

The Gospels

LESSON
THREE

The Gospel According to Mark Discussion Forum



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The Gospels

Lesson Three: The Gospel According to Mark

Discussion Forum

With

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Dr. Jeffrey Lowman	Dr. James D. Smith III	Dr. Ben Witherington III
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Question 1:

How reliable is church tradition regarding the authorship of Mark's gospel?

The text of the Gospel of Mark doesn't tell us who its author is. So, we have to rely on other means to determine who wrote it. And one of the main sources of information we have is church tradition. But of course, church tradition isn't inspired like Scripture, and many people wonder if it's trustworthy. How reliable is church tradition regarding the authorship of Mark's gospel?

Dr. Richard Bauckham

I think that the very earliest church traditions we have are sufficiently close to the time of the writing of the Gospels and the early circulation of the Gospels for people to have had some good information. And much the best example of this is what we know from Papias who was Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, the beginning of the 2nd century. Papias tells us that Mark wrote his gospel depending on the preaching of Peter. He was Peter's interpreter according to Papias, which presumably means that he translated Peter's Aramaic into Greek or Latin. And Papias tells us that he composed the gospel out of his knowledge of Peter's preaching. I think that's probably the most authentic and early tradition we have about the Gospels, and really, I see no reason to question it. It's from an early date. And Papias, we also know that Papias was really in touch with figures from the apostolic age. He didn't know Mark or Peter, but he tells us that in the late 1st century at a time when some of the eyewitnesses of the Gospels were around, certainly people who had known them... in his own town of Hierapolis, the daughters of Philip the Evangelist who are mentioned in Acts... Philip and his daughters settled and it looks very much as though Papias knew the daughters. So he's in close contact with important figures in the early church. So I think Papias knew what he was talking about. I think probably most church tradition after the second century is dependent on those second century sources that we know. So, I think in a way the Fathers, the later writers of the church,

were simply repeating these earlier testimonies. So I think it's these earliest ones that are really well worth looking at very carefully and weighing up as good evidence. Some scholars have simply dismissed it all and, really, because their own view of how the Gospels originate doesn't fit with what these early testimonies were saying. But I think we should take them much more seriously than that.

Dr. Mark Strauss

The other thing about Mark is that most scholars, even those who question the authorship of most of the New Testament, most accept that this Mark, John Mark of Jerusalem, was actually the author of the second gospel. And the reason they say that is that Mark is an obscure, almost unknown figure in the New Testament. So if the church was creating authorship, creating a name of an author, why would they choose John Mark as an author? There's no reason they would choose him as the author which suggests that he, in fact, was the author of the second gospel.

Question 2:

Humanly speaking, how qualified was Mark to write a gospel?

The Holy Spirit's inspiration was sufficient to qualify any ancient writer to write Scripture. But the doctrine of organic inspiration also insists that the inspired human writers made real contributions to Scripture. Humanly speaking, how qualified was Mark to write a gospel?

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things in Mark's gospel is there's a tiny little reference in the story of Gethsemane of a young man who loses his clothes, runs away, and runs away naked. And it's only in Mark's gospel. And very likely, this is actually Mark's little signature, saying, "I was there on that first Thursday evening when Jesus was arrested," and it's a little signature, if you like. So, I take it that Mark was a teenager at the time of Jesus' arrest. Quite likely his parents lived in Jerusalem — we have reference in Acts to Peter appearing and knocking on the door of Rhoda, the servant girl at John Mark's house. So, he's a Jerusalemite, he comes from there. And then later in the New Testament we hear that he accompanies Paul on his travels to Cyprus. Then later, he's also accompanying Peter and arrives in Rome. There's a reference in 1 Peter 5 to Mark being with Peter in Rome. Now, that's an impressive portfolio of a character, someone who knows Jerusalem, who perhaps was there at the time of Jesus, now has been with Paul, now has been with Peter, and so when it comes to reading Mark's gospel — and we think that Peter probably has been behind Mark's words, encouraging him to write these things down — I think we should have every confidence that this is someone who knew what he was talking about.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Paul was one of his mentors. So we've got the great apostle to the Gentiles. He traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey, though Paul rejected him later because Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas on that first missionary journey. We

know that much later they were reconciled and Paul says in 2 Timothy, to Timothy, to bring Mark with him because he's valuable in the ministry. So Mark restored himself after that first failure. So, a companion of Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles; also a companion of Peter. Peter refers to John Mark as being with him when he writes his letter of 1 Peter. Also, the church tradition that Mark actually was with Peter in Rome and wrote Peter's version of the gospel. So, think of the mentors that he had. His two main mentors were Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter, really the representative of the twelve apostles. So, qualified to write as an apostle of Jesus Christ? Absolutely qualified.

Dr. Richard Bauckham

There are several references in the New Testament to someone called Mark. In the Acts of the Apostles we hear about someone called John Mark. John was his Jewish name. Like many other people, he added a Gentile name, in this case, a Latin name, Mark, Marcus. So, the two names, a common practice of bearing two names like that. A figure called John Mark who, according to Acts, was an early disciple, member of the early Jerusalem church, and he travels with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. We also have a Mark who is mentioned in Paul's letters and a Mark who is mentioned in the first letter of Peter where he's called Peter's son — metaphorically obviously — probably his son in the faith, as it were. He came to faith through Peter's ministry. Now, it's been questioned whether all these Marks are the same person, and then again, whether they are the same person as the Gospel of Mark is ascribed to. And some people say the name Mark, Marcus in Latin, was a very common name, so there's no reason to identify these various persons. Actually, that's not very accurate. Roman citizens had three names, and male Roman citizens had three names. And the first of those names, called the "*prinomen*," was really only used within the family. And Marcus was very, very common as a *prinomen*, but you would never use it outside the family circle as the only name by which you identified someone. So if you call someone just Mark, as the title of the gospel does, as Paul and Peter do, if you call someone just Mark, they cannot be a Roman citizen because it would not be the name by which you'd call them. So there must be someone else, a non-Roman who has taken a Roman name. In that case, it would not be the *prinomen*. But there were far fewer people called Mark in that respect, in that way.

