

**GOD
WANTS
TO SPEAK
WITH
YOU!**

2-MARK'S GOSPEL!

The Bible is the most sophisticated communication device ever made. It is able, within its limited number of pages, to begin to communicate the height, breadth and depth of the infinite God. In its pages, as you read, you will hear God speak to you - if you are open to it.

God wrote the Bible personally for you. All those Israelites wandering in the desert on their way to the promised land was personally for (and for their benefit as well) you. God is able to arrange things in such a way that all that he does is for the benefit of everybody - you included. How do we know this?

Jesus speaks through the Bible to tell us.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28)

But is it just for those who love Him?

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8)

"if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." (2 Tim 2:13)

God loves everyone, because God is love. Thus he works for the good of everyone. He wants to communicate his love to everyone, so much so he died for everyone. To communicate this love, God arranged for the Bible to be brought about. Let us explore how God brought this about.



GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE

What the bible says is what God wants it to say. God is the author of scripture. God is mysterious as well. There is no better place to clearly see God's mysterious ways than in scripture. It is like discovering how a magician does his magic tricks. God gives himself away in scripture. We learn about what he is up to and why. We can get to the point of trusting him and relying upon him because we can see how he has treated others and that is exactly how he wants to treat us. He always treats us with love and is always

faithful even if we are not.



The writers of the Bible might have been aware they were being inspired, or might not have

been. They were writing for a particular purpose they had at the time. They were true authors of what they wrote. But God was also using them to write what he wanted written, even if they were not aware of it. God is infinite and the mysterious ways of God are ultimately beyond our comprehension - but they are always ways of love. God intended for you to have a bible and to use it as a means of communication between him and you, personally. All of the events of the bible are meant to help you better understand his love and experience it, now and forever. Take a moment just to think about that.

OK, we are ready for another dose of Vatican II - I will give you the whole passage and then take the main parts bit by bit. Here it is

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| <p>"Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.</p> | <p>"Those divinely revealed realities" - That God reveals himself through Jesus, and wants have fellowship with us, ie to be our friend.</p> |
| <p>For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.</p> | <p>God is their author The whole Bible is inspired</p> |
| <p>In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.</p> | <p>The writers of the books are ALSO true authors.</p> |
| <p>Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.</p> | <p>Because of God's providence, the Bible teaches 'that truth' which He wanted conveyed to us through Scripture.</p> |
| <p>Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text)." (DV 2)</p> | <p>All scripture is divinely inspired.</p> |



of scripture and the human authors are also true authors
 a mysterious thing that God can use our meager efforts to
 credible plan - even without us knowing it. As we read
 earn much by paying attention to what the human authors
 and most importantly to what God wants us to understand.



WHY START WITH MARK'S GOSPEL?

The best place to start is Mark's Gospel. All of the Bible is about Jesus, so let's start with Jesus. Once we have a basic understanding of Jesus, he becomes like a guide for us to then go back to the Old Testament (OT) which will deepen our understanding of Jesus, and the rest of the new which builds upon our basic understanding of Jesus.



Why not another gospel? OK, time to get technical. Most scholars believe Mark's gospel was written first. Matthew and Luke have 406 verses of Mark out of Mark's 662 verses. Matthew has a further 145 verses of Mark, and Luke 60, leaving at most 51 verses unique to Mark. There is other content particular to Matthew and Luke, but not to Mark - this is known as 'Q' for Quelle meaning source. Since Matthew and Luke is much longer than Mark, it appears they have elaborated on Mark's



gospel. There is also a gradual deepening of reflection on the life of Jesus expressed in the different gospels.

Mark starts with Jesus' Baptism.

Matthew and Luke starts with Jesus' Birth.

John starts with 'The beginning' before creation.

We will use Mark since it is the simplest gospel and Matthew and Luke follow the same basic storyline as Mark. We will delve into that storyline in detail as we explore Mark's gospel. This will allow us to concentrate on the unique features of Matthew and Luke later. We will also be able to better appreciate Matthew and Luke having studied Mark's gospel.

