'Rome Way', and the various ways of our own culture today.

As we enter 2021, many of us are desperately hoping that our world could be different. We are more sensitive to the suffering and brokenness in our world. We remain disappointed and disenfranchised by our political leaders. We cast about looking for reprieve from the critical and cynical and angry voices that clamour for our attention. The way of Jesus doesn't offer us an easy escape from the mess in our world, but it does teach us how to live – in the mess – with a lasting hope, a deep peace, and an abiding joy that can only come from Jesus Christ, our Lord. In this way, our lives will display a kind of life that will be seen as light to the nations, and that will reveal the true glory of knowing and being known by Jesus.

SERIES BIG IDEA

Faith in Jesus Christ begins a life-long process of learning and growing at the feet of Jesus – as we seek to be with Jesus and be like Jesus. Through the gospel of Mark, we come to understand more about Jesus, and so also understand ourselves as we receive and respond to him. As disciples of Christ, we have a deep security and strength knowing we are forgiven sinners welcomed into the loving embrace of our Heavenly Father – we no longer live under the tyranny of sin, death, and Satan. This gives us a deep hope in a world that is hurting and broken; it guards us from the temptation to give in to fear or despair or to grasp power and success to shield us from a hostile world. Instead, we will live lives of repentance and faith - of sacrifice and service, of generosity and love. With compassion, we will draw near to the stranger and outsider, the hurting and broken. For in this way we resist the deadly patterns of this world, and the powers that clamour for our allegiance, and instead will follow the humble footsteps of our loving Lord and only Saviour – Jesus Christ.

USING THESE SERIES COMPANIONS

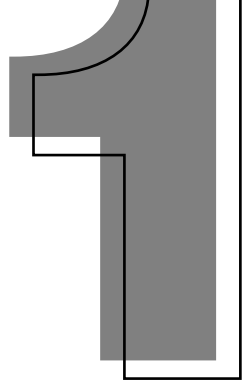
- There are more questions than is possible to discuss in one Growth Group event – so the Growth Group Leader or in some cases the Group can select a smaller number of questions for discussion together. Preparation is key – listening to the Talk and reading through the questions before Growth Group are excellent ways to be ready for Growth Group.
- Utilise the Leaders Guide that will be sent to the Growth Group Leader each week – this will give background to the questions
- There are different types of questions – so it is good to check every now and again that your group is discussing a range of question types
- Feedback is helpful always - please email me with any time with your thoughts andrea pryde@livingchurch.org.au
- We haven't numbered the questions. This is to allow your group the freedom to discuss what is most useful to your group, without being constrained by consecutively ordered questions. If it's helpful you can write your own numbers to reflect the questions and the order in which your group will discuss them
- At the end of each study, it might be useful to close the discussion by going around the room and discussing what you have learned about Jesus, and what you have learned about yourself

NOTES

As Mark begins, we immediately learn something about who Jesus is and also who he is calling us to be – as his kingdom draws near.

READ MARK 1:1-15

JESUS: SERVANT AND KING



QUESTIONS

Unlike other gospels, Mark doesn't begin with a birth narrative to establish Jesus' identity. But Mark does tell us upfront who Jesus is – "...the Messiah, the Son of God". From your understanding of the Bible, what do these titles tell us about who Jesus is?

Why do you think we start with Mark sharing the story of John baptizing people (v4-8)?

Why is Jesus baptised? (See also Matthew 3:13-15)

When Jesus was baptized, he fully identified with our sinful mess. How does that set the scene for the rest of Mark and provide us with encouragement?

Look at verse 15. What does it mean, "The kingdom of God has come near"?

In verse 15 Jesus says "Repent and Believe" – what does that mean for you? How do you feel about that?

"**When** you understand who Jesus really is – you see who you really are." How do you feel when you read this?

In the original language, Jesus is commanding *continuous* and *ongoing* action: We repent and we keep on repenting, we believe and we keep on believing. What does a "Repent and Believe" lifestyle look like for you?

PRAYER

NOTES

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KING OVER EVIL

In this study we continue to explore who Jesus is, and what it means for us to receive him as he is revealed to us.

READ MARK 2:1-12

QUESTIONS

When the people in this passage appeal to Jesus, what are they asking for? Does Jesus give them what they ask?

Already we see crowds surrounding Jesus. At this point in the story, do you think the presence of the crowds is positive or negative, a hindrance or a help to Jesus' ministry? (See 2:12)

READ MARK 3:20-30

Look at verse 20 – again we see lots of crowds. How would you describe the crowds here? And do we see any sign they are “repenting and believing”? (recall Mk. 1:15).

Look at verse 21 – How do Jesus' family respond? Why do they respond like this, and is it a right response to Jesus?

In verse 23-27 Jesus tells a parable, responding to the criticism of the religious leaders. What does the parable mean? Who is the ‘strong man’ in the parable (v27)?

Look at verse 29 – is Jesus saying the religious leaders are blaspheming the Holy Spirit? If yes, how? And why is this called an ‘unforgivable sin’?

