

INTRODUCING JESUS

SEVEN BIBLESTUDIES IN MARK'S GOSPEL

PREFACE

The aims of these biblestudies:

- To examine the basics of Christianity over seven short sessions. These look mainly at Mark's gospel. We won't look at it all in detail, but will focus in on part of it in each session. They're ideal to go through with a Christian friend.
- To allow you ask any questions you have about what is studied, or about anything else. Your friend will do their best to point you to answers in the Bible!

Mark's gospel and the Bible

The Bible consists of 66 books, divided into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. (It has a contents page to help you find your way around the different books.) Everything in the Old Testament happened before Jesus' time on earth and everything in the New Testament happened during and afterwards.

Our source for these sessions is Mark's gospel. It is one of four eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus recorded in the beginning of the New Testament. The apostle Peter is the eyewitness of the events we read about in Mark's gospel. Mark was his right-hand man who wrote down his words.

Homework

Try to do some homework each week, in preparation for the next session. This takes the form of reading about three chapters of Mark's gospel, and working through some questions. You will find it extremely helpful if you're able to do this.

Any questions?

At the start of these sessions, are there any big questions or issues which you would like to think about during the course? If there was one big question you wanted to ask God, what would it be? Why not note it down now. See if your time studying Mark's gospel brings you nearer to an answer.

Before getting started

- You'll need a Bible. We recommend a good modern translation like the English Standard Version or New International Version.
- We suggest you pray and ask God's help. This may seem odd - particularly if you've never done it before. You could simply say: "God, please teach me the truth about Jesus and Christianity. Amen."

Outline of sessions

1. Jesus introduced...
2. Is Jesus really God?
3. Why should I listen to Jesus?
4. Why is sin such a big deal?
5. Why did Jesus die?
6. The resurrection of Jesus?
7. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

SESSION 1: JESUS INTRODUCED

AIM

To introduce Jesus Christ: Who is He? Why did he come? What does it mean to follow him?

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ MARK 1:1-15

Verse 1 is like a title for the whole book. Gospel means “good news.”

- What’s the good news all about?

Stop and think

- What do most people think Christianity is all about?
Do they think that it's "good news"?

Look through verses 2-15

- Who testifies about Jesus?
- According to each of these witnesses who is Jesus?

Look at verses 2-3

These contain two quotes from the Old Testament, from Malachi and Isaiah, who were both prophets (i.e. they were like spokesmen for God). We need to work out why Mark quotes from them here.

Hint: he wants to tell us who Jesus is and why he has come.

- Read Malachi 2:17-3:2. What is Malachi promising will happen?
- Read Isaiah 40:1-5. What is Isaiah promising will happen?

By quoting these prophets, what is Mark claiming about who Jesus is and why he has come?

Stop and think

- Suppose Jesus really is God the fearful judge and God the mighty saviour.
How does this compare with most people's view of Jesus?

Look at verses 14-15

The "kingdom of God" is Jesus way of describing the rule of God over the lives of men and women.

- From what you've read in the first 15 verses of Mark, how is the kingdom of God near?
- How does Jesus say we should respond?

Stop and think

- To "repent" means to "turn round" - to turn from living for myself and start living for Jesus. To "believe" means to "trust" - to trust Jesus. Have you turned and trusted Jesus yet?

REVIEW OF MARK 1:1-15

As we read on through his gospel Mark will ask: Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus come? What does it mean to follow him? From Mark 1:1-15 how have these questions begun to be answered? Fill in the table:

Who is Jesus?	
Why did Jesus come?	
What does it mean to follow him?	

Stop and think

- How has my view of Jesus Christ been challenged?

Have you got any questions?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Read Mark 1:1-3:6 and then consider:

1. Who is Jesus said to be in this section?
2. What sort of power and authority does he exercise?
See 1:16-20,21-27,40-45, 2:1-12
3. What has Jesus come to do? See 1:14-15,35-39, 2:17
4. What sort of opposition does Jesus encounter?
See 1:12-14, 2:6-7,16,18; 3:2-6

SESSION 2: IS JESUS REALLY GOD?

AIM

Aim: See Jesus' claim to have all of God's power and authority.

LOOKING BACK

Note and discuss any questions from your homework reading. Then recap briefly what you learned in 1:1-15 (Who is Jesus? Why has he come? What is the right response to him?)

