

Notes on Mark 1—10

by Grant Thorpe

available at

<http://www.corobaptist.org.au>

The following notes may be copied and distributed freely if they are acknowledged and not used for profit.

Chapter 1

Jesus was introduced to the world by the widely known prophet, John the Baptist. By the end of one chapter of his story, Jesus had a reputation of his own so powerful that he could not enter a town without being recognised and followed. However this fast moving account of how Jesus began his work is more powerful for what it tells us about what God was doing in these events.

John the Baptist had opened the way for 'the Lord', as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 40). (In a world created by a Father, Son and Spirit, each depends on another and none can bear witness to himself.) Through John, God signalled that he was coming to give repentance to Israel. Through his coming Son, he was about to baptise Israel with the Holy Spirit. The day of the fulfilment of many prophecies was dawning.

The Spirit came first to Jesus, tearing the heavens apart. Then Jesus entered a wilderness, as Israel had done, and (unlike Israel) launched straight into establishing the reign of God. Jesus, like John, called people into the repentance that God offered the nation, he gathered followers to help him fish for people, rode roughshod over demons and disease and spread his good news everywhere. The demons knew what was going on. Here was the 'Holy One of God' come to sanctify his people. But Jesus did not want to be known by their testimony. Clearly, he wanted people to see and hear that God had come to bless them with his immediate reign, in the person of his Son. All the threats to our life, in this world and the next, were falling under his Lordship.

Prayer

O Father, draw me from the mundane, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and set my interest and trust in your Son. In him your reign is now established. By raising him from the dead, you have granted repentance to us. Father, it is your purpose to bring to us everything necessary to life and godliness, to grant us forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. May your reign be established on earth. May your will be done, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chapter 2

The battle created by Christ's display of grace is taken to a new level in this chapter. Some believed Jesus could heal their friend, but they heard him being forgiven. So did the scribes. Here Jesus showed how the reign of God would proceed. It would not stay with an outward display of mercy but address and bring relief to the conscience of each person who was prepared for it.

The boundaries of the kingdom were also challenged. Sinners who received Jesus were in the kingdom. Righteous people who refused him would gain nothing from the reign of God. Piety was redefined by the presence of a 'bridegroom' and the bringing in of 'new wine'.

The Sabbath had been central to the religion of Israel and it gave the formal religion of the Pharisees a test case to assess Jesus. But Jesus showed he was closer to the real faith of David than they were. Jesus reaffirmed that the Sabbath was God's gift, not a human performance, and that he had authority to proclaim its true content. Through him, humanity would discover how to rest in a God who cared for his creation and redeemed its people from servile labour.

Prayer

Father, your grace of your Son has reached to me, a sinner. What a welcome you have given to all who hear his word! You declare that our sins are forgiven! Father, keep my heart from relying on my own expressions of faith and grant that I may walk in the new life Christ has won for us all. You have made him Lord over every human duty. Therefore Father, I rejoice in the grace you have brought to me through him and look to him today, and now, in his name, come to you. Amen.

Chapter 3

Common people could see that Jesus was doing good, saving life and curing many whereas the religion of Israel's leaders had been exposed as a sham. Rather than repent, their fury took over, but Jesus did not let their hardness dent his purpose. He continued to heal, and argued that it would be unlikely for Satan to shoot himself in the foot. Moreover someone stronger had attacked Satan. In fact, unclean spirits were regularly calling Jesus Son of God. They had met their Master.

The leaders should have done the same, willingly, but they preferred to link the Holy Spirit's work in Jesus with the shameful work of demons. The fact that Jesus argued with them suggests they had opportunity to think again, but if this was their final position, they stood condemned of eternal sin.

Jesus' family could not identify God's reign in Jesus and so were nervous about reports of his madness. In fact, God's reigning through the words and actions of Christ was establishing the new family.