What about John. Almost everyone agrees that John is the last gospel. I say almost, since there is always someone who has a difference of opinion in this area

since it is open to interpretation. More about interpretation later. John is the richest of the gospels, and best explored after reading the first three, since it appears he presumes you already have read them. Let us look at how the gospel of Mark came to be.

THE THREE STAGES OF GOSPEL TRANSMISSION

The Catholic Catechism clearly summaries three stages in the development of a gospel. I have explained how this is when it comes to Mark's gospel.



How do we know Mark was first?

For many centuries the Church thought Matthew was the first gospel. [St. Augustine](#) (354AD-430AD) expressed this in his [writing](#) about 400AD which was also held by many major theologians of that time.

The theory that Mark was the first written is attributed to [Gottlob Christian Storr](#) in 1786. But it was not until 1836 with the support of [Heinrich Julius Holtzmann](#) that the theory became more dominant.



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| <p>"1. <i>The life and teaching of Jesus.</i> The Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, "whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up."⁹⁹</p> | <p>The gospels really pass on what Jesus did and taught, and that it is the honest truth about Jesus.</p> |
| <p>2. <i>The oral tradition.</i> "For, after the ascension of the Lord, the apostles handed on to their hearers what he had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed."</p> | <p>Peter reflected on what had happened and would have told the stories of Jesus, over and over to people. As time went on he would have gained fresh insights into the person and work of Jesus.</p> |
| <p>3. <i>The written Gospels.</i> "The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form; others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches, the while sustaining the form of preaching, but always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus."¹⁰¹ " (CCC 126)</p> | <p>Mark a disciple of Peter wrote down the stories he heard from Peter and would have organised them into his gospel.</p> |

When we examine the rest of the New Testament we find Mark's mother was Mary whose house was used for the breaking of bread (Acts 12:12)

Mark's cousin was Barnabas (Col 4:10)

St. Peter refers to Mark as 'my son' (1 Peter 5:13)

We also have a record of Early Church writers who affirm that Mark was a disciple of St. Peter.

So how do we know Mark received his story from St. Peter?

Scholars who have studied Mark's gospel and compared it to the other gospels have developed some interesting facts about it.

- Jewish language, culture is explained.
- Roman terms and customs are presumed and Roman values for money are used.
- A connection to the Church in Rome is mentioned (Rufus was known to the Roman Christians).
- Special detail about events that only Peter, James and John were present at.



As we read Mark's gospel we can 'hear' St. Peter proclaiming the stories. Read through The word 'immediately' actually occurs nearly forty times in the whole gospel of Mark compared to Luke's seven and John's four. Peter was an impetuous fellow. You can imagine Peter proclaiming this gospel with his vibrant spontaneous personality. Mark captures that for us, but Mark also goes on to weave these stories together in such a way as to add more meaning and depth. Ancient writers write differently to today's writers. Today's novels are long stories. Mark's gospel is only 17 pages in length in my Bible. While it is short, it is full of literary techniques that through careful reading become clear and express fresh



layers of meaning.

So how can the Church get mixed up about such a simple thing as which gospel was first written? To better understand this question, let us have a close look at the gospel itself. Here it is in as near to the original as we can get. It is the first line of Mark's gospel.

1 Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ.]

Here is the English and Greek alphabet. Notice there are some English letters without Greek equivalents and some Greek ones that need a couple/few English letters.

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| A | β | | δ | ε | | γ | ' | ι | | κ | λ | μ | ν | ω | π | | ρ | ς | τ | υ | | | ξ | | ζ | θ | φ | χ | ψ |



Here is an image of one of the oldest new testament manuscripts. It is a section of St. Paul's letter to the Romans and is dated from 180-200AD. It is written on papyrus, which made from the leaves of the papyrus plant.

It is written in Greek. The New Testament was first written in Greek, Koine Greek (Common Greek). Koine Greek was the major language used by the Romans for Administration and Trade. The

Gospel writers wanting to spread the Good News of Jesus as far as possible thus chose Greek. The Jewish people spoke Aramaic and Hebrew. Aramaic is different to Hebrew. Hebrew is the traditional language of the Jews. Aramaic was the language of the Assyrians who dominated half of Israel and the countries to the north in

721BC. Their language became common in that region and was the language used by the common people.