This passage reflects back on Jesus' early ministry and his miracles. Why does Mark include this story and what do we learn about Jesus here?

Knowing & understanding Jesus' authority – what does that mean for you?

FURTHER READING

What is the ‘unforgivable sin’?

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-unpardonable-sin/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-asked-what-is-the-unforgivable-sin/>

PRAYER

NOTES



KING OVER LIFE

In this study we explore what true faith looks like through two healing stories that are interwoven – the healing of a 12-year-old girl, and the healing of a woman who was sick for 12 years.

READ MARK 5:21-42

QUESTIONS

What is remarkable about these two people's stories?

What does Jesus do for them?

Look at verses 30-32 – why does Jesus go to such lengths to know who touched him?

What do you notice about how Jesus responds to those in need, and how do Jesus' responses show us more about him?

Imagine what it is like to be destitute & abandoned, suffering for 12 years. Then Jesus heals you. How do you feel?

Imagine you are Jairus and his family – your child is sick and dies. Then Jesus raises the child. How do you feel?

Have you ever been scared and so asked for help in secret?

How important is faith in each of these stories? (see verse 34, 36). What can we learn about the kind of faith Jesus is calling us to exercise?

Have there been times when you have felt that your faith was weak? What did you do?

What might you say to someone who feels that their faith is weak?

Times of distress and desperation can reveal what our faith truly rests upon. Does this connect with your own experience? How?

FURTHER READING

If anyone you know is dealing with long-term suffering or sickness, here's a helpful article to read:

<http://thebriefing.com.au/2009/12/dos-and-donts-when-dealing-with-the-downcast/>

PRAYER

NOTES



KING OVER CREATION

In this study we see Jesus' authority over all creation and explore how we might live courageously in a world that often feels chaotic and frightening.

READ MARK 6:30-56

QUESTIONS

Why is Jesus feeding all these people? What is he showing us as he feeds them? (see also John 6:35)

After the people ate, there were plenty of left-overs, what does that tell us about Jesus?

Look back at verse 34. What might the people have been like if Jesus concluded they are “*like sheep without a shepherd*”?

In verse 45 Jesus *made* his disciples get in the boat. Then, when the disciples are struggling with the waves, he intends to *pass them by* (v48). What is Jesus doing? Why is he walking on the water?

In verse 50, Jesus literally says: “Take courage! I AM. Don’t be afraid.” (Recall this is God’s name, as revealed first to Moses in Ex. 3:14). What is Jesus revealing about who he is?

Jesus had compassion on the crowd. How often do you feel compassion for others?

In what situations in life are you “in the boat”?

What should we do when we feel as anxious as the disciples when the world is full of chaos and turmoil?

What characteristics of Jesus help you feel calm?

PRAYER

NOTES



SUFFERING KING

In this study we explore who Jesus is as the suffering Christ; how the disciples only *partially* see Jesus; and what it looks like for us to follow in Jesus' steps.

READ 8:22-9:1

QUESTIONS

Describe what happens in verses 22 -26?

Straight away the disciples are talking about who Jesus is (verses 27-30). How complete is their understanding? (*Or perhaps do they see only partially, too?*)

In verse 33, Jesus rebukes Peter. Why does Jesus say that Peter has “*merely human concerns*”? Isn’t it a good thing he recognizes Jesus as *the Messiah*?

Look at verses 34-35. List each of the things Jesus mentions as crucial to following him.

Have you ever been in the situation where you have only partially understood something and then come to understand more fully? Share what that was like.

In what ways can we, just like Peter, miss seeing completely who Jesus is?

What do you think it means to *deny yourself* and to *lose your life in order to save it* (34-35)?

What is so radical about Jesus, and what does this mean for us as his followers?

What does his Kingdom look like because it is led by a radical King?

Jesus is calling his followers to “take up their cross”. How do you feel about what that means for your life?

In the list you made from verse 34-35 – what struck you as personally significant or challenging?

Take it to God in prayer.

PRAYER

NOTES



SERVANT KING

In this study we see Jesus again pair a healing with teaching about the kingdom of God. Are the disciples still blind to Jesus, and the nature of his kingdom? How do we relate to the disciples point of view?

READ MARK 10:35-45

QUESTIONS

Look at the request of James and John (v37), what's wrong with their request?

In verse 39, Jesus says the disciples will drink the cup he drinks and be baptized with the baptism he is baptized with. What is the cup and the baptism he is referring to?

Jesus talks about two models of power – the way of Rome and the way of God's kingdom. What's the difference (verses 42-45)?

What does Bartimaeus call out to Jesus (v47)? What does that tell us?

Notice that Jesus asks the same question to the disciples and to Bartimaeus. Compare the response of James and John (v36-37) with the response of Bartimaeus (v51). What do you notice about their two different responses?

Have you ever wondered how important you are? Have you ever had the desire for greatness? Have you ever sought to have/exercise power to protect yourself?

What does it look like for us to be a slave of all (v44)? Do we just do whatever anyone asks of us? How do we decide what is best to do for people?