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ MARK 1:16-2:17

Look at 1:16-34

- What sort of power and authority does Jesus exercise?
- What does this tell us about the identity of Jesus? See also the bold statement in 1:1.

Look at 1:35-2:17

- What does Jesus say he has come in order to do? See 1:35-39, 2:17
- Is Jesus' purpose a surprise in the light of what he *can* do? Why?

Look specifically at 2:1-17

- What's the surprise in Jesus' words in 2:5?
- What point is Jesus making?
- What's the significance of Jesus' claim in 2:5-7 to forgive sins?
- What does this add to our picture of who Jesus is?
- What is humanity's greatest need? Why is 2:17 such good news?

SUMMARY OF 2:18-3:6

As he clashes with the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus shows he has the right to reinterpret Old Testament law - something only God can do. Again he shows he has all of God's authority. In 3:6 we see the beginning of the plot to kill him.

REVIEW OF MARK 1:1-3:6

Stop and think

- What have we learnt about the identity of Jesus in 1:1-3:6?
- How does this challenge the person who says that "Jesus was just a good person"?
- "Jesus must have been either MAD or BAD or GOD." What do you think?
- What do think will be some of the implications if Jesus really is God?

Have you got any questions?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Read Mark 3:7-5:43 and then consider:

1. To whom is Jesus primarily teaching and revealing himself?
See 3:13-19, 4:10-12,33-41
2. Given Mark 3:6, why do you think Jesus concentrates on these people?
3. What sort of authority and power do we see Jesus exercising?
See 4:35-41, 5:1-20,35-43
4. What does this add to what we saw of Jesus' power and authority in 1:1-3:6? What does this teach us about who he is?
5. What are the different ways in which people respond to Jesus?
See 3:21-22, 4:40-41, 5:15-17,27-28,42

SESSION 3: WHY SHOULD I LISTEN TO JESUS?

AIM

Aim: See why we should keep listening to and accepting the words of Jesus.

LOOKING BACK

Note and discuss any questions from your homework reading. Then recap briefly what you've learned thus far about the identity of Jesus.

SUMMARY OF 3:7-35

Having been rejected by the Jews, Jesus establishes a new people of God (3:13-19). Anyone who does the will of God can be in Jesus' new family (3:31-35).

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ 4:1-25

A parable is a story Jesus tells, using everyday objects (eg. seeds, soil etc) to make a teaching point. How people respond to his teaching reveals whether or not they are really interested in him or not.

Look at verses 1-20

- In the parable in 4:1-20, what do the seed and the soils represent? What is the parable telling us about?
- Examine the different types of response to Jesus in the parable. What does each type of person have in common?
- What are the features of the wrong responses to Jesus?
- What distinguishes the "good soil"?

Look at verses 21-25

- Without worrying too much about the detail, what's Jesus' big point here?

Stop and think

- How can you make sure that you are “good soil”?

- From what we've already learned about Jesus, why do we need to take his words seriously?

SUMMARY OF 4:26-34

Here are two shorter parables, both about the "kingdom of God". They tell us that the kingdom of God (= the rule of Jesus Christ over the lives of men and women) will grow invisibly as the word of God is spread (vv26-29), and whilst it starts small it will become enormous (vv30-34).

SUMMARY OF 4:35-5:43

Here are four incidents involving disastrous situations – a massive storm, a demon-possessed man, a sick woman, and a dead girl. Each situation is beyond the control of man - the detail of each incident makes that really clear. Yet over each situation, Jesus is in complete control - he really has all of God's power and authority. As a result, we can trust this Jesus - we don't need to fear (see 4:40, 5:15,17,20, 5:34, 5:36)

Have you got any questions?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Read Mark 6:1-8:29 and then consider:

1. What does this passage add to what we've seen of Jesus' power and authority in chs1-5? See 6:32-56, 7:31-37, 8:1-10,22-26

2. How are people responding to Jesus as they see his power and authority? See 6:1-6,24-26,51-56; 7:37; 8:11

3. According to Jesus, what is the real need of the people? See 6:34, 7:14-23

4. In most of the passage, how much do the disciples understand of who Jesus is and what he is saying? See 6:36-37,48-52, 7:17-18; 8:4,14-21

SESSION 4: WHY IS “SIN” SUCH A BIG DEAL?