Many ancient greek texts were written in all capitals without spaces between them and no punctuation! You could work out the words by reading it. Particular Greek words were used like a full stop. Greek itself is very different to English. Words in a sentence can be moved around easily in Greek, since the word ending identified how it should be used in a sentence, where as in English

the placement of the word indicates who does what to whom.

All this makes for some confusion when translating the Greek NT (New Testament).

Also, each papyrus will deteriorate over time. Back then, books needed to be copied - there was no printing presses (they came in 1450AD). These texts were meant to be used, so they were copied and used until they were worn out. Then the copy was copied and used until it



was worn out, and so on, and so on.

So how certain are we of the New Testament text that we have compared to the original?

There are over 5000 copies of NT texts that we have, some are just fragments with a few words, others are complete copies of the New Testament. We have no original. If we look at the number of copies and how many errors there are in the copying we can come to realise there are very few errors that would have significance. We can be more than reasonably certain that what we have is what the evangelists wrote - this is purely from a scientific perspective. From a faith perspective we are impressed with God's providence in preserving the message of Jesus through all these centuries so you can have a bible in front of you.

There are, of course, other gospels written on the life of Jesus. These according to the Church don't measure up. The Church only decided which books should be included in the 'canon' ie the accepted set of inspired texts at Trent in 1564 AD.

We are now ready to start to explore the Gospel of Mark.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, son of God. (Mk 1:1)

Christ means Messiah, the saviour. The word 'Christ' comes from the Greek word 'Christos' which means saviour. The word 'Messiah' comes from the Jewish word for Saviour.

The first sentence of Mark's gospel sets the trajectory for the whole gospel. We are told Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. The characters in the gospel don't know that Jesus is the Messiah or the Son of God, but slowly come to realise it. In fact the first person to realise Jesus is the Messiah is St. Peter in the Middle of the gospel. The first person to realise Jesus is the Son of God is the Centurion who saw Jesus die on the cross. So the first sentence is like a trajectory with the Christ revelation landing in the middle of the gospel and the Son of God revelation coming at the end of the gospel. The gospel is clearly organised. There is a clear structure to the gospel with particular patterns to the stories. Here is the overview of the gospel of Mark with the major cycles listed. With each week of this course we will explore half a cycle. I have explained something of each part in the right hand column. Within Mark's gospel there are groups of stories which follow a pattern, we call this a cycle, since the pattern repeats.

| Overview of the Structure of Mark | |
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| 1) Prologue (Mk 1:1-13) | The prologue starts with the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God and this is Good News. It introduces us to John the Baptist's ministry which prepares us for Jesus. |
| 2) Jesus is gradually revealed as Messiah a. Early Ministry 1st cycle (Mk 1:14-3:6) b. Jesus' Ministry Extended - The Twelve Appointed 2nd cycle (Mk 3:7-6:6a) c. Jesus' Ministry & Person, Symbolised & Revealed - Disciples in Action 3rd Cycle (Mk 6:6b-8:21) | There are three cycles in Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Each cycle comes from a set back, then a summary of what Jesus is doing. Jesus then does something bold to advance his ministry. There is then some challenge and teaching which leads to somekind of set back before the next cycle starts. John is killed, Jesus calls the disciples. Jesus is rejected by the Pharisees and Herodians, so Jesus appoints the 12 as the foundation of the Church. The 12 don't agree and understand Jesus, but Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, so Jesus makes Peter the first pope. Jesus very clearly establishes a new institution, the Church and gives it a clear structure with apostles (bishops) and Peter (the first pope) as it's head. He trains them and sends them out on mission to do what he does. |
| 3) Peter's Declaration of Jesus as Messiah (Mk 8:22-30) | This is the middle of the gospel. Jesus now heads for Jerusalem and reveals what kind of Messiah he is - a servant leader. |
| 4) The Mystery of the Son of Man a. The "Way" of the Son of Man a) First Cycle (Mk 8:31-9:29) b) Second Cycle (Mk 9:30-10:31) c) Third Cycle (Mk 10:32-45) b. Transition (Mk 10:46-52) c. Revelation in Jerusalem Mk (11:1-13:16) d. Passion and Resurrection Mk (14:1-16:20) | Each cycle here starts with a passion prediction - that Jesus is going to be crucified, but rise again. The disciples don't understand. Jesus teaches them to be humble and servant leaders. To follow in his steps. Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly. He teaches each day in the temple where he is challenged. He celebrates the last supper (the first Eucharist) and is betrayed by Judas. He is arrested, tried and whipped, and crucified. He rises again. |