So I think it's not likely, actually, that there were more than one well-known Mark in the early Christian movement. So I think there is a good case for saying the Mark to whom the gospel is attributed is the Mark who appears in the Acts of the Apostles. And that's really very interesting evidence, because it takes Mark back to the early Jerusalem church where he would have known a lot of people who knew Jesus, and we find him associated closely with Peter in the first letter of Peter. And that fits rather well with the earliest evidence we have from outside the New Testament about the authorship of any of the Gospels, which is what Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis early in the second century, tells us about Mark's gospel — that Mark acted as the interpreter of the apostle Peter, presumably meaning that he translated Peter's teaching into Latin or Greek, and that Mark compiled his gospel on the basis of the teaching of Peter. And so that actually fits rather well with the reference to Mark in 1

Peter, and it's citing a piece of early evidence that there's really no reason to doubt that, as it were, the largest eyewitness source behind Mark's gospel is the apostle Peter. But we can, of course, imagine Mark supplementing that with things he knew himself from his own experience of early disciples when he was a member of the Jerusalem church. So I think the implication is probably that Peter is the main source behind the gospel, but that some other material Mark may have contributed himself from his own knowledge of early evidence about Jesus.

Question 3:

How does the structure of Mark's gospel help us to understand his message?

Like many ancient writers, Mark appears to have been less concerned with writing a strictly chronological history, and more concerned with organizing his materials in ways that helped communicate his main message. But what was that message? And how does the structure of Mark's gospel help us understand his message?

Dr. Ben Witherington III

Mark's gospel is probably the earliest gospel we have and its structure is really very interesting. It's structured in a way that makes you think theologically about what's going on. For example, from Mark 1:1 all the way to the Caesarea Philippi story in Mark 8, people are asking all kinds of questions about Jesus and his disciples — “Now who is this that can calm wind or wave?” “Why are not your disciples observing the Sabbath correctly?” — I mean, all kinds of questions. And the underlying question is, “Who is this person?” and “Where did his authority come from?” What Mark is telling us in the first 8 chapters of his gospel is, you need to answer the “Who?” question first if you're going to understand why Jesus did what he did and why he said what he said. So Mark positions this story about the revelation of Jesus' identity at Caesarea Philippi right smack dab in the middle of his gospel. “Who do people say that I am?” Jesus says. The disciples say, “Well, some say you're John the Baptist *part deux*, the sequel.” Some say he's one of the prophets, or like Elijah. Jesus then says to the disciples, “Fair enough, but who do you say that I am?” Peter then raises his hand and then says, “I know. You're the Jewish Messiah” and Jesus responds in the affirmative to this.

Now, what's interesting about this is, up to this point in the narrative, nobody has fully come up with the correct answer except maybe the demons, and that's a credit reference you don't want anyway, right? The disciples had been more like the “duh-disciples.” They haven't gotten it yet, but when Peter gives the correct answer about who Jesus is, it's at that point in the narrative that we begin to have in three straight chapters, Mark 8, Mark 9, and Mark 10, the revelation of what Jesus' mission is in life. We hear, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be killed and on the third day rise.” We hear it in Mark 8; we hear it in Mark 9; we hear it in Mark 10; and then in Mark 10:45 the climax of these four passion predictions is “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for the many.”

Now what this suggests, since we didn't have any passion predictions before Mark 8 and then we have three straight chapters of passion predictions after the identity of Jesus' revealed — an identity that matches up with Mark 1:1 — this is the beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. What this suggests is that the “Who?” question has to be answered first before we can ask and answer the question, “What’s the meaning of his ministry, and why did he have to die?” So we have the “Who?” and “Why?” questions answered first, and then we have the statement about “What is the mission?” and then we have the passion and resurrection stories. Mission accomplished. So there’s a threefold structure: “Who is this person?” “Why did he come?” “Did he fulfill his ministry?” Answer: “Yes.”

Dr. Mark Strauss

For all of the gospel writers, the structure, the outline of their gospel, if you will, really focuses and channels the purpose for which they are writing. And Mark’s gospel is a very easy gospel to outline because it really basically is structured around two main sections — three if you count the last week of Jesus’ life — but the two main structures focus on the Christology of Mark’s gospel, the presentation of Jesus. The first half of Mark’s gospel stresses Jesus’ authority as the mighty Son of God. Jesus does amazing works. He heals the sick. He casts out demons. He teaches with authority. He calms the storm. He demonstrates this incredible authority, demonstrating that he, in fact, is God’s Messiah. He, in fact, is the mighty, powerful Son of God, the divine Son of God. So it’s all about authority in the first half of Mark’s gospel. That really climaxes in chapter eight, with Peter’s confession, profession, that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus says, “Who do people say that I am?” and they say, “Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah.” He says, “Who do you say that I am?” and Peter says, “You are the Messiah.” And at that point then, Jesus affirms that, but he then describes what the Messiah will accomplish, the suffering role of the Messiah, and that’s Jesus’ first passion prediction, first prediction of his death in the Gospel of Mark. And from that point on, through the teaching, through still some miracles, Jesus is focusing on the suffering role of the Messiah.

Question 4:

Why was Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ so remarkable?

Many scholars believe that the centerpiece of Mark’s gospel is Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ. Looking at the New Testament, it seems fairly obvious that Jesus is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. So, why was Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ so remarkable?

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the most remarkable things in the Gospels is that moment when Simon Peter declares — in response to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” — “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are the Messiah.” It’s a defining moment. Now, what’s so remarkable about it? Well, it is, as Jesus himself says, a moment of revelation, when God himself has revealed to Simon Peter something which he could

not have understood himself, but it's also because there's been such longing and expectation, over what, 500 years, that this Messiah figure would come. And now Peter is declaring that this person who is standing in front of him, "You are the Messiah." And so you've just got to feel the incredible amount of expectation and buildup, and now suddenly this is the moment.