AIM

Aim: To see we need rescuing from God's anger at our sin.

LOOKING BACK

Note and discuss any questions from your homework reading. Then recap briefly what we've learned about why we should listen to Jesus and his teaching.

SUMMARY OF 6:1-53

Jesus and his followers will meet with rejection. The example of Herod shows why: people will not repent (turn to Jesus), even when they hear the truth. (6:1-29)

Hundreds of years earlier, God had rescued his people Israel from slavery in Egypt and miraculously fed them in the wilderness for a generation. Here Jesus performs a similar miracle - showing that he is the same rescuing God come to earth. But why does he need to rescue people? Read on and find out! (6:30-53)

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ 7:1-23

Look through verses 1-23

- What's the issue in this section? Did you notice a repeated word?
- In the Bible, "defilement" or "uncleanness" means you're unacceptable to God. How do the Pharisees think people become unacceptable to God?
- Why does Jesus criticise the Pharisees in verses 6-13? See particularly verse 13. What does that show about them, vv6-7?

Look at verses 14-23

- What does and doesn't make people unacceptable to God, according to Jesus?
- From these verses, what is our big problem?
- Why can't the religion of the Pharisees (eg. "don't touch this etc") deal with the problem?

Look briefly at 9:43-48

- Why is sin so serious? What is its ultimate consequence?

Look briefly at 12:29-31

- What does God want from us? What do we give him instead?

Stop and think

- "I'm a good person - God will accept me". How can we be sure this is wrong? Why can't my morality make me clean?
- Why does it matter if I'm "unclean"?
- What do you make of Jesus' verdict on humans? Do you agree this is true of you?

SUMMARY OF 7:24-8:30

Jesus performs another feeding miracle, declaring again he is the God who saves people. This time, he does it in gentile lands - ie. he has come to rescue both Jews and Gentiles. (And now we know why people need rescuing). (7:24-8:10)

People won't realise who Jesus is unless he reveals it to them - so ask Jesus for spiritual sight. (In verse 21 the disciples are spiritually blind and incomprehending. In verse 29, Peter realises who Jesus is: the Christ, God's chosen king. The verses in between, where Jesus heals the sight of a blind man, illustrate how Peter has come to realise who Jesus is - Jesus has performed a miracle enabling him to see the truth).(8:11-30)

Have you got any questions?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Read Mark 8:30-10:52, and then consider:

1. Jesus gives himself the title "Son of Man" in 8:31, 9:9, 9:31 and 10:33. What is this "Son of Man" like? See 8:38, 9:2-9, and also Daniel 7:9-14.
2. What "must" and "will" the Son of Man do, according to Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34. Why is this surprise?
3. What must anyone who wants to be a follower of Jesus do, and why must they do this? See Mark 8:34-38.
4. To what extent do the disciples understand what Jesus must do and what it means to follow him? Why does this matter?
See 8:32-33, 9:31-35, 10:32-45. Compare with 8:35-38
4. What is going to be the solution to their lack of understanding?
See Mark 10:46-52.

SESSION 5: WHY DID JESUS DIE?

AIM

Aim: To see that I cannot deal with God's anger at my sin. Jesus has to die on the cross to deal it.

LOOKING BACK

Note and discuss any questions from your homework reading. Then recap briefly what Jesus said about the state of our hearts. Why does this matter?

SUMMARY OF 8:31-10:16

Jesus must die - and so too must his followers give up control of their lives. It will be worth it when Jesus returns in judgement. On the mountain of transfiguration, Jesus is briefly seen in all his power and glory - he's more important even than Moses and Elijah (who are the chief figures of the Old Testament). The section finishes with Jesus repeating that he must suffer and die, just as John the Baptist (like a second "Elijah" has suffered and died). (8:31-9:13)

This boy is a vivid picture of the power and effects of sin. Jesus is able to deal with it powerfully. Straightaway (vv30-32) he repeats that he must die. He's hinting that his death is the way he will deal with sin. (9:14-32)

Here Jesus continues to teach about what it means to be one of his disciples. Jesus' way is one of serving and humility, of receiving the lowliest of people (children were status-less people), of not rejecting other believers just because they're not one of us, of not causing others to sin, and of resisting sin in our own lives. (9:33-50)

This section on divorce teaches us that obedience to the OT law cannot save you - that was never its purpose. (Divorce was allowed in OT law as a concession to the hardness of the human heart - but it was still fundamentally against God's will.

