

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 1, Introduction to the Book of Mark

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the book of the Gospel of Mark. This is session 1, The Introduction to the Book of Mark.

Hi, my name is Mark Jennings, and I'm delighted to be able to begin this session on the Gospel of Mark with you as we look at it.

You might even notice on the slide I have up here's an artistic depiction of the Gospel of Mark. As you are probably aware, each of the Gospels has a traditional symbol associated with them, and so as you look at this painting, you will see a lion whispering into Mark's ear as he writes his Gospel. And I think it's interesting that the lion was picked as the sign because there are a lot of vivid pictures of what is happening in the Gospel of Mark.

What I'd like to do today with this first lecture is begin to really just sort of set the field, if you will. I want to talk a little bit about what a Gospel is, what a Gospel is not, help us understand the genre that we're going to be looking at over the next several weeks. I also want to discuss the question of the historical veracity of the Gospel.

In other words, why we should be able to trust what Mark is telling us is true and accurate. And then consider some introductory matters, some themes that we're going to be looking at with the Gospel of Mark, the authorship, the historical setting. Just begin to sort of set that stage so as we get into Mark chapter 1 in our subsequent time together, we'll have a good footing, at least, of where to begin.

I have a quote here from C.S. Lewis that I find always quite informative. The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship, from a corkscrew to a cathedral, is to know what it is, what it was intended to do, and how it is meant to be used. And I think that a good place for us to begin our discussion of the Gospel of Mark is to begin just thinking about what we're talking about.

What do we mean when we use the term Gospel here? Our primary sources for the details of who Jesus is in his life is the Gospels. But what are they? The term itself is interesting. I don't know if you've ever asked why it's even called a Gospel.

But a Gospel comes from the old English, Godspell, a translation, if you will, of the Greek word euangelion, which basically means good tidings or good news. So this term euangelion, which is the term that gets translated as Godspell in Old English and then Gospel in today's English, had this idea of good tidings or good news. And it is often used, this term euangelion, to announce a great victory.

We see this euangelion used by the Roman rulers when they would parade about a battle that they had won or a victory that had been occurred or at their inauguration into the emperor. They would have a euangelion. They would have a pronouncement of good news.

We see this similarly in Isaiah. When you look at Isaiah 52, how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news. That would be euangelion in the Greek translation of Isaiah.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring euangelion, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns. Notice in Isaiah that we have that proclamation idea, that your God reigns. We see this in the Gospel of Mark when we look at chapter 1 next time when he talks about the Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel.

It is associated with the proclamation that the kingdom of God has come. They were there to repent and believe the euangelion, the good news about Jesus. But in time, this understanding of euangelion as a proclamation started to morph, started to change into a genre.

So that when we get to these written versions, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we get this title of Gospel associated to them. The reason the Gospel got associated with them is probably because of Mark 1:1 and how Mark begins by declaring that what he is doing is a euangelion. So this idea, this genre, if you will, of a Gospel started to take shape.

So what is it when we talk about a Gospel? Well, there are different characteristics to them that I think we need to be aware of. First is they are historical. They act like histories.

They draw upon traditions. They draw upon other sources. They draw upon eyewitnesses.

If you are ever interested, look at the first four verses of the Gospel of Luke, for example, where Luke presents his methodology as a historian, if you will. Second, as histories, they are set in a historical context, first century Palestine. They give us dates, locations.

They convey information. In other words, the author of each Gospel are presenting themselves as doing something historical. They are not doing myth.

This is not myth-making. The writing that they are doing is not a fable. It presents Jesus' deeds, his words, his death, his resurrection, his claims, his vindication of those claims as something that occurred in real time.

We also see that these Gospels have narrational aspects. In other words, they are not a collection of sayings only. They are not a collection of words.

They are stories. Now, understand when I say stories, I don't mean fiction. We've already established that they present themselves as historical, but they are narratives.

There's a plot to them. There are characters that were introduced and were told things about characters. There's conflict.

You see themes that progress through the Gospel. There are viewpoints, and there are settings. And like all stories, they're not unbiased.

