**Sunday 7th April - Connect Group notes and questions**

**Background to Mark’s gospel**

Who wrote it? And what was his source?

As with the other gospels the authorship of Mark isn’t explicitly stated in the text. Some inferences have however been drawn with supporting reasons of varying strength. Most likely Mark was written by John Mark who we know about from his times with Paul as recorded in Acts (12:12; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39) and Colossians (4:10) where we see he was Barnabas’ cousin. John Mark wasn’t one of the 12 disciples/apostles who accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry but some think he might be the young man in Mark 14:51.It’s possible that he gained much of his knowledge from conversations with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13) - among other sources.

When was it written?

It was most likely written in the period AD 55-60\* and is usually thought to be the first Gospel to reach its final form and to have been used by Matthew and Luke. All writers used eye witness accounts and oral stories about Jesus circulating amongst Christians see Luke 1v1-4. 90% of Mark appears in the other gospels.

\*A range of dates between AD 40 and 75 has been suggested. An argument against a late date is that if Luke and Acts (originally one book) were written before Paul’s death in AD 63 but after Mark then this would indicate that Mark was available in written form by the late 50s.

Who’s it written for - and why?

Evidence suggests Mark wrote with Gentiles in mind, e.g. his explanation of Jewish customs, interpretation of Aramaic expressions, also relatively few quotations from the OT. There are also some Latin words which is an indication to some that it might have been written for Romans.

In fact the location most commonly suggested is Rome so part of its purpose could have been to help Christians there to understand the historical basis for their faith and be a tool to aid evangelism to those around. Alexandria, Caesarea and Syrian Antioch have also been suggested.

What is distinctive about Mark?

The gospels have different emphases but together present a more complete picture of Jesus than any one on its own. A distinctive emphasis of Mark is being a book of action as can be seen from its opening paragraphs. He doesn’t begin with the birth of Jesus; there are no family trees, he wants to get straight to the point.

How is his material presented?

As with all the gospels the events leading up to the death of Jesus on the cross - the passion narrative - occupy a significant part of the book….in the case of Mark, more than a third. What comes before that can seem a miscellaneous jumble of events - teaching, miracles, casting out demons - but is thought to have been selected to convey a particular emphasis that Mark had in mind for his readers…. a storyline. However, there is disagreement among commentators as to how Mark himself wants to group the material.

The storyline we’ve adopted is:

1. Who is Jesus? (Chapters 1-8) Jesus goes to some lengths to keep his Messiahship hidden and it is only in Ch 8 that this becomes explicit when he asks Peter who he thinks he (Jesus) is.
2. Jesus as Messiah (Chapters 8-10). Jesus predicts his death - 3 times - and teaches more about God’s ‘upside-down’ kingdom
3. How Jesus becomes King (Chapters 11-16). The final week of Jesus’ life culminating in his death and resurrection

This split also roughly corresponds to changes of location in where the action is centered - first in the region of Galilee, second in Judea heading towards Jerusalem, and thirdly and lastly in Jerusalem itself. This way of grouping the chapters finds more agreement among commentators.

Q. How do you think having such background material (and any other you can access) can help to understand Mark’s gospel.

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**Questions on Chapter 1: Preparing the Way**

Q1. vv2-8. How crucial was the preparatory work of John the Baptist? In 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 Paul talks about the different roles that may be involved in someone coming to Christ. Share about your own situation and role.

Q2. vv9-11. Who is Jesus? The passage tells us emphatically that Jesus is the Son of God. Do we accept that for ourselves or do we want to park that for the time being, wanting still to be convinced…maybe we’ll make up our mind later in the series.

Q3. vv12, 13. How would you feel if, as part of his preparing us for ministry, God were to call us to a wilderness experience too? What would help you survive this experience well?

Q4. vv16-20. Do we see ourselves just as individuals called to be in a special relationship with God through Jesus? Or called to become members of a team whom God is using to bring in his kingdom….the church?

Q5. vv21-45. When Jesus speaks today do we regard him as speaking with authority? Given that he is no longer with us as flesh and blood how does he do so?

Q6. vv21-45. The evil spirits knew Jesus of Nazareth was the Holy One of God. Why did they know his true identity but not the people?

Q7. vv21-45. Putting yourself in the position of the people at this time who do you think they thought Jesus was? Just another rabbi - but a particularly gifted one?

Q8. vv21-45. What healing (physical or spiritual) have you experienced in your life or those close to you? Looking back how did it change your relationship with Jesus and were there other things you learnt?