Dr. Simon Vibert

At the point when Peter confessed Jesus was the Christ, Jesus himself said that this was a moment of great insight and understanding for him, and finally at that moment Peter saw that Jesus fulfilled the expectations of what the Messiah would be like and what he would do, and Jesus affirms that as being a right response to everything that he's done and said so far in the gospel.

Rev. Larry Cockrell

It's a remarkable confession because it represents a personal confession of faith by Peter, but one that could only be made by one who had been regenerated. And Christ would even say to Peter when he makes the statement that flesh and blood did not reveal that to him, but his Father in heaven. And so, again, it was the Father who had opened the heart of Peter to actually understand and know who Jesus was. Peter's confession in and of itself is a remarkable thing because we see then God the Father at work, you know, regenerating, renewing Peter's heart and making it possible for him to know who Christ truly, truly was. Intellect alone is not enough to know who Christ is. The Father has to reveal and make that known to the individual, and that is only done as they are born again.

Question 5:

What did the Jews in Jesus' day expect the Messiah to do?

Following Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the second half of Mark's gospel focuses primarily on what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. In these chapters Jesus emphasized that, as the Messiah, he had to suffer and die for his people. And this was a radical idea for his disciples. But why? What did the Jews in Jesus' day expect the Messiah to do?

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

The mainstream expectation was that the Messiah would be a son of David and that he would bring in political peace; that he would drive out the Romans. You can read this today in a book called *The Psalms of Solomon*. The Psalms of Solomon speak of the wicked who are in Israel, probably thinking of the Romans and some within Israel who compromised with the Romans, and it teaches very clearly that when the Messiah comes, he will come as a military ruler, he will expel the sinners, he will bring in righteousness, and then the people of God will dwell in peace. And it's clear, I think, in reading the New Testament — we think of John 6 for example where the Jews came to make Jesus a king — that this is what the Jews of Jesus' day expected of him as well. And, of course, as you know, Jesus crossed them up again and again.

He seemed to have no interest in this political realm that they were expecting. He surprised the religious leaders again and again with his stance towards the Law, which I think was a right understanding. He focused, of course, on women and tax collectors and sinners. I think the religious establishment believed that the kingdom would come in if Israel would obey the Law, and they actually viewed Jesus as a threat in that regard, because Jesus didn't seem to be advancing obedience to the Law, but transgression of it, at least in their view.

Question 6:

How did Jesus compare to the messianic expectations of his contemporaries?

Jesus' disciples, like most other Jews in his day, didn't expect the Christ or Messiah to do many of things that Jesus did. And this made it hard for many of them to accept his ministry. How did Jesus compare to the messianic expectations of his contemporaries?

Dr. Simon Vibert

In Mark's gospel, in the first half of the gospel, Jesus' kingship is emphasized quite strongly, so Jesus demonstrates that he has power over sickness. He demonstrates that he has power over nature. He demonstrates that he can gather a following around himself. And all the things that you'd expect a God-King amongst us to do. But the surprise that the disciples find difficult to grasp, particularly in Mark's gospel, is that when Jesus announces or affirms that he is King, as is slowly dawning on their minds, he then goes on to say that he will be rejected, that he will suffer and that he will die. And initially, I think, they found it very difficult to grasp the idea that the King should come among them as one who serves, but actually, with the benefit of hindsight, looking back at the predictions of the coming King, you can put together passages like Isaiah 53 which speak about a king who comes, but who also will suffer and who will die, and Jesus believed that he was doing that to pay the ransom price for human sin, and that on the cross he would lay aside his majesty in order that he could atone for the sins of humankind.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Creation was in a fallen state and Jesus came to reverse the fall, to establish, once again to establish God's kingdom on earth. And that kingdom meant the defeat of sin, the defeat of Satan, the defeat of death. So Jesus was looking at something much greater than merely a political victory, merely a military victory. In fact, Jesus' miracles really demonstrate what the kingdom was all about because when Jesus healed the sick, what was he doing? Well, he was obviously demonstrating God's compassion, God's love for people. He cared for people, so he healed them. But really, it's much more significant than that. In the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah, Isaiah predicts that when the kingdom comes, that is when God restores his creation, the lame will walk and the blind will see; the deaf will hear. In other words, sickness is ultimately a result of human fallenness and the fallen state of creation. So

what Jesus is doing, he's doing little snapshots of the kingdom. He's demonstrating what it would look like when God restores his creation. And so the healings are really a demonstration that this is much greater than just a physical defeat of the Romans or physical liberation in Israel. This is a restoration of the world as God had originally intended it to be. The exorcisms, then, have the same significance because what does Jesus do? He casts out demons. Well, that's an act of compassion — freeing someone from Satan's power. But in another sense, it's got a larger purpose. And that larger purpose is to demonstrate that Satan himself is being defeated. This world that's been in the grip of Satan since the fall of Adam and Eve, God is taking back his kingdom, and so, little snapshots by Jesus to demonstrate that by casting out demons, showing his authority over Satan, that with his death on the cross, he's going to defeat sin, Satan, and ultimately death as well.

Question 7:

Why did Jesus perform miracles?

For many of Jesus' disciples, the miracles he performed were an important proof that he really was the Christ. They exhibited his power and authority. And they showed that God approved of his message. But were there other purposes, too? Why did Jesus perform miracles?

Dr. Greg Perry

You know, often times we think about Jesus' miracles only in sort of a spectacular sense, as a demonstration of his identity as the second person of the Trinity, of his deity. And they certainly do testify to his authority. But what we also see is that Jesus heals to restore the people who can't go to the temple to worship, who can't function properly in society because they're a leper, because they have an issue of blood, because they're blind. These things prevent them from going to worship God at the temple. And so we see Jesus having real compassion on people, and by healing them, restoring them to their full membership in the people of God, and to their full functionality, to be able then to work, provide for their family and for themselves. And then we, lastly, see Jesus doing miracles again, particularly with the demonic, in casting out demons, to demonstrate his authority as the Messiah, as the one who is the kingdom of God present in their midst, who can restrict the activity of the devil. And so for these reasons Jesus performs miracles.