In our 21st-century world, we sometimes think of biases as wrong or incorrect. Well, let me tell you, the Gospels are very biased. They present their understanding of who Jesus is.

But just because they're biased doesn't mean it's not true. But they are presenting themselves in the story that they're portraying. They're choosing the elements of their story very purposefully to tell us something about who Jesus is.

Now, when we think about the general state of scholarship on biblical stories, unfortunately, what we've come to find is what I have just shared that there is a historical quality to them, a story quality to them, and a theological aspect that's involved in all of this, that the general state of things in biblical scholarship would question some of what I just stated, especially the first point about the historical accuracy. And I think as we begin our study of Mark, it's probably worthwhile for us to understand a bit of the state of things in modern biblical scholarship and then be able to speak to that to discuss the historical veracity of the Gospels. Rudolph Bultmann, a 20th-century New Testament scholar, wrote, I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since early Christian sources show no interest in either, or moreover, fragmentary and often legendary.

The general state of things in biblical scholarship today seems to be this. Outside of evangelical concerns, it seems to be that the majority of biblical scholars reject the notion that Jesus was anything more than a man. They would say the Gospel of Mark is not trustworthy regarding its details, but is rather the product of a long involved process of myth making.

In other words, the phrasing you often hear is this idea of the Jesus of history versus the Christ of faith, that the Jesus of history is hard to get to because it has been clouded in the Christ of faith. In other words, all that is available is what Christians in the early church have said about it. How did this come about, you may wonder.

Well, it wasn't always this way. For the longest time, New Testament scholars and the church held to the historical veracity of the Gospels, but with the dawn of the Enlightenment, with the increase in the emphasis on rationalism, the idea that if something couldn't be reasonably repeated, then it had to be doubted, the historicity of the Gospels began to be challenged. I want to discuss this for a little bit before we even get into the Gospel of Mark because the philosophy of rationalism influences how we read or how one reads the Gospel.

We never come to a Gospel with a neutral position. We come with differing positions based on our belief, based on our understanding of how things are, and based upon how we have been exposed to the different arguments. For example, those of us who have read different works coming from the 18th and 19th centuries, the so-called first quest of the historical Jesus, the main idea there was that Jesus was a mere man, an ethical teacher who proclaimed love and the infinite value of people.

This was often described as the liberal Jesus. What would happen during this first quest was try to explain what was happening in the Gospels to fit within this idea of who Jesus must be. You would get these far-fetched rational explanations for the miracles must not be true because miracles are against rational thought.

They can't be replicated. They're not reasonable. You would hear certain suggestions such as, well, Jesus didn't really walk on water.

He walked on the shore, but there was a mist on his feet, and so it just looked like he walked on water. Albert Schweitzer, in looking at many of these studies that were coming out of the 18th and 19th centuries, noticed that all of these studies had one common element: that the Jesus of Nazareth was clothed by modern theology in historical garb. In other words, all of these studies seemed to present the historical Jesus in a way that looked just like what the authors themselves valued.

I think that is a cautionary tale for each of us as we get into the Gospel of Mark to always be concerned that what we are doing when we're reading Mark is finding out who Jesus is and what Mark is saying about Jesus and resist the temptation to make Jesus look like me or look like you. After this so-called first quest was tried to use the Gospels as a way to explain who Jesus was in terms of a liberal theology that fit the 18th and 19th centuries, we moved into the 20th century and the so-called no quest. This is Rudolf Bultmann and others, where the observation became that nothing could really be known about the historical Jesus.

Radical skepticism, if you will. Now, we must understand that this is all coming out of what became known as a history of religious schools. The idea of a history of religious school is basically this: religious growth is evolutionary.

In other words, religions develop from something simple to something complex. So, Jesus begins, according to this frame of thought, as a Jewish figure, but once the church spread into Greek circles, it became now this Jesus, simple Jesus Galilean became infused with pagan conceptions, even to the point of divine. So, according to this no-quest position, what we see is just the fruit of this history of religious approach to who Jesus is.