To better understand a cycle here is the first in detail with comments in the right column. Note before this cycle starts John the Baptist is arrested. This is the rejection which prefigures Jesus' action for the cycle.

| Summary of the first cycle in Mark's gospel | |
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| a) Summary: Preaching the Gospel Mk 1:14-15 | This summary may only be half a verse. Usually it just makes the point that Jesus teaches and heals. |
| b) Call of the First Disciples Mk:1:16-20 | Jesus establishes something new. This time Jesus calls his disciples. Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more (Rom 5:20) Any set back actually leads to Jesus doing something more incredible and grander than the set back. Ultimately this prepares us for the set back of his death which leads to the resurrection - the ultimate defeat leads to the ultimate victory. |
| c) Teaching and Challenge 1. Jesus Teaches and Heals a. The Demoniac Mk:1:21-28 b. A Group of Miracles Mk:1:29-34 c. Jesus in Solitude Mk:1:35-39 d. The Leper Mk:1:40-45 2. Controversy with scribes and Pharisees a. The Sick of the Palsy Mk:2:1-12 b. The Call and Feast of Levi Mk:2:13-17 c. The Controversy concerning Fasting Mk:2:18-22 d. The Sabbath Mk:2:23-28 e. The Withered Hand Mk 3:1-4 | Very clearly the gospel has a structure and each of these passages while on their own reveal something of Jesus. But placed in their context reveal much more. We can see the developing dynamic. The ebb and flow of the gospel. The building drama of the story. Jesus very clearly has a dynamic plan. We see how it unfolds, step by step. Some of it is in response, some he just clearly initiates himself. |
| d) Pharisees and Herodians seek to destroy Jesus | Each cycle ends with some kind of rejection. In this cycle Jesus, after all he has taught and all the miracles, is rejected - they plot to kill him! We can learn a lesson from this. We won't always be successful - but it will never stop us if we are in Christ. |

The complete detailed structure of Mark's gospel is included in the appendix. You may like to refer to this as you read each passage, to gain an awareness of where it is within the scheme of things.

Day 1 Preaching the Gospel Mk 1:14-15

"The time is fulfilled" The greek word, kairos, means 'the right time' or "the fulfilled time". God has his own timing. Have you had an experience of sometime happening at 'the right time'?

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When we have a relationship with God, He guides us through life so we learn things at the right time. If we are not ready, we will not learn as well - we will be underdone. If we learn too late, we could be burnt by life's challenges. To learn at the right time, means to be open to God and to spend time with Him in prayer. What do you think God is teaching you at the moment?

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"The Kingdom of God is at hand" What is this kingdom? Jesus is the Kingdom. Jesus perfectly follows God's will. A king-dom is where a king rules. Jesus perfectly follows the 'rules' of his father. He represents the father's kingdom to us in action. If you want to become part of this loving kingdom, then follow Jesus. Make Jesus your king and you will be in his kingdom. How do you think you could make Jesus your king?

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"Repent and believe the good news"

Repent comes from the greek word which means to 'turn around'. We must turn around from doing wrong and seek to do good. For the Jewish person of the time, it was enough incentive to believe God's blessing had come. This meant many things to a Jewish person, peace (no war), prosperity (no famine, lots of good food and wine), freedom (no control from external powers). This was the promise from the covenant - if you obey the voice of God good things will happen, but if you do not obey the voice of God bad things will happen. Read Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19 for an example of this. For the Jewish person of the time, this was exciting enough, but God has much more in store for everyone. God intends a deep inner transformation, rather than just external prosperity. The inner change leads to all the blessings anyway. Rather than just obey, we are invited to be God's friends founded on love. But we must change our ways. The first thing we are to 'work' on is to keep up our prayer life. To pray each day.