So you could keep the law - eg. by divorcing your wife - and yet still have displeased God. Law-keeping cannot save you. In contrast, heaven and the kingdom of God belongs to people who are like little children - who realise they have nothing to offer, are without any rank or status, and who simply come to Jesus. But the question remains: how can Jesus deal with my sin? (10:1-16)

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ 10:17-45

Recap

- What has Jesus said he must do? Remember 8:31, 9:31, 10:33. Bear this in mind as we read on.

Look at verses 17-34

- What prevented the rich man following Jesus? Why did this matter? See verses 17,23.

- What point is Jesus making with the camel? Who can be saved? How?

Stop and think

- What sorts of things stop people following Jesus? And me?

- How do verses 32-34 answer the problem of who can be saved?

Look at verse 45

In Mark 10:45, Jesus explains why he died. The death of Jesus will save me from sin and God's wrath – if I place my trust in Jesus.

- How does Jesus describe his death?

- Who needs ransoming? From what we've seen in Mark's gospel so far can we work this out? What do we need ransoming from?

Stop and think

- "The cross was just an accident that didn't achieve anything." Why is this wrong.

- Read the account of Jesus' death on the Cross in Mark 15:1-39. What do you make of it?

- Have you put your trust in the cross of Jesus? What are the consequences if you have? What if you haven't?

SUMMARY OF 10:35-52

These verses continue to explain the way of following Christ. Jesus' way isn't of seeking self-advancement, but of serving. This section ends with the wonderful example of Bartimaeus who knows he has nothing to offer Jesus, and simply cries out to him for mercy.

Have you got any questions?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Read 11:1-13:37 and then consider:

1. How do the crowds treat Jesus as he arrives in Jerusalem? See 11:1-10
2. What is the significance of the detail in 11:1-10? See Zechariah 9:9
3. How do the Jewish authorities treat Jesus? See 11:27-33, 12:13-17
4. What does Jesus say will happen to the Jewish authorities in 12:1-12?
5. How does Jesus describe the period before the end of the world?
See 13:5-13.
6. How should followers of Jesus act while they wait for the end?
See 13:9-13,32-37

SESSION 6: JESUS' RESURRECTION?

AIM

Aim: To see that Jesus has been raised to life. He is an ever-living saviour and will one day return to judge.

LOOKING BACK

Note and discuss any questions from your homework reading. Then recap briefly what you've learned about what the death of Jesus achieved.

SUMMARY OF 11:1-33

Jesus is the long-expected King, sent by God. He will save, but also judge those who oppose him.

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ 12:1-12

Look at verses 1-12

- To whom does Jesus tell this parable? See 12:1, and 11:27,33
- What is the crime of the tenants in the parable? What does their behaviour in verses 1-8 suggest they think of the owner?
- Why is the description of the son significant? Compare 12:6 with 1:11 and 9:7.
- What will be the owner's response? See 12:9
- What does Jesus want the religious authorities to see will happen?
- How should the religious authorities have responded to the parable? How did they? See 12:12

Look at verses 10-11

- In the parable the son is killed. How do we know that isn't the end of the story? What will happen to the Son?
- Read 8:31, 9:31, 10:34 and 13:24-27. What else do we learn about the resurrection of Jesus?
- According to Mark's gospel, what is Jesus' present role, even now?

Stop and think

- Do you agree that Jesus is alive? If not, how do you account for Jesus' own predictions and the predictions of the Old Testament (in vv10-11)?
- How should *we respond to the risen Jesus*?

SUMMARY OF 12:13-44

Give God what he deserves (vv13-17). Having just read the parable of the tenants, we know this means treating the Son of God rightly.

In verses 18-27 Jesus uses the question of the Sadducees to prove that God is in the business of raising people from the dead - he is the God of the living. So he is well able to raise Jesus from the dead... as saviour and judge.

Given the reality of Jesus resurrection as saviour and judge, how should I respond? - Love him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. (I'm to love the Lord with all my heart etc [vv28-34]; and in vv35-37, Jesus proves that he is the Lord). In practice, don't be like the Pharisees (vv35-37), but be like this poor woman (vv41-44) who gives God everything.(12:13-44).