The gospel of Mark doesn't show us much about the real Jesus but about this evolutionary process. In other words, we have nothing actual. Bultmann would say nothing could be known about the authentic Jesus except that he existed, was a prophet of some sort, and proclaimed the kingdom of God.

Now, this hasn't always been the case. There would be what was called a new or second quest for the historical Jesus. This is figures in the 50s to 70s, kind of in reaction to this no quest, this idea that nothing could be known about Jesus, that the gospels told us nothing about Jesus.

People like Käsemann and others argued that the gospels had to tell us something. Even if you reject the supernatural, there still must be something that can be gleaned from the gospels. Then after that, we're into now the period which is known as the third quest, which is from the 80s, 1980s to today.

Here, the emphasis was on methodologies. The gospels began to be more in view regarding what it could tell us about who Jesus is. You would get a wide range of opinions that would fall under this third quest.

Opinions from groups such as those known as the Jesus Seminar, which had its heyday in the late part of the 20th century, would have its own very specific methodology of what could be understood of who Jesus is or is not and figures more common today like N.T. Wright and others. The key here is always the method that the quest for the historical Jesus in the gospels is legitimate. There's optimism.

Whereas the no quest would say there's pessimism, the third quest says there's optimism. Something can be known. It just depends on your method.

That is where I would fall in as well. I think the gospels tell us a whole lot about Jesus, who Jesus is, who Jesus was. The question of methodology becomes, what is it about the first century? What is it about the original context? How do we read and understand the gospels in the way that its original readers would have understood

it? What are the questions that we should be asking? This means that, probably right now, each one of you is asking this very question.

Why in the world did I just spend the last few minutes talking about different ways of understanding who Jesus might be from a historical standpoint? The reason is simple first, as I wanted you to see how this process has occurred, especially in Western thought. How we've gone from centuries of trust, the historical veracity of the Gospel of Mark and the other gospels, to what is now mostly doubt, or at least some skepticism.

How the Enlightenment and rationalism have affected biblical scholarship. Also, I believe one's assessment of the historical Jesus and how much one can know depends on many factors. What do we accept as sources? What criteria and methods do we use? What value do we give the gospels? In a few minutes, I'm going to talk about the historical reliability of the gospels.

At the heart of each of these decisions that one makes about Mark and the other gospels is still that question. Does our Jesus look like a Jesus of the first century of the gospels, or does our Jesus look like something from the 21st century? I think that there always needs to be governing how we will approach the Gospel of Mark. Of course, other presuppositions come into our understanding.

If you deny miracles, then you will deny that Jesus did them. If you believe miracles can occur, then you will believe that Jesus did them. If you deny the existence of demons, then you will deny exorcisms.

If you believe the spiritual world exists, then you won't. It's impossible to read as a blank slate. Of course, for me, I don't think we should.

As I will approach the Gospel of Mark, I will be reading it and interpreting it through an analogy of faith, through my own belief in who Christ is. It does not mean we must simply be fideistic. We must always be ready to give an answer for the reason and the hope that we have.

Now, to the question of historical reliability. I'll just scratch the surface a bit here. Using this idea of the gospels as being generally reliable, what are some of the aspects we see from the gospels themselves? I made the comment earlier that gospels are historical, present themselves as historical.

Indeed, when we look at them, they present themselves very much as a very specific type of ancient historical writing, similar to what we would call a bios, sort of an ancient biography. This would be a historical presentation that centers on a main character. This isn't an unusual genre in the ancient world.

I think we can certainly say that the gospels center on Jesus. If you want to have a fun exercise as you read through the Gospel of Mark, highlight those sentences that are either not about Jesus, don't have Jesus as the subject, or aren't Jesus speaking. You'll have very few times to highlight.

In other words, almost every sentence in Mark is about Jesus. You have small bits about John the Baptist, but other than that, it's almost always about who Jesus is. So, looking at the historical characteristics, one of the things we see in the Gospel of Mark and the other gospels is that eyewitness testimony seems to be important.