Prayer

Father, we have been slow to recognise your good deeds among us and for us. We have let the present forms of our life and religion hide from us your powerful and gracious working. Father, forgive us. You have raised your Son from the death we inflicted on him, and he has proclaimed forgiveness of sins. You have overcome forever the powers of darkness, which have enslaved us. Lord, we hear your word to us through your Son and know that we are welcomed with him as your family. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter 4

In Jesus' teaching and healing, God was manifesting his authority (the kingdom or reign of God) and saving his people. However many were opposing it and division

was occurring. Jesus showed why some do not come under that reign. The devil, the flesh and the world are all powerfully opposed to God. They cannot endure an authority that does not use their agency. But in spite of this, God's word yields a good harvest.

When I hear that God is reigning in Christ for my salvation or when Christ explains what is happening under his reign, I should take heed. Understanding is a sign of having come under his reign. Whilst the kingdom is kept secret from those who cannot see God's gracious reign in Christ, its purpose is to be revealed and revealed more and more (vv. 21-25). This kingdom grows without human agency and yet will embrace the whole earth.

Jesus finished his day exhausted enough to sleep through a storm, but alert enough when awakened to recognise demons and to arouse faith in his disciples. God's reign was opening up to them. So, today, Christ reigns in the merits of his cross and by the power of his resurrection. This reign we announce, and, under this grace, many good works continue to pour out.

Prayer

Father, I thank you that I have come to understand your gracious reign. I know I am forgiven, through Christ being raised up as Lord. I know that by your word you will bring every good thing to your people and that all nations will come to shelter under your reign. May I not be offended when I find I cannot live without you. May I always glory in the message of the cross. Grant that opposing powers may not distract me but rather that I grow in faith and hope and love. Hear my prayer for the sake of your mercy. Amen.

Chapter 5

None of these healings of themselves could change the world, but they were signs of God's favour and indications of the new age which God would establish in Christ's resurrection. For the third time, demons acknowledged Christ (1:24; 3:11; 5:7). Here was the woman's Seed who would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15) and destroy his works (I John 3:8). (See also Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 16:11.)

This amazing display of God's power in Christ forced the question for pig keepers as to whether God's authority, intruding on their profits, would be accepted. For the moment it was not to be so, nevertheless they would have a telling evangelist among them!

Demons, death and disease all fell before Christ's word. He brought the woman who sought healing anonymously into personal contact with himself, bringing her not only healing but the assurance that she had trusted in God. The synagogue leader's faith was sorely tried but he learned that Christ was greater than death. This Christ, raised from the dead, bids me also to look to him. The world has a gracious Leader and Saviour. Those who look to him are justified now and know they are being prepared for glory.

Prayer

Father, you have entrusted everything to your Son, and I have been brought under his reign. Therefore today Lord, I do entrust to you every need of mine and every responsibility. Grant that the world may learn of your love and see that you have regard for our every need. Through Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Chapter 6

Resentment of a fellow artisan being raised to prominence seems to lie behind the Nazareth rejection. Whatever, the result was serious. If his miracles were not from God, the remaining conclusion for them would be that they were from Satan. But we are simply told here that they missed out on the gracious reign of God to relieve their distresses and to bring light into their darkness. The work of Jesus now broadened out by his sending the twelve to do as he was doing, and those who rejected them virtually became Gentile or unblessed territory (dust to be removed from the messengers' feet).

Calvin said: 'a bad conscience is the mother of all heresy.' So here, those not yielded to the grace coming to them in Jesus Christ could not have a right view of his person. Certainly not Herod Antipas. He feared John the Baptist, and was grieved profoundly (the same word is used of Jesus in Gethemane) to have him killed, but fear could not shake the passions that ruled his life. He needed the love that would come if he yielded to God's grace in Christ.

Of this grace, there was an abundance. Jesus had compassion and called his disciples to share in that compassion by giving the crowd something to eat. Then he revealed the greatness of God's love for these people. This great miracle did not penetrate even the hearts of the disciples. They needed further encouragement in the storm. But still the blessings came in abundance.