The end of the world will come when Jesus returns - unmistakably - to gather his people to heaven. In the meanwhile, "keep watch". (13:1-37)

Have you got any questions?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION

Read 14:1-16:8 and then consider:

1. To what extent is Jesus' death a mistake or accident and to what extent is it under Jesus' control. See 10:33-34, 14:12-31,48-49,61-62.
2. To what extent is death easy for Jesus? See 14:33-36; 15:34
3. What is the significance of the "cup" which Jesus drinks as he dies on the cross, 14:36. *Hint:* To work this out, see Isaiah 51:17-23 What is the cup? What does it mean for Jesus to drink the cup? What's the shock?
4. What does Jesus' death accomplish and why is this important?
See 10:45, 14:24, 15:38
5. To what extent do Jesus' disciples understand all he has been teaching them? See 14:46-50,66-72, 16:8
6. Who does see and understand? See 15:39. Why is this surprising?

SESSION 7: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW JESUS?

AIM

Aim: Trust in Jesus - because his death saves us from God's anger and offers us a relationship with God.

LOOKING BACK

Note and discuss any questions from your homework reading. Then recap briefly what you've learned about Jesus' resurrection. According to the Bible what will Jesus do in the future?

FOCUS BIBLESTUDY – READ 14:1-11

Look at verses 1-11

- What do we learn about the opposition to Jesus from this passage? In what way is it surprising? See 14:1-2, 10-11.
- How does Mark highlight the woman's response to Jesus? In what ways is it an appropriate response? 14:4-8, see 10:13-15, 12:41-44.
- How does Jesus interpret her actions? See 14:8.

Review

- Complete the table below to sum up the different responses to Jesus. Who responded in the right way?

PEOPLE	RESPONSES TO JESUS IN 14:1-11
Religious leaders	
Some other people present	
Woman	
Judas	

Stop and think:

- With which of the four groups do you identify?
- How should you respond to Jesus?
- See also 1:15. Do you know what it means to repent and believe? Have you done this yet?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REPENT AND BELIEVE?

To **repent** means to turn - from living to please myself and to start living for Jesus. To **believe** means to trust in Jesus - in his death and resurrection as the way I can be forgiven, begin a relationship with God now, and look forward to heaven.

If you haven't repented and believed yet you could do so right now, simply by praying a prayer like this:

"Lord Jesus, I recognise that you are God and have the right to control my life. I have rebelled against you, sinning in my thoughts, my words and my actions; sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately. I am sorry for the way I have lived and ask you to forgive me. As best I can, I want to turn away from rebellion and turn to you. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are full of love and kindness. Thank you for dying for me on the cross. Amen."

SUMMARY OF 14:12-16:8

The great news of this last section of Mark's gospel is the death of Jesus. Jesus goes to his death. See what it achieves!

In 14:24 we read of *a new covenant, based on blood*. Back in the Old Testament Bible book called Exodus, God's people were saved from God's anger by sacrificial blood of lambs and brought into a special relationship with God (called the covenant). Jesus is saying here that his blood offers people a new covenant-relationship with God.

In 15:38 this is graphically illustrated by the tearing of the temple curtain. The temple was the place where God met with his people. But they were separated from the "holy of holies" within the temple (which was the focus of God's presence) by a huge curtain - they couldn't come near because God was perfect and holy, and they were sinful and imperfect. When Jesus died, taking God's anger at sin, the way into God's presence was opened up for anyone who trusts in Jesus and his death!

FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS REPENTED AND BELIEVED THIS MEANS...

You have a relationship with God. You can call him your Father, and Jesus himself comes to live in you by his Holy Spirit, and now beings to change you from the inside out.

Your sins are forgiven. Remember Mark 2:10. Jesus' death totally paid for your sins, and means you won't face God's anger on the day of judgement.

You have eternal life and can be confident about heaven. Why? Because you're trusting in what Jesus has done, rather than in what you can do.

AM I A CHRISTIAN?

Test yourself. You are a Christian if you can genuinely say "Yes" to the following statements:

"I trust in Jesus' death for the forgiveness of my sins - I do not trust my own good works."

"I trust in the risen Jesus to be Lord of my life - I will not insist solely on my own will."

WHAT NEXT?

Keep on reading and listening to the Bible. And keep on spending time with Christian people. The best thing to do is find a church that takes the Bible seriously. Pray that God will help you get to know Jesus better.