Dr. Mark Strauss

I think Jesus performed miracles for several different reasons. One was out of compassion and to meet human needs. He cared for people. At times it says, "He looked at them and had compassion on them," so he performed the miracles. Another reason was to demonstrate who he was, to demonstrate his authority. So when he cast out a demon, or when he healed the sick, or when he performed a nature miracle like walking on the water, it was to demonstrate his divine authority and power. And I think the third reason he performed miracles was to really demonstrate his mission. His mission was to proclaim and to inaugurate, to establish the kingdom of God. And

what does the kingdom of God look like? Well, ultimately the kingdom of God is restoring creation to a right relationship with the Creator. And so, for all of creation, and human beings in particular, to once again submit to the authority of God, and to be the creation that God intended it to be. And so when he heals the sick, he is demonstrating the restoration of human beings through healing. When he casts out demons, he's demonstrating that he is breaking the power of Satan over his creation. When he's raising the dead, he's demonstrating his resurrection power to destroy death once and for all. So these are little snapshots of the coming kingdom that's going to come; demonstrating that his message, the message of the coming of the kingdom of God is, in fact, true, demonstrating it through these mighty miracles; through these powers.

Question 8:

Why does Mark's gospel end with the women responding in fear to the news of Jesus' resurrection?

In Mark's gospel, one of the most common responses to Jesus' miracles is fear. And this is nowhere more evident than at the very end of the gospel. When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices to anoint Jesus' body, they found his tomb empty, and an angel told them that Jesus had risen. But instead of rejoicing at this wonderful news, they ran away terrified. Why does Mark's gospel end with the women responding in fear to the news of Jesus' resurrection?

Dr. Robert Plummer

The Gospel of Mark has an interesting ending. If we look in Mark 16, the angel announces to the women that Jesus has risen from the dead and then it says in verse 8, "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." Now first off, we need to mention there's some question as to whether this is really the last verse in the gospel or not. The best and most ancient manuscripts end at verse 8. We have a copy in our library here of *Codex Vaticanus*, one of the most valuable ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, and you can see it ends with the last Greek word there, "*gar*," and then it says "*kata Markon*" — "according to Mark," and there's plenty of space where many more verses could have been written and they were not. Some people think that the earliest ending of Mark was lost and so later on someone summarized the other gospel endings, and so that's what we read in some Bibles in verses 9 and following — in the King James Version and elsewhere.

But there's a growing movement of New Testament scholars that really believe verse 8 is the last. It's the best attested and the question is: "How does this fit in with the rest of Mark's gospel?" If you look at Mark's gospel, there's an interesting theme of the disciples' constant failure and misunderstanding. They're fearful; they're cowardly; they're afraid; they don't understand; they run away. Even the mysterious passage in chapter 14 of the man fleeing naked, you're like, what in the world is this

guy in chapter 14:51-52, doing fleeing naked? Well that was a sign of utter defeat and shame in the 1st century — to run away naked. And so here in the moment of Jesus' arrest is a picture, a visual picture of his followers, naked, shame, and fear. And in spite of constant failure and misunderstandings by the disciples, God's truth and his purpose triumph. Jesus dies on the cross; the gospel goes forth; salvation goes to the ends of world. So I think it's a Markan understatement here that the women have been commanded to go and announce his resurrection, and instead they are fearful and they run away and say nothing to no one.

Dr. Frank Thielman

People are often puzzled about the ending of Mark's gospel. You get to the end, and in some ways it seems very unsatisfying. People flee from the tomb in fear. The women are afraid when they see the tomb empty. I think this is a great illustration of how it's important to read the Gospels in their entirety from beginning to end because that ending to Mark's gospel makes a lot more sense when you see how fear functions in the narrative of Mark's gospel generally. The disciples, Jesus' followers, express fear in the gospel sometimes when they see Jesus doing dramatic things, when he is working amazing miracles. They express fear when God is at work. So when we get to the end of the gospel and Jesus is raised from the dead, the women, I think, are responding in fear because they too don't yet understand what kind of person God is as he is revealed to us in Jesus. Now, Mark's given us lots of hints in the gospel that eventually those who follow Jesus will understand, but he's only telling one part of the story, and he's reminding us there that these early followers of Christ didn't fully understand Jesus, and so that's why they flee in fear.

I actually think probably Mark's gospel was written with a full knowledge that this—he was not telling the whole story, that other people would also tell parts of the story. And so Luke comes along and not only writes a gospel that kind of fills in elements of the story after Jesus is risen from the dead, for us in wonderful and helpful ways, but writes the book of Acts that fills in the story as well and shows us there how many of the women who followed Jesus were faithful to him and did realize who he was. So, Mark's gospel is a very deep gospel. It's the shortest of the Gospels, but in some ways it's the most puzzling of the Gospels because it has lots of levels of meaning, and that ending of Mark's gospel is one of those puzzling elements. But I think Mark is showing us there that the early Christians had a long way to go. They were off to a good start, but they had a long way to go in learning who Jesus was and coming to know him better. Personally, I think it's a great encouragement to those of us who are following Christ today that we too have much to learn about him. We can learn from his Word. We can learn from other Christians. But we always have much more to learn, and we shouldn't be discouraged by the questions we have, the puzzles we may have about who he is, some of the doubts that we come across. We should share that with other believers and learn more about him and stay faithful and persevere just as they did.

Question 9:**Why did Jesus' gospel message focus so strongly on the kingdom of God?**

Although some aspects of Mark's gospel may puzzle readers, everyone should be able to recognize that one of the central themes in Mark's book is the "good news" or "gospel" that Jesus preached. But Jesus' message wasn't limited to individual salvation. The good news he proclaimed heavily emphasized God's kingdom. But what was the relationship between these two ideas? Why did Jesus' gospel message focus so strongly on the kingdom of God?