Prayer

Father, the world, and I also, have been slow to yield our affections to Christ in response to his grace. Therefore, even while surrounded with mercy, we have been without understanding and have not followed in his path. Father, forgive me, and have mercy on us all. I thank you that even now, the signs of your grace are clear in the preaching of the gospel and in the favours shown to your people. May your grace triumph at last! Make us bold by your love and willing to be servants of your reign, through Jesus Christ whom you have exalted. Amen.

Chapter 7

Scribes and Pharisees had regulated what was meant by various commands of God so that they did not have to deal with the intention of what God had commanded any more. They had done this by focusing on externals that gave them standing with men. Also, they could ignore how far they were from pleasing God. Clearly God is concerned with what is coming from us and his grace is intended to flush out our pollution with love.

The Gentile woman's 'bowing down' and 'begging' and eating dog's crumbs in order to receive a favour from Christ stand in marked contrast to the Jew's polluted affections.

Mark then chose a story which fulfilled Isaiah 35:5, a passage which Jews believed Messiah would fulfil. That Jesus did all things well is shown in how he healed the deaf mute. But the sigh of Jesus is typical of his being deeply moved when confronted with the many faceted debilitations of Satan.

Prayer

Father, forgive me because I have avoided love by merely being busy, and not heeded what was important to you because I loved the praise of peers. I thank you that your Son has not only opened up these troubles of the heart but borne them in his sufferings. He has loved you perfectly and loved us most profoundly, and in him, I know I am healed. Surely, he has done all things well, and has brought me to you, gracious Father. Have mercy on our race as it continues its unthinking busyness. Save us from all of Satan's works through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter 8

Compassion again led Jesus to talk to the disciples about doing something for a hungry crowd. They could think of no way of doing this although they had witnessed the earlier miracle. Jesus miraculously fed the crowd again.

At this time, the Pharisees could not see any value in the signs already done and wanted one to suit themselves. Then, the disciples could not understand what Jesus meant in warning them about the Pharisees. Was it that they could see no fault in them? Their underlying guilt made them think of something they had not done, but that meaning was meaningless in the light of Jesus' miracles. The grace in Jesus' compassion had not yet enlarged their own affections and so they thought in terms of guilt rather than grace. This was the leaven Jesus warned them about, however Jesus continued to heal, again a blind man.

The right time had come for Jesus to bring the 'Who' question into the open. Whatever limits there were in the apostles, Peter was clear that Jesus was not just a prophet raised from the dead but Messiah, the hope of all Israel. Moreover the truth drew the disciples into still stranger territory: a murder, a resurrection, and those who believed following in this path of 'losing' their life to have what Christ would bring them. The disciples had believed in Christ and must now continue to believe in him through this tragedy and triumph. To do otherwise would be to follow Satan and not God and would result in no Advocate on judgment day.

Prayer

Our Father, I come to you in Jesus' name. It has been your purpose that he be made an offering for sin, and you have raised him up to give us all new life. Forgive my slowness to see the breadth of your compassion revealed in Christ. Let me see your glory, the glory you revealed in the death of your Son. Save me from crippling self-reliance. Save me from protecting myself. Father, may the greatness of your grace and the breadth of your compassion make me a servant of the cross to all. Amen.

Chapter 9

The disciples were now wrestling with inability to understand and follow Jesus. Some would not die without seeing the kingdom come in power. This encouragement probably indicated the transfiguration as the beginning of all the actions that would lead to Christ's enthronement.

The Father spoke a second time (1:11) to his beloved Son. Jesus' teaching now included the cross, and, perhaps related to this, the disciples were commanded to listen to him. They may well have listened on the way down the mountain but still could not understand rising from death. Their confusion found expression in a scribal argument that Elijah would have to come first. For the scribes, this was a reason not to believe in Jesus, but for Jesus, it was the opportunity to explain that John the Baptist was (figuratively) the Elijah who would come before Messiah. Jesus had seen the restoration of Israel, as far as it could go under John the Baptist: many had been baptized in preparation for the coming of their Messiah. However this fell far short of the regeneration which Jesus knew was needed. He knew the Scriptures that indicated sufferings for Messiah.