There's strong evidence that the gospel writers saw themselves as caretakers, as transmitters of the story of Jesus. Indeed, throughout the New Testament, eyewitness testimony about who Jesus is is upheld and honored. The gospel writers claim to be doing history, as I mentioned earlier.

They give things that would have been verifiable, such as names, places, dates, and so forth. The level of detail that presents itself seems to claim to want to be understood as historical. These aren't vague descriptions but are concrete depictions.

Third, evidence of accurate transmission can be seen. We see a desire to have events and words saved, even when those events might seem less than ideal or those sayings might seem difficult. When we have Jesus not knowing something, or the disciples coming across as dull, or even one of the disciples as a traitor, when there's a massive rejection of the hero of Jesus, these should sound surprising if we thought the gospels were not historical.

If these were simply myth-making, you might want to gloss over those words. You might not want to present those ideas. But Mark has them, as do the rest of the gospels.

This preservation of difficult sayings and of difficult events is part of the historical version. Also, and I think something that doesn't get as much recognition as it should in this idea is that there's an absence of later church controversies found in the stories of the gospels. In other words, if the gospels were the product of a later church, if they were this evolution of development, you would expect to see some of the events that were being debated and disputed in the early church find their way into the gospel of Mark and the other gospels.

Even some of the things we see in Acts don't show up in Mark and the other gospels, let alone 2nd and 3rd-century church debates. It seems even at a scratching the surface, if you will, the lean is that the gospels are reliable in terms of the events and the words they record. That would be something that even someone without faith would have to readily admit.

Now, of course, you may be asking about this very point. Aren't there contradictions? Don't we have contradictions between the gospels? How can I trust the historical veracity if it seems that they go against each other? Of course, it's a good question to ask, but the natural question needs to be: what is a contradiction, and what is simply common historical practice? The issue of contradiction is one we always come back to. In fact, you'll notice even if you read the gospels that sometimes there seem to be things that don't line up.

If you look at Mark and you look at Matthew and you look at Luke, there are some things that come right away very similar, but other things that make you scratch your head. That's not even mentioning the differences between the Gospel of John and the Synoptics. But as we think about these matters, are they contradictions? I think we need to be clear.

The gospels are not transcripts. They are not videotapes. That was not the method of ancient history writing.

Indeed, it's not the method of modern history writing. When we start addressing this issue of contradiction, we need to first begin by distinguishing between what might constitute a contradiction and what is common historical practice. What would have been readily understood then, if you will, by the reader and the receiver of the Gospel of Mark as fitting within common historical practice? In most cases, for example, the Gospel writers, and Mark's no different, will engage in paraphrasing.

That's not an uncommon historical practice. There's this question of *abscissima verba* versus *abscissima vox*, the idea being *abscissima verba*, actual words or actual voice. The standard in ancient history was never *abscissima verba*, actual words, but it was always actual voice.

In other words, a historian was expected to present accurately the voice of the speakers, even if some editing occurred. One could never make it up whole cloth, in other words. An obvious example of *abscissima verba* is Mark 15:34, when we actually have the Aramaic of Jesus.

When Jesus on the cross is crying out in Aramaic, we get the Aramaic of that. We get the actual words. I point that out for two reasons.

One knows that the Gospel of Mark was written in Greek, in a form of Greek called Koine Greek. The words of Jesus, if Jesus, as we believe, spoke Aramaic, which would have been the language that he was raised in and lived in, then by definition, everything he said, for the most part, had to be translated into Koine Greek. Any time, those of you who have worked in languages, you know this: any time you translate from one language to another, there is an interpretive act.

There's an interpretation that occurs and happens. There are decisions that have to be made. You can say the same thing different ways.

We get the *abscissima verba* in Mark 15:34 and when we get there, I'll make an argument of why I think we get the *abscissima verba*. This is the Eloi Eloi beginning of my God, my God, why have you forsaken me. Eloi Eloi is how it starts in Aramaic.