Day 2 Call of the First Disciples Mk:1:16-20

"Come follow me" Are you ready to follow Jesus?

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To really follow Jesus, firstly to give time to Him. Those he called stopped what they were doing and instantly followed Jesus. We are to do the same. We should stop what we are doing and become aware of Jesus and think of him. To invite him into what we are doing. To be with Jesus, is to let Jesus be with us.

At times we might become aware of God's presence inviting us to go and pray. Generally, we should respond and spend that time in prayer. Sometimes some one wants our attention and we might be busy with something. This is like Jesus calling us to be with him. If we are aware of Jesus in others we will respond like the disciples and give the person our time, since in a way, we are actually giving Jesus our time.

Today, try and be aware that if someone asks for help, it is Jesus asking and give your help straight away. You have then followed Jesus today.

Day 3 The Demoniac Mk:1:21-28

Do you believe in Demons?

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Demons and devils are fallen angels. The Catechism states "**414** Satan or the devil and the other demons are fallen angels who have freely refused to serve God and his plan. Their choice against God is definitive. They try to associate man in their revolt against God."

Devils have a limited power as stated in the Catechism. "**395** The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries - of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature- to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him."²⁷⁵

Clearly we see in this passage of Mark, the limit to Satan's power. Satan is no match for Jesus. Through Jesus Satan is no match for us. Through Jesus we have the victory over Satan. God can even bring good out of Satan's work if we let God.

The modern media has popularised demonic possession. The truth is, it can happen, but exorcisms are essentially about bring someone closer to Christ. To renew a person in the

normal practices of Catholic life. By seeking to follow Jesus we are doing the same and building God's kingdom which casts out Satan as a result. It is far better to be proactive, ie build God's kingdom, than to be reactive and try to destroy Satan's kingdom. It is like giving someone a compliment, you increase their self-esteem and thus may get rid of some negativity they have. If you just say to someone, "Don't be so negative." You have not helped them improve.

Can you think of someone you should encourage today?

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Day 4 A Group of Miracles Mk:1:29-34

In verse 30 we have the word 'immediately'. Mark often uses this word. It gives pace to the gospel. A sense of urgency and of excitement. Imagine if Jesus visited you and all the sick people you know were healed. Picture it. How would you feel, what would it be like?

There are many miracles throughout the centuries. You cannot be declared a saint without 2 miracles. God is still healing and casting out demons. Jesus wants to heal. Jesus wants to take suffering away. We should always pray for healing. We should always seek to alleviate suffering. Take a moment to pray for healing for those you know who need it.

Day 5

Jesus in Solitude Mk:1:35-39

Have you ever had to get up early for something? Jesus would have had a long day and night before getting up early. We may think that we need a sleep in. But Jesus works differently. He draws strength from God. His first point of finding rest, is in God alone. This is his first desire.

We should also have this attitude. It takes time to develop. By praying each day and becoming more mindful of God throughout the day, we will gradually start to seek His will in all we do.

Day 6 The Leper Mk:1:40-45

Why do you think Jesus asks the leper to not tell anyone?

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This is actually an important point, and all sorts of scholars have read interesting things into Jesus request for secrecy. Essentially, Jesus wants to go by the book, ie the Law of Moses. He wants to win over the Pharisees by showing he is obedient to the Law of Moses. But it did not work. Jesus will always do good, even if it is misunderstood, because it is good to do good. Has there been a time when you have done something good and it has had a bad effect?

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But something good can still come from it, even much later.

Day 7 The Leper Mk 1:40-45

We have repeated this passage since it is so rich in lessons.

When someone gives you a present, are you more in love with the present or with the person who gave it?

God gives us many gifts. Are we more in love with the gifts he gives us, rather than him?

A good measure of this is time. How much time do we give to God? God gives us all of our waking hours to use. How much do we share with God? That is why prayer is so important. It gives a chance to spend some time in building relationship with God, and thus demonstrates our love of God.

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