In the meantime, grace continued to be shown to the needy. The disciples struggled to believe in the power and grace of God that would reach again and again to broken lives, and Jesus wondered how long he would have to endure them. Even the needy parent was driven by desperation to ask for a faith beyond their capacity.

As Jesus continued teaching about his death, the disciples revealed an accompaniment of their unbelief: a quest for greatness. In his death he would bring to them a grace that would finally remove the high mindedness that beset them.. Already, they should learn to serve everyone, to be welcomed as children in their role as apostles, to welcome others who did great deeds in Jesus' name (did he rebuke them for not being able to do a great work themselves?) and to rid themselves of any encumbrance to this gracious service. They should remember the illustration of salt: which like a fire would cleanse and so preserve them; and which as a seasoning they should seek to have in their own persons, sowing the fruit of righteousness in peace (James 3:17-18).

Prayer

Father, we live each day in the miracle of your grace and are summoned to trust you for things we would never have thought possible. Lord, let me be done with my unbelief! It has been nothing but a miserable focusing on myself and a refusal to embrace the grace of the cross that your Son willingly endured. May the joy that your grace has brought lead me out today to serve heartily and to welcome all your servants, for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

Chapter 10

Pharisees sought to stand in judgment on Jesus but must have left dismayed. Law could only be understood by a person who was grateful for God's redemption. Apart from that, its intention was to reveal the extent of sin. These critics had turned Deuteronomy 25 into a permission to divorce when it only provided restrictions for when it happened. They earned the description of being hard hearted. Christ had come as restorer of all God had in mind from the beginning, including marital

faithfulness. Adultery was thought to mean a married person having an affair. Jesus said adultery was also finishing one marriage and beginning another. (See article on this web-site: *The Story of Marriage*.)

Those who came under the reign of God as children seeking blessing would enter the Kingdom. Rich people would find it difficult. The disciples had trouble with both of these points. They still wrestled with grace being undeserved. Little children had done nothing to deserve what they received. Rich people appeared already to have been rewarded by God. But these external facts were no guide to the strangeness of the grace that was present in Christ. Peter then learned that he was a man of grace and had not realised what strange new Kingdom he was in. He had followed Christ. He would not miss his inheritance. But he would not secure anything by being 'first'.

While Jesus thought and taught about his death and resurrection, the disciples continued their debate about self-importance (cf. 8:31-38; 9:30-35). They had no idea of the path to glory that Jesus would tread. A 'cup' and a 'baptism' both suggest going through a judgment and refer here to the cross. There was no way Peter or James could share that. But, in the way of following Christ, in gratefulness for his lonely sufferings, yes, they would share the sufferings of Christ (I Peter 4:13). Nothing could bring a guarantee of status in this kingdom. All the disciples needed to learn that its Lord was a servant, and his role was to cover our fault with his own gift.

'_when *lutron* is used for *kaphar* it always denotes a vicarious gift whose value covers a fault, so that the debt is not just cancelled. Indeed, in the equation *kaphar* = *lutron* the offering is always for a human life' (TDNT 3/329).

It was either need or desperation that drove Bartimaeus to ignore public reserve and shout for help. His call for mercy was addressed to the King. He had pushed through all the obstacles to faith and found the reign of God pushing its way through our slowness to bring healing.

Prayer

Dear Father, your Son has taught us your strange and gracious ways. Forgive the cavalier way in which I have looked to meet minimum requirements rather than to bring you pleasure. Let the fullness of what you have done in Christ, to offer him up as Ransom for me, soften my hardened heart and give me back to my brothers and sisters as their servant. In all of this, I thank you for your patience, and for the sureness in which you are bringing the creation to its goal and secure our inheritance. Amen.