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

What is the relationship between the gospel and the kingdom of God? In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, the first recorded words of Jesus are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel." The gospel is the good news proclaiming that the reign of God's kingdom has come into this world. Thus, all the miracles Jesus performed are signs of this coming kingdom. Since the rule and kingdom of God are here, our sins are forgiven. The blind can see, the lame can walk, the lepers are cleansed, demons are cast out, and the dead are raised. That is the good news. The good news of course, at its core, is the cross — the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus did not die and rise again, he would not have won salvation for us. He would not have overcome the power of death. And the kingdom of God would not have come to us. Therefore, the gospel is the best news. The coming of God's kingdom is the greatest blessing and joyfulness for the human race.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

The message of the kingdom is intimately tied to the gospel message of death, burial and resurrection. The kingdom must be understood in terms of the Old Testament. All the way back with Adam's fall into sin, plunging the human race into depravity, affecting all of creation, you have the promise of God that he will bring his saving rule and reign to this world. That's worked out in a whole host of ways in the Old Testament, primarily in the coming of the Lord himself through the Davidic king — these great messianic themes. Christ is the one who is the Lord, who is the King. He is the one who ushers in that saving reign. He ushers in that saving reign by not only his incarnation and his life, and putting to flight his enemies — you think of Satan and his powers — but he does so ultimately in consummation on the cross, in his resurrection. The problem of sin is a relationship with God and all of its effects upon the human race. Sin has to be dealt with before God. And so, the inauguration of the kingdom takes us to the cross, demonstrated then that he has won victory over sin. He has paid our price before God's righteous requirements. Resurrection now has taken place, and the gospel message of death, burial, and resurrection is the very inauguration of that kingdom that is here and then will be consummated in the end. So the relationship between the two is intimately put together in the Scriptures.

Dr. Jeff Lowman

If we start by understanding that the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in hearts of men and women, and that rule and reign manifesting itself in every sphere of life in which their lives touch, the way that they come into that rule and reign is through the message of the gospel, the *euangelion*, the good news, that Christ has laid his life down upon the cross for their sins. And through that transforming power of the gospel, then they are called to transform the world around them and bring in God's work of the kingdom to every area of their life.

Question 10:

In what sense did Jesus establish God's kingdom during his earthly ministry, and in what sense are we still waiting for his kingdom to come?

Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was "at hand." But in Mark's gospel, and even today, it's clear that God's kingdom hasn't been fully manifested in the world. In what sense did Jesus establish God's kingdom during his earthly ministry, and in what sense are we still waiting for his kingdom to come?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

One of the most difficult things for people to understand is the relationship of the first and second coming of Jesus the Messiah. It's understandable that people would say, "Well, how could Jesus be the Messiah and have fulfilled messianic expectations when we don't see lions lying down with lambs?" We don't see people beating their swords into plowshares. We don't see peace on earth, good will toward men. So how is it that the Messiah has come? Well, what we had to realize was that there was a first coming of the Messiah, and a second coming of the Messiah. What we call it is "inaugurated eschatology," this idea that end-time realities have been brought into history with the first coming of Jesus. They've been inaugurated, they've been initiated and begun in a decisive way, but they still are being worked out to the point where there will ultimately be a consummation of these realities. It's been called the "now and not yet" of the kingdom. That the kingdom has come, Jesus has brought it; he's delivered the decisive blow in the battle. But the battle still rages and it awaits a future, ultimate fulfillment and coming. And so that's the tension we live in as the people of God now — between Jesus' first and second comings — the now of the kingdom, and the not yet of the kingdom. And this has many broad applications to our lives. So we have power over sin, but we still have a battle to fight over sin. We see demonstrations of end time realities now working themselves out, but we realize that that battle will continue until we see Jesus again, and he finally comes once and for all.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

One of the things that Jesus accomplished during his earthly ministry was to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Now, what that appears to mean is that in an act of divine power, Jesus established a beachhead in hostile territory and inaugurated an

invasion initiative that is destined to restore this planet to its rightful Creator and owner and King. This initial assault on hostile territory manifested itself in a number of dramatic ways: challenging systemic evil, challenging demonic evil, dispelling deception with light and truth. It was a powerful introduction of an alternative allegiance. This campaign is still underway. There remains mopping up operations, cleaning up, last holdouts to be eliminated. And the final enemy that remains to be overcome is death. And so, even as we participate in the power of the Spirit in this ongoing kingdom campaign, we pray, "Your kingdom come; your will be done." There's still something we need supernatural aid to see achieved.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

It's important to ask the question: In what sense did Jesus establish his messianic kingdom in his first coming, and in what way are we awaiting it in the future? The Scripture is very clear that in his first coming he has come as the King. He has announced the kingdom. That kingdom has now arrived. In fulfillment of Old Testament expectation, God's saving rule has broken into this world in Jesus Christ, culminating in his death, his resurrection — his resurrection demonstrating that his death has been victorious. Sin has been dealt with. Death as the consequence of sin has been defeated. And not just in the resurrection. His glorious ascension — he is now seated at God's right hand. Pentecost — he has poured out the Spirit. All of that is part of the coming of the kingdom. The — what we call the "inauguration of the kingdom" — it is now here. Yet, our Lord Jesus Christ has also told us that there is still the future. We still pray. Think of the Lord's Prayer that we pray: "Your kingdom come." Well, the kingdom has come. He has won victory. It is still awaiting its consummation. Why this delay? Well, I think the reason for the delay is for the spread of the gospel. For the gospel to go to the nations, so that all of God's people now come into relationship with him. That is over a period of time; that's how he's chosen to do so. So that the kingdom has now come, victory has been won. Consummation takes place when he comes again, and there is then the restoration of all things. Sometimes the illustration from World War II is used in this regard. "D-Day" — when the Allied troops went, stormed the beaches of Normandy — that brought basically, almost the end of the war, but there were still more battles to be done. That was "V-Day" in terms of the kind of consummation. Well, Christ's first coming is that "D-Day." It is that which has brought with it victory. There's also now the consummation that will take place in the end. Victory, and just a matter of time before he comes again.

Question 11:

What is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church?

Jesus came to establish God's kingdom on earth. But Christians aren't always clear about the ways the church and the kingdom interact and even intersect. How does the church fit into the plan of the kingdom? What is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church?