It's often said we get the Aramaic there because of just how powerful that statement is. I will, of course, not deny the power of that statement, but there are also other powerful statements in the Gospel of Mark. What was interesting, this I think speaks to how Mark is as a writer.

If you look at Mark 15:34, look to see what happens after that. What do those around Jesus start to say? They start to say he's calling Elijah. Well, if we do not get the Aramaic, the Eloi Eloi, which is in the mouth of a man on a cross who is garbled and is dehydrated and sweating, can sound very much like Elijah.

If we don't have the Aramaic, the *abscissima verba* there, we'll be completely confused. Why do they think he's calling Elijah? So we get the *abscissima verba*. But a lot of times Mark, as other ancient writers will do, is he will give the *abscissima vox*, the actual voice.

And I think this is important for us to think about because going back to this idea that the Gospels are not only histories, but they're narratives. This also begins to speak to the role of Mark as a writer. Mark was, I believe, inspired by the Holy Spirit, an authoritative interpreter of the events of Jesus and his life.

He depicted not only actual events and actual sayings but also their interpretations, and that interpretation is true. And so, we see choices being made by Mark as a writer. Mark makes choices about what he is going to put in and leave out.

And sometimes, these choices, which would have been common historical practices, can be confused as contradictions. If one writer mentions several individuals and another writer mentions just one or two, is that a contradiction, or is that representative of choice? There's selectivity and omission. The Gospel writers did not simply just put out everything they knew.

They made choices regarding what they wanted to present, and Mark did as well. When we look at what Mark does, for example, we can compare Mark's statements about Jesus on the cross with the other Gospel writers' statements when Jesus is on the cross. These seven words of Jesus, you might have heard them referred to, are great statements that Jesus makes when he's on the cross.

Interestingly enough, these seven statements that are made, they don't all exist in one Gospel. They're spread out across. Is it because the individual writers didn't know that Jesus said some of these wonderful things? Did they not know that Jesus said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Or did one writer not know that Jesus said, Forgive them for they know not what they do.

Or did they not know about the introduction of the new relationship that Mary and John would have? Or was it because they made a choice about what they wanted to have in the telling of their story, about what they wanted in that climax to be a part of the theme they had been driving towards? Again, this is a question of whether it is a contradiction or is common historical practice. A couple of things I'd like to mention before we look at some of Mark himself. One is this idea of akraah. Akraah is this rhetorical device in the ancient world of digesting.

By that, I mean of taking something larger, of taking a larger story or a larger speech or a larger event, and digesting it down to something that is smaller but still held to the essence. So, for example, we will see gospel writers, like all ancient historians, simplify something or put it into a form or a package that might really convey what they want to stress or be easily remembered or presented. Different writers could choose to do different things on how they might do akraah.

Also, for gospel writers, like ancient historians, especially those writing in ancient bios, the chronological order of events was not always critical. Now, that seems strange for us because the chronological accuracy of an event is something that is always essential in our thinking of events. But you know, I was reading a book the other day, a historical biography, and there were a lot of flashbacks that were happening or introducing themes that got put in.

So, even some modern biographies don't always follow a set chronology. But this was especially true for ancient historical writers and ancient biographers; they could have some selectivity on how they arranged particular events. Again, not making it up whole cloth.

The event needs to have occurred. There was an assumption of historical accuracy. But you could put that event in an order, perhaps topically, if you wanted.

Think of the Gospel of Matthew, for example. The parables in Matthew get arranged in one chapter. Now, I'm quite certain Jesus spoke in parables throughout his ministry, but Matthew really has it exist in one chapter.

There's an arrangement that can occur. One of the greatest examples of Mark doing some of this arrangement, if you will, and we're going to see this play out throughout our looking at his Gospel, is the so-called Markin Sandwich. We're going to talk a lot about this.

It's a rhetorical device. The Markin Sandwich is quite simple. Mark begins a story.

We'll call it the bread. Begins a story. Before he ends that story, he inserts the meat, if you will, a second story.