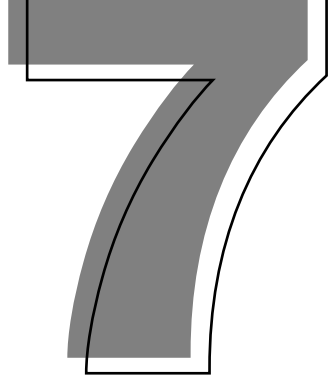
How do you feel about the fact that Jesus' closest friends could be so self-centred and lacking in understanding?

How would you answer Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?", if Jesus asked it of you right now?

The disciples are blind to Jesus and the nature of his kingdom, and so blind to follow Jesus in the way of service to all. Instead a blind beggar truly sees and follows Jesus on the way...in what way might this apply to us?

PRAYER

NOTES



In this study, we explore the different responses to Jesus as he enters Jerusalem and how we might live as faithful and fruitful followers of Christ.

READ MARK 11:1-25

JUDGING KING

QUESTIONS

As Jesus comes to enter Jerusalem, who are the people who meet him? How do they respond to Jesus?

In verses 9-10, the people sang Psalm 118. Look at Ps. 118:26 and now look at Mk. 11:11. What kind of reception does Jesus receive from the temple? What are we to understand from this?

Jesus curses a fig tree (v14), then he gets angry in the temple (v15). Why? And how are these two responses linked?

How do you feel about how Jesus deals with the chief priests and the teachers of the law? Was he too tough? What does it tell us about Jesus' great passion?

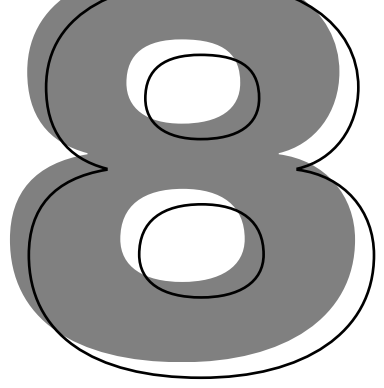
The religious leaders had shaped their idea of the Messiah to meet the "needs" they believed they had. How do we do that today?

Read verses 22-25. What are the mountains to be moved? And how does that help our prayer life (v24)?

The temple was a "den of robbers" – Both individually and as a church, what should we do to ensure that our lives are pointing to Jesus and not desecrating him?

PRAYER

NOTES



DYING KING

In this study we see Jesus – the one who is king over sin and death and creation – now submit to death at the hands of sinful creation, and we explore what his unique suffering means for us.

READ MARK 15:21-41

QUESTIONS

In Mark's gospel, we have often seen paired together Jesus' anticipation of suffering with the call for us to follow in his steps (see Mk. 8:31-38; 9:30-37; 10:32-45). With this in mind, what is so significant about Simon of Cyrene (v21)?

Get a big piece of paper. Go through the passage identifying each event, how it demonstrated evil and then how it also demonstrates redemption.

What happened					
Evil					
Redemption					

Look at verse 34. Why did God forsake Jesus?

Look at verse 38. What was the curtain, and what did it symbolize? What is the significance for us that the temple curtain was torn in two?

When you reflect on what Jesus suffered, how do you feel? What assurance do you have knowing Jesus dealt with your sin?

How does Jesus's suffering and victory provide perspective on our suffering?

Read through Mark again to familiarize yourself with what has happened. Next week, we are going to reflect on the big picture that Mark has presented throughout this term.

PRAYER

NOTES

As we finish our time in Mark's gospel, we reflect particularly on the women, and their fearful response in the face of Jesus' resurrection, and how Jesus is revealed as one who meets us with compassion in the midst of our fears.

READ MARK 16:1-8



RESURRECTED KING

QUESTIONS

Notice that the women went to the tomb first. But where were the guys?

Given what Peter had done in 14:66-72, what does it mean that he is mentioned specifically by Jesus in verse 7?

Picture what the women see 15:40; 47 & 16:1. The gospel ends with the women fleeing and afraid. Mark chooses to include their fearful response as a fitting ending to this gospel. Does this seem strange to you? Why do you think Mark chose this moment as his ending?

The women never actually see the risen Jesus, but are invited to believe on the basis of what they're told – through the testimony of the angel. How might this be an encouragement to us?

Reflecting on Mark's gospel, notice how commonly people respond to Jesus with fear (Mk. 4:40; 5:15, 36; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32; 12:12; 16:8). Do you think it's true that our fears often reveal the true nature of our faith? How so?

What sort of things most cause you to feel anxious or afraid, and how do you most often respond in fearful times? In light of the resurrection, how can we now respond differently? (You might like to look also at 1 John 4:18).

REFLECTION FOR THE SERIES

Write down your highlights from each week?

What were the main things that you learnt about Jesus?

What were the main things that you learnt about yourself?

PRAYER

In Christ, we have been united to God and brought into the fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit. Our connection with God empowers us to be transformed in all of our relationships. We are called to pursue healthy relationships as an expression of our growth to maturity and our participation in the fullness of the Spirit.

**Living
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Understanding Jesus – Who We Are in Him

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