Dr. William Ury

Both the concepts of the kingdom of God and the church are indispensable for a full Christian understanding of how we are to live in any part of our lives. But I think it's important for there to be a distinction between the two. I think many Christians, including me, for years thought, well, the church is sort of like the climax of the kingdom, so we're kind of the most important thing going. But the kingdom concept in all of Scripture is much larger than the church. So the way I view, and I think the Bible does too, views the church as an irreplaceable part of the kingdom, but it's a sub-part or a piece of the kingdom work. God's kingdom, his rulership, has always been the base of reality. He is the reigning Lord of the universe, of all creation, of us. He is Lord of all peoples, all nations, all kings, all tribes. Now most don't know that, but he is. So the kingdom of God, the reign of God, is an overarching theme in all of Scripture. The church, hopefully, are those people who have submitted to the lordship of Jesus, recognize his sovereign lordship and have submitted themselves to being his agents in the world. It's very important that the church understand its place in the kingdom. When we are going to be with him in the future, when he comes again, I don't think we're going to be referred to as the church. I think that will be the kingdom: the bride will be produced for her bridegroom, that other very important picture in Scripture.

So, why I'm saying it this way, I think that sometimes we as a church have too high a view of ourselves. We think we're the only answer, or God's only purpose. And we're very, very important. He died for the church. He died to offer himself. But he also died for the world. So the best way for me to view myself as a member of the church Jesus Christ is to say, I've got one goal and that's to be the body of Christ. I am called to be his hands, his feet, his arms to the world just like he would be if he were here. That's my king's command to me and to us as the church. The sad thing is I think sometimes the church says, well, we're the climax of the kingdom, therefore we're the end of what he's come to do and therefore we're going to sit and do nothing or just enjoy his presence until he comes again. I think that's a wrong view and we need to correct ourselves, get back into the business of connecting the church's purpose with the kingly purposes of our Lord and Savior.

Dr. Steve Blakemore

This question about the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church is one that's haunted Christians for a long time, at least since the Reformation and probably before. But as I understand it, the relationship between the kingdom of God in the earth now is something like this: Jesus Christ has come, and in his incarnate life, in his ministry in overcoming the power of evil, in his self-sacrificial life to overcome the power of sin, in his resurrection from the dead to overcome the power of death, he has renewed creation, and there is now at work in creation the reign of God. The kingdom of God has now been launched, so to speak, into the world through Jesus Christ. The church is not that kingdom. The church is meant to be by God's design the visible manifestation of the reality that the kingdom of God has come upon the earth in Jesus Christ. The church is not inconsequential to the kingdom then. The church is meant to be the visible evidence in our lives of worship,

our lives of obedience to the gospel, our lives of self-giving love and reflecting the character of Christ in how we treat one another and how we relate to the world. Those lives are meant to reveal to an unbelieving world that the kingdom has come and that the promise of God is certain. So the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God is the relationship of the reality to a sign, much like the bread and the wine in Holy Communion are signs of the reality of the self-sacrificial, broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Question 12:

What is the relationship between God's plan for our lives as individuals and his plan for his kingdom?

Mark's gospel strongly emphasizes Jesus' kingdom mission, and encourages the church to participate actively in building the kingdom. But what about our individual lives? Aren't they important? Doesn't God have blessings in store for people that obey him? What is the relationship between God's plan for our lives as individuals and his plan for his kingdom?

Dr. Steve Harper

Jesus understands us better than we understand ourselves. And he understands where we fit into the grand scheme of things better than we do at the time that we're experiencing the call. Jesus comes to us with a kingdom vision and we come with a personal vision. And I think what that means is that sometimes Jesus' words seem very harsh. For example, in Matthew 8:22, he says, "...let the dead bury the dead." It's almost like the man can't even go back home to say goodbye. He just has to drop everything. But then he turns right around in Mark 5 and he says, "Go home, and tell your friends," your neighbors, your family, "everything that God's done for you." And I take that to mean that Jesus is at work in our lives to position us to fit into the kingdom where God wills for us to fit into it. Our call is not a matter of compromising our faith, but it's a matter of contextualizing our faith. And so I think we're free to go to Jesus and say to him, for example, "Lord, where do you want me to fit into your grand scheme of things?" When you deal in Mark where he calls the apostles for the first time, and he wants them to be with him so that he can send them out in order to preach and to heal, but then at the very end is this list of the apostles. And I used to read that and I would think to myself, you know, this is more than Bible trivia. There is a reason why those names are given there. And if we go into church history, you know, tradition says that each of those apostles went to a different place for a different purpose. And I think that's the way God's call works in our lives. Jesus knows where we're to fit in long before we do, but we have the freedom and the liberty to know that he is going to send us to a place where we will fit and where our call will be part of the kingdom vision.

Dr. John Oswalt

Many people through the centuries have argued about the nature of the kingdom of God. It's a clear description that we find in the Bible, and yet just exactly what it

means has been a source of a lot of controversy. I think we can say, though, that in its essence, at the bottom, the kingdom of God describes God's rule in the world, in the church and in the individual human heart, so that if you and I are living God's life according to the Scriptures, we can say that we are participating in the kingdom of God.

Question 13:

How can we identify and employ the Holy Spirit's power in our lives?

In order to ensure the successful building of his kingdom, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to empower the members of his church for kingdom service. We don't all have the same gifts and calling. But every one of us has a special appointment from the Spirit. So, how can we identify and employ the Holy Spirit's power in our lives?

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

The New Testament, particularly, emphasizes that the Holy Spirit strengthens us in our everyday lives to please Jesus Christ and God the Father. In other words, where does the strength come from day by day to put our trust in God and to obey him? What the Scripture teaches is that that strength does not come from ourselves. We must be filled with the Spirit. We must call upon the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. I think this is enormously practical because we sense as believers that in and of ourselves, we have no strength. In and of ourselves we cannot please God. We face each day recognizing that we have no strength from the day before. I need a fresh empowering for the Spirit of God. I need a fresh endowment from on high. And the Scriptures teach us we receive that from the Holy Spirit. He gifts us. He sanctifies us. He strengthens us. He helps us put our trust in Christ every day.