He completes that second story and then resumes the first one, the bottom piece of the bread. So, you see this rhetorical device, this Markin Sandwich, where Mark will start an event, insert talking about a new event, completely talk about that event, and then complete the first event. Now, it's a rhetorical device.

One of the things that allows Mark to do is to present two separate things and have them mutually interpret each other. Often, the meat kind of gives some sort of meaning to the first event. It becomes clear when we look at these; you'll see that these two events are not necessarily in chronological order, but there's a rhetorical device that has occurred.

All of this is to begin to set our stage. I think when we look at Mark, we're looking at two things. First, we're looking at Mark doing historical work.

We're looking at Mark acting like an ancient historian. We're looking at Mark telling us a story about who Jesus is. We look at him as being selective, omitting, and including.

And so, my point, I suppose, is this. When we talk about contradictions, we often do so without thinking about the ancient context or the genres that we're dealing with. We ask questions that make sense, perhaps, in our context but would not make sense in an ancient historical context.

We forget that Mark is a writer who makes choices, as Matthew, Luke, and John do. These choices do not deny the historical veracity of what they're saying but rather reflect the brilliance of the story that they're presenting. So, let's talk a little bit about the Gospel of Mark.

Mark has a huge footprint in the New Testament. Many, like myself, believe that Matthew and Luke used the Gospel of Mark in their writing. That alone kind of conveys the footprint that Mark would have had, both early on and then continues today.

What do we see in the Gospel of Mark? Well, his literary style is incredibly fast. There is a pace to the Gospel of Mark. It is a fast-moving narrative.

For example, the word immediately, or the English word immediately, coming from a Greek word, is used 42 times. 42 times, Mark begins something by saying immediately. Matthew does it five times.

Luke does it once. This use of immediately, straightaway, right away, or then, next has the effect of keeping the narrative moving. There's a heavy emphasis on the present tense and present tense verbs in the Gospel of Mark.

Now, when present tense verbs are used, you may think that that's an odd observation, but it creates a sense of vividness. There's action in the Gospel of Mark. Mark often groups events together.

Religious leaders and the challenges often kind of come clumped together. The exorcisms come clumped together. The miracles come clumped together.

We've talked about how Gospel writers will often use themes or topics in the selection of how they present their events. Of course, I've mentioned the Mark Sanderson theme, and we'll come across a lot of these when we get into the Gospel. You'll see threes.

Mark has a fondness for triads. He has a fondness for the number three and patterns and sets of threes, three boat scenes, and three cycles of passion predictions. I think you'll find a lot of irony in the Gospel of Mark.

The Son of God who suffers. The powerful Son of God who suffers. It's an ironic idea.

It is unexpected. We'll see lots of occasions of irony. Mark Strauss, in his book on the Gospel of Mark, also has a wonderful book that governs a lot of my thoughts here on the four Gospels.

Mark Strauss talks about how religious leaders are the ones who become the outsiders. Gentiles are the ones who become insiders. Down-to-earth parables speak to heavenly truths.

Jesus is rejected by his own, and so forth. There's lots of irony in the Gospel of Mark. When we look at Mark's portrait of Jesus, one of the things that we see that's unique to Mark, or maybe a better way of putting it that Mark stresses, is the humanity of Jesus.

Jesus is very down to earth, if you will, in the Gospel according to Mark. He expresses compassion, indignation, grief, love, anger, amazement. There's anxiety at Gethsemane, perseverance.

There's ignorance about the time of his return. There's a humanity in the Gospel of Mark. Hand in hand, we also see power and authority.

One of the things that begins immediately in Chapter 1, which we'll look at next time, is how Jesus speaks and acts with the authority of God. Extraordinary teaching, healing, exorcisms, miracles. We'll see a mystery about him, a messianic secret, this idea where Jesus both reveals who he is but keeps it quiet as well.

We're going to see a lot of this sort of progress. Of course, leading all the way into this question of who Jesus is, one of the things we'll note is how many questions Jesus has, or rather Mark has. Mark is full of questions about who Jesus is.

