

# main course

## from action to passion: bible study 1

### THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Bible Studies by Lance Stone based on John Proctor's 'Mark's Jesus'

Bible Study 1: From Action to Passion.

### AIM

To study the person of Jesus as he is presented in the gospel of Mark and to see how this speaks to us today.

### YOU WILL NEED

Bibles or at least copies of Mark's gospel for everyone in the group.

A copy of 'Mark's Jesus', by John Proctor, available from Church House bookshop or the Grove website, either as hard copy or as download <http://www.grovebooks.co.uk>

The booklet is also reviewed on the Vision4life website. You don't need one for everyone but have it available for those who want to follow this up.

### TO BEGIN: JESUS IN CHARGE

One of the frequently noted features of Mark's Gospel is the dynamic way it presents Jesus. He is always on the move, always directing events and in charge. John Proctor puts it this way: "The pace is breathless sometimes. We are led on swiftly from one incident to another: 'just then (1.23); 'as soon as they left' (1.29); 'in the morning' (1.35); 'throughout Galilee' (1.39); 'when he returned' (2.1) (Mark's Jesus, p.3).

There is a momentum about Jesus' ministry as he leaves transformed situations and people in his wake. The Gospel contains some little potted summaries that gather up the impact Jesus is making.

**Read:** Mark 1: 34; Mark 1:39; Mark 3: 7- 12.

### JESUS IN AUTHORITY.

This relentless, driving force of Jesus' ministry is related to Jesus' authority. He is very much in control, making an impact on the world with his message that "the Kingdom of God is upon you!" (1.14). In other words God is taking a grip of His world and reasserting His rule. And where God's rule takes hold of the world the rule of sin, destruction and death is undone as people are healed and forgiven (2:1-12), demons are driven out (1.27; 1.34; 1.39) and even the dead are raised (5.35-43).

**Read:** Mark 1:22, 1:27.

People remarked that Jesus' teaching had authority unlike the scribes.

### Discuss:

- i) What do you think would be the features of Jesus' teaching that gave it this authority? In what ways do you think it was different from the scribes?
- ii)
  - a) Why did Jesus' authority so disturb and threaten some people?
  - b) Discuss 3.20-22. Does this surprise you?

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- iii) What qualities in a person give them authority and earn them respect?
- iv) Who or what has exercised authority in your life in a) a positive way, b) a negative way? (This is an opportunity for you to share a little bit about your background and story).

### JESUS' MESSAGE AS 'GOOD NEWS'

Part of the authority of Jesus' message consisted in it being "good news", also translated as "gospel".

**Read** the seven times this term occurs in Mark: 1.1; 1.14; 1.15; 8.35; 10.29; 13.10; 14.9.

John Proctor points out that this is a technical term, associated with the power of Rome, which was the occupying power in the Holy Land in Jesus' time.

"Good news", says John Proctor, " might be the news of an Emperor's ascension to the throne, of the benefits of Roman rule, of victories, or even an imperial birthday. But whatever the occasion, this word regularly invited its hearers to affirm and confirm the emperor's grip on power."(Mark's Jesus, p.4).

**Discuss:** in what ways is the Christian faith "good news" for you? Good news of what? How might you explain to an unbeliever in what ways your faith is good news for you?

**Read:** Mark 2: 1-12

**Discuss:**

- i) Is there anything about this passage that particularly strikes you?
- ii) Such was Jesus' authority that the crowds flocked to hear him (v.1-2). A paralysed man couldn't get in the door. This contrasts dramatically with the church's authority and pulling power in our country today. Was the church ever anything like this in your memory? Discuss what has happened.

In other parts of the world – Africa, Asia, South America -churches are full to overflowing. Why so different there from here?

- iii) In this incident there are barriers to this person getting to Jesus that need to be overcome – drastically (v.4). In what ways does the Church put barriers in the way of people coming to Christ?
- iv) Is there anyone in this story who you might particularly identify with? Here are some suggestions:
  - a) The scribes: I am a person of tradition who finds innovation and change difficult (see 2:22)...
  - b) The paralysed man: I know my need of Jesus but there are things that keep me from him...
  - c) A stretcher-bearer: I'm more of a "doing" kind of person. Action matters more than belief. Ask me to give someone a lift to church and I'll do it, but forget all that "theology".

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- d) Someone else? An anonymous person at the edge of the story, perhaps an onlooker, might be chosen: 'I like to watch but I'm afraid to join in' or 'I'm always here watching but no one seems to notice me'.

### FROM ACTION TO PASSION.

There is also the figure of the man on the stretcher. While his friends take the initiative of bringing him to Jesus and lowering him through the roof, he is passive, dependent, the object of other people's actions.

Something similar happens to Jesus – a notable feature of Mark's gospel. From Mark 14 on, the active, authoritative Jesus who is in control becomes passive, the object and victim of the actions of others. John Proctor puts it this way, "Action has become passion. Jesus is the victim – arrested (14.43-50), tried (14.53-64; 15.1-5), beaten (14.65; 15.15), mocked (15.16-20, 29-32), crucified (15.21-27), dead (15.33-37) and buried (15.42-47)." (Mark's Jesus, p.11).

If you have time you might want to read those passages.

**Discuss:** think of some of the ways in which power is taken away from us so that we are no longer in control, but become the objects or the victims of others, or dependent on others.

In a famous book entitled *The Stature of Waiting* W.H. Vanstone speaks of such experiences as ones in which we are forced to wait for others, and in which we become patients and require patience. He points to areas of life such as old age, retirement, unemployment 'in which the quality of a person's life becomes largely dependent on factors external to him, factors which are neither achieved nor controlled by his own effort and initiative'.

What does it mean for us that Christ experienced such a movement from action to passion?

### Prayer time:

Take some time to consider prayerfully how this Bible Study speaks to you. Pray too for those who are no longer in control of their lives, dependent on others or victims of others: the frail and elderly, the homeless... etc.

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

- What was the most helpful thing?
- What was the least helpful thing?
- What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more bible studies like this on the Gospel of Mark there are three more on the website.

If you want an all-age friendly activity based on the story of the paralysed man that should also be on the website shortly.