Dr. Steve Harper

God's power is really not something that comes along to sort of, you know, "help me out." It's not like God saying, "You do 80% and I'll cover the last 20%." God's power really is the means of our accomplishment. The prophet Zechariah said, "It's not by might, it's not by power, it's by my spirit saith the Lord." And I think the more we're able to do as human beings, and we really are able to do a lot (it's amazing), the harder it is to believe that. Jesus said in John 15, "Apart from me you can do nothing." You step back from that and you think about putting a man on the moon, or maybe eradicating malaria in our lifetime — or something Bill Gates and others are working hard to try to do — it seems that there's just a lot of things that human beings can do. But Jesus talks about power, not just in the sense of being able to do something, but in the sense of John saying all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. I think that's what Jesus means in John 15. He doesn't mean, you know, that without Jesus you can't lift a chair from one room to another. But what Jesus means in John 15 is that even the ability to do the most routine things is something that was given to us in a very act of creation. It may be a natural talent, it may be a natural ability, or it may be spiritual gift, but there's

nothing that we do that's independent of the one who created us to be able to do those kinds of things.

Jesus is talking about it in a different way in Acts when he says in 1:8, you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and the ends of the earth. That's another kind of power, power to witness. And so the practical ways I think in which that works itself out, as I often tell people, is that we go back to Jesus' three words: ask, seek, and knock. We ask for power. And by that I mean saying, "Lord, where do you want me to use the power that you've given me?" I don't want to be three miles wide and a half an inch deep. I want my life to be invested in something, and I want it to count for something. So we ask, "Where do you want me to invest my life?" That's just a legitimate question. Most of us have talents and capacities and I.Q.s. We could be more than one thing. But sooner or later we have to ask God, "Where do you want to use me?" And once we get some sense of that, then our power gets distributed through that kind of ministry.

Seeking, I think, is the way in which we come to realize that there are nuances of power. You know, an orchestra is made up of many different instruments. Even if you ask, "Where do you want to use me?" and God says, "I want to use you in the orchestra," then you've got to seek for that particular place. Am I going to be a cello? Am I going to be a violin? Am I going to be an oboe? Once you get your territory sort of mapped out, then you get to explore that. You get to seek it out. And some of that comes through trial and error. Some of that comes through experimentation until you begin to sense that fit for your life. And so your power begins to flow through your particular manifestation.

Then, I think, when Jesus was talking about knocking, he's actually talking about expressing — you're right there at the door, the door opens, and so you begin to use the power that God has given you, and the way that you believe that God wants you to use it, and in the knocking, you get to discover whether that power is being used in the most fulfilling and productive ways that it could be. But God's power is really the source, the system, and the supply for everything that we want to do as followers of Jesus.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The Holy Spirit determines to whom he will give spiritual gifts. And we are dependent upon him and those gifts to function as his instruments in this world. We need to rely on him to do just that. There are miraculous demonstrations of his power that God's people recognize, but we depend most of all on the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control as the definitive recognition of God's work in our lives.

Question 14:**How can church leaders guard themselves against sin?**

Despite the Holy Spirit's empowerment, Christians still struggle with temptation and sin. The church is called to be holy, and to build God's righteous kingdom throughout the world. But our sins often hinder our work. And when our leaders fall into sin, the negative impact is even greater. How can church leaders guard themselves against sin?

Rev. Youssef Ourahmane (translation)

We know as the Scripture teaches us that Satan's intention is to strike the shepherd. The Bible says so. The sheep will be scattered. Satan targets powerfully to strike the shepherd or the servant in the church. Based on that, the leader or the servant ought to be cautious. He needs to be cautious from Satan who wants in one way or other to defeat him, whether through sexual sin, financial sin, or pride, or many other things. We need the servant to have one of the brothers or sisters in the church or group to shepherd him. He needs to have a certain fellowship, a relationship with brothers and sisters in the ministry so he can share with them his weaknesses and things that bother him, to share with them the weak points in his life. We need each other. We need to know that Satan wants to see us fall. We need to have a relationship and be open with each other. But we need to pray and pray a lot so God can protect us and watch over us and ask others to pray for us.

We should not give Satan a place in our lives to fool us. We need to be cautious in the way we act and how to behave in our lives and in our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the church. We should not give Satan a chance. We need to know that we all care for each other. When I see a brother or a sister, for example, as a leader in a service, and there are improper things going on in his or her life, or there is some kind of danger, we should warn each other, and talk to each other. We should not ignore things and just say, "This is our pastor and that's it." We shouldn't say that he doesn't need any advice or any teaching or any help in the ministry. On the contrary, we need to care for each other. Unfortunately there are many servants who fell in sin and drifted away from the ministry. We need to know that God alone is the one to protect us and sustain us. We should not rely on our abilities, our lives with God, our testimonies, but to stay firm in our relationship with God, in our conduct, in our walk with him in our ministry.

Dr. Steve Harper

In the experiences of life, whether they happen to us when we are riding down the road in the car, by ourselves, or whether we are in a Billy Graham crusade with fifty thousand other people, we get convicted. God's Word encounters our spirit in such a way, that we realize that we are out of alignment. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We realize that we are not saying the things we should be saying, doing the things we should be doing, and on and on and on. That is a "*kairos*" moment, not just a "*kronos*" moment, that's not just the ticking of the clock, that's the beating of a heart, that's the forming of a soul. And, procrastination is dangerous. To

say, as some people even did in Scripture when Paul was preaching, “We heard you, but we’ll call you back, and go into that more later on.” That kind of procrastination is dangerous. And the most obvious reason it is dangerous, is that we think, “You know, I’ll work on that tomorrow,” or next week, or whatever. We don’t know that we have tomorrow, or next week. I don’t want to make this response to sound threatening or ominous, but it’s really true. We presume that because we are healthy today, we’ll be healthy tomorrow, or because we are alive today, we will be alive tomorrow. So, I want to say first of all, that it is dangerous because we can’t presume that we have tomorrow. If God is addressing us in the present moment, we need to deal with that. We need to ask, “Why now? Why not yesterday?” You know, why now? Take the present moment seriously.