Someone seems to be always asking a question about Jesus. Of course, moving to Peter's confession and then ultimately the centurion's proclamation at the cross. Some other characteristics just to keep aware of as we start to come to a close here in thinking about Mark.

There are antagonists all over. You have Satan's forces and religious leaders. The primary opponents right off the bat are introduced as the demons, but then also the religious leaders, who're introduced almost simultaneously, stand in opposition.

The religious leaders always seem to be concerned that Jesus associates with sinners. Jesus' teaching threatens his popularity. We'll see when we look at the destruction of the temple and other aspects.

We look at the disciples. The disciples have a very ambiguous role in Mark. Jesus seeks them out, he calls them, he appoints twelve, he places great trust in them, he gives them extraordinary authority.

But of the four gospels, Mark's portrayal of the disciples is the most negative. In Mark, the disciples frequently misunderstand Jesus. There is a clear unwillingness for them to recognize the suffering role of the Messiah.

And unlike the other gospels, the recovery, if you will, of the disciples is hinted at, but there isn't the full recovery at the end of the gospel of Mark. The example of Jesus is set against the disciples at the garden. Jesus perseveres, but they run.

I think to some extent what Mark is showing is not that there is a disdain for the disciples, don't misunderstand, but rather a presentation that Jesus is the paradigm of what it means to follow, what it means to obey God. It is the disciples' shortcomings that are used to highlight Jesus' faithfulness, and we'll see this play out again and again when we look at Mark. Some of the theological themes that we'll find, the kingdom of God is a central message in Mark.

Jesus' kingdom teaching contains both present and future elements. The kingdom is present because the king is present, but there are also comments about a kingdom yet to come and a future establishment. We'll also see this idea of Jesus the servant Messiah, how he is the mighty Son of God, the Son of Man, the Messiah, but is also the one who is going to die as a servant of the Lord, who is the atoning sacrifice.

We'll see a redefinition of a lot of these titles in Mark, often, I think, with Isaiah 53 in mind. Lastly, as we sort of wrap up this, I want to talk about some questions of authorship. We call it the Gospel, according to Mark.

Why do we call it that? In the text itself, it must be granted the text is anonymous. When you think of Paul's letters, you have I, Paul, writing to the church. We have no claim to the author being made in the Gospel itself.

The traditional identification has always been this figure of John Mark, who was a companion of both Paul and Peter. Early church historian Eusebius from around the 4th century quotes Papias, a church leader who lived during the first half of the 2nd century, and said that Mark had been the interpreter or translator for Peter, wrote down as much as he, Peter, told of the sayings and deeds of Christ accurately, but not in order, which I find fascinating. For he was not a hearer or follower of the Lord, but as I said of Peter, this is the quote, who adapted his teaching as needed and did not arrange the sayings of the Lord in an orderly manner.

So, Mark made no mistake in writing some things down as he recalled them. Again, that's what Eusebius is referencing there, this quote regarding this figure John Mark. We've seen that play out.

Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, there's been a large early church agreement on this. The association with Peter, though largely dismissed now by a lot of New Testament scholars, I think still holds as convincing. I think it's interesting when you look at how Peter is treated in the Gospel of Mark, and there's a prominence to Peter in Mark that's somewhat more highlighted.

There are even bookends, if you will, of Peter as the first apostle that's named in chapter 1, verse 16, and the last one that's named, depending on how you understand chapter 16. The stuff about Peter and Matthew and Luke, there's stuff there that's not in Mark, but the stuff in Matthew and Luke tends to be about Peter's future, which I find interesting. There's less about that in the Gospel of Mark.

Some people have wondered if that was part of Peter's own humility when he was talking about the story of Jesus, that he dampened down a little bit of the high praise that he had received from the Lord. Mark's importance in the early church, of course, is evident. One of the things I think is interesting is that Martin Hengel, a New Testament scholar, has done some work on this; we call it the Gospel according to

Mark because, in our earliest manuscripts, that's the title on top of the text, on top of the manuscripts.

Now, this title would have been associated, Hingle argues, quite early. In fact, as it started to go out, there would have been a need to identify who the author was. Hengel's argument was that if this title wasn't in one of the earliest manuscripts, we would have expected to see Mark's Gospel with a different opening, Gospel according to this person or the Gospel according that there might have been some variance.

But that Mark seems to be locked on quite early, Hingle argues, probably means that there was quite a certainty with it. Also, the question always has to be, would Mark be one you would make up? Would John Mark be the figure to whom you would connect the Gospel? He's not a major figure in the New Testament. Granted, there are references to Peter and to Paul, but he's not Peter, and he's not Paul.

The question, I think, demands the question against Mark in authorship almost demands the proof be made of, well then why would they choose Mark of all people? You may even have potentially an overt reference to this Mark figure in the garden with the man who runs away without his clothes. Ultimately, we don't know for sure. Is the Mark mentioned in Colossians and Philemon and 2 Timothy and 1 Peter? Is that the Mark who wrote this Gospel? Early on, the early church said yes, and I think the evidence still would support that.

Historically, it's always thought that Mark wrote to a Roman church, perhaps from Rome. We know Mark was connected with the church at Rome. Again, that's based on tradition.

The dating of it begins around the 50s and 60s. It's some of the earliest dating, with others arguing for a later date. Some may be around Peter's martyrdom.

One thought is that the Gospel started being written down as some of the eyewitnesses started dying. There started to be a need for that, especially with the spikes in persecution and the pockets of persecution that were starting to occur. Again, it's hard to say.

I think Mark was quite early, personally, probably right about that time, around 60 or 70. The final thing I would mention, just as hinting one of the bigger issues, the Gospel of Mark is, where does it end? Our Bibles today have Mark 16, 9 through 20, but many modern versions of the Bible have gigantic brackets written around it. There's a reason for this, in case you were ever wondering.

One is that in some of the more reliable manuscripts, the process of trying to determine what the original words were is called textual criticism. That idea is a

comparison where you look at a bunch of different manuscripts, see what they're like, how they're different, which ones are older, and which ones are stronger. A whole set of methodologies is used.

One of the things that was found is that verses 9 through 20 of Mark 16 don't occur in some of the most reliable manuscripts. So, the very process that is used to authenticate, if you will, Mark chapter 1, verse 1 through 16:8, that process speaks against 9 through 20 in some way. Many of the words in that last part of 16 don't appear as well in Mark, and so the thought is, would Mark have so quickly started using words that he had not before? The Greek style is thought to be a transition from verse 8 to verse 9, if you read, is troubling just in terms of the subject of verse 8 is women.

Verse 9 assumes Jesus as the subject, but yet there hasn't been a clear transition. Verse 9 presents Mary Magdalene in a manner that sounds as if the reader doesn't know her, yet she was just mentioned earlier in chapter 15. One of the things that you look at is verses 9 through 20, which seem to be a compilation of resurrection appearances from the other Gospels.

Because you see, that's the problem with a shorter ending. With a shorter ending, you have no resurrection appearance, and the Gospels have a resurrection appearance. One of the earliest creedal statements is that Christ rose from the dead.

And so, the thought is, well, how could Mark not have a resurrection appearance? And there's a lot of different debates on that. The options seem to be either he didn't have one, and he's just sort of hinting at it. He did have one, and it's what we have in 9 through 20, or he had one that's somehow been lost to history.

Another thing is he died before he could complete one. You get the various theories. To let you know how I'll be approaching it, I think there's enough textual doubt on verses 9 through 20 that I won't be including it as part of my discussion of the Gospel of Mark in terms of tracking Mark in themes or what Mark was doing.

If I was forced to make an opinion on this, I think there is an ending to the Gospel of Mark that came after verse 8 that somehow either never made it into the Gospel or has been lost to history. I find it odd that there's no resurrection appearance. But there are many mysteries that will be made known one day, and maybe Mark's ending will be one of them.

I look forward to the time ahead with you as we begin to explore the Gospel of Mark. Thank you.

This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the book of the Gospel of Mark. This is

session 1, The Introduction to the Book of Mark.