The other reason that I think its dangerous is that it really does contribute — procrastination really does contribute to the development of a hardened heart. Because, we get convicted about something in the present, we don’t do anything with it. We begin to think to ourselves, “Well, that wasn’t so bad. You know, I don’t guess I really need to worry about that a whole lot right now because I didn’t repent, I didn’t make any changes, and my life is still rolling on pretty much like it always did.” The danger is that we begin to just layer over that God moment, our rationalizations, our assumptions, and way down the line we are actually living a lie, we’re living 180 degrees away from what it was God was trying to get our attention about in the first place. And that is a dangerous thing.

Dr. Simon Vibert

In our worship services we’re encouraged to begin by repenting of our sins, and that’s not because we think we need to become Christians all over again, but there is a sense in which, in becoming a Christian you believe for the first time the direction of your life changes, but repentance means change of mind leading to change of conduct, and in a sense we regularly need to do that because all of us continue to be sinful and all of us need to continue to repent of our sins. So, ongoingly we say sorry to God for our sins as we repent daily of the things that we do wrong.

Question 15:

Do the failures of the disciples undercut the authority and respectability of the church and its leadership?

One way Mark’s gospel encourages believers in every age is by pointing out that the disciples were fallen and weak people just like the rest of us. Jesus didn’t expect them to live perfect lives, and he gave them his Spirit so that they could succeed in ministry. And we need that same help, too. Even so, some people wonder if the disciples’ failures somehow harm or even invalidate the church’s ministry. Do the failures of the disciples undercut the authority and respectability of the church and its leadership?

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things about the gospel writers is that they are so honest about the failings of Jesus' disciples, the twelve apostles. You see this particularly in Mark's gospel, where it's a very honest account, and the disciples are asking ridiculous questions, and Jesus had to be very stern with them in correcting them. And Peter puts his foot in it lots of times. It's slightly less true in Matthew's gospel, where some of that's been slightly airbrushed out, but it's still a very honest account of their failings. Is this a problem? Well, if you expect the leaders of the church to be perfect, well, yes, that's a problem. But if actually the leader of the church then and now is Jesus Christ, and he's perfect, it actually isn't a problem because the leaders of the community that follows Jesus again are going to people who make mistakes. And another thing just to remember is that the very word, "disciple," means "learner." And so what we're seeing in the Gospels is these disciples learning. They're lifelong learners, and actually that's a very good example to us of how despite our mistakes and our failings, we too can be Jesus' followers and we too are committed to lifelong learning.

Dr. Jonathan Pennington

One of the beautiful things about reading the Gospels is that the people, the characters, are very real. In fact a lot of scholars have observed that a major theme, especially in the Gospel of Mark, but it's in all the Gospels, is the fact that the disciples often fail desperately. You can think of Peter, really clearly the leader of the early church, we can see it in the book of Acts and in the Gospels themselves, and he is the greatest failure of all in many ways. I mean, he even denies Jesus three times, which was something that in the church, as the church develops, becomes a real struggle for understanding what do you do with someone who's denied Jesus? It's clearly a failure of faith. But that's exactly what's beautiful about not only the Gospels, but all of the Bible, that the characters that are there are meant to identify with us, or we are meant to identify with them. Being not perfect, in a vacuum, religious icons of people who aren't real, but real, flawed, fallen people. In fact, one of the beautiful things about the idea of discipleship is that we are to follow and be like Jesus, yet even the disciples, the original disciples, in their following of Jesus show and model for us both faith and hope in Jesus, but also the reality of being broken humans who fail. And to us, rather than undermining the authority of the church and undermining the authority of leaders, it helps us identify with the fact that we too, as redeemed people, are in process. We are being transformed. We are being converted more and more. And in our failures, Jesus and God, three in one, are glad to accept us and transform us and use us as his vessels of the kingdom throughout the world.

Question 16:**What positive examples can we find among Christ's followers in Mark's gospel?**

In contrast to the many failures of the disciples recorded in Mark's gospel, we also find some shining examples of faithfulness to Christ. And just as the disciples' failures give us hope that God can love, accept and use anyone in ministry, these examples of faithfulness give us hope that we can live in ways that please him and that result in his approval and blessing. What positive examples can we find among Christ's followers in Mark's gospel?

Dr. James D. Smith III

I think in our desire to follow Jesus, we need to keep it in mind that all of us are imperfect people pointing to a perfect God. But in Mark's gospel, chapter 14, we have an example of a person that Jesus commended and actually said, "Wherever the gospel is preached, this person should be remembered as an example." It's the woman who anointed him in time for his burial. And what Jesus said about this woman in the middle of a very critical audience around them, was that what this woman had done in anointing him, in honoring him, celebrating generously who he was as Lord, she had done a lovely thing. And there's a word in the original Greek, a word that says, "something morally good" — and that's fine and it's important — but there is a word additionally that says not only morally good but "lovely," and inviting, and winsome, and beautiful; this woman had done something lovely. God leads us to do things that are beautiful for one another. Jesus also said, she has done it prior to my burial. In any culture, there are those of us who say, "Boy, I was too late. I wasn't in time." Isn't it wonderful when God gives us a sense of the right moment to step forward, and just in time to do something in the name of Jesus that blesses? The woman did that and she did that before his burial. And finally, Jesus says, she's done what she could. And that doesn't sound like much to many of us. We're trying hard, and maybe the progress doesn't look the best and we sort of shrug. But in fact, Jesus commends that, when we simply offer our best to the service of the Lord and trust him for the fruitfulness. That's a great deal. And I think that woman is a remarkable example wherever the gospel is preached, as Jesus said.

More than any other gospel writer, Mark emphasized the failures and fears of Jesus' followers. And this should be really encouraging. The people that knew Jesus personally — even his closest friends — still struggled with sin. So, it shouldn't surprise or disappoint us that we do too. Mark's gospel assures us that even though we're weak and sinful, God won't abandon us. He still loves us, and he still calls us to expand his kingdom throughout the earth in the present day, and to enjoy the glory of his consummated kingdom when Christ returns.

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