

World Domination

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1 NKJV)

Context

Who, What, Where, When, and Why?

Who: Unbroken tradition from the days of the early church tells us the author of this gospel is Mark. The title "The Gospel according to Mark" was added very early as copies were disputed to the churches. This was necessary so they would know who had actually written the account. There is a Mark, or John Mark, mentioned eight times in Acts and Paul's letters. In Colossians 4:10 he is described as cousin of Barnabas. Mark was a common name in the Roman world so we don't know for sure these references refer to the same Mark who traditionally wrote the gospel. Tradition also tells us Mark was a close associate of the Apostle Peter (cf. Acts 12:12, 1 Peter 5:13) and it is from him he received information to write the account.

What: The term "gospel" (*evangel, joyful tidings*) had a different referent in the first century than today. The term was typically used to describe the "good news" of Caesar's accomplishments; peace, prosperity, law and justice, victory over enemies, an expanding kingdom and so on. Today, when we hear the word "gospel" we think about Jesus death on the cross to pay for our sins. But when Mark used the term he meant it to be understood in its common fashion – but applied to Jesus rather than Caesar. Therefore, he was talking about the good news of peace, prosperity, law and justice, victory over enemies, an expanding kingdom and so on, in Jesus Christ the son of God. If this first sentence acts as a title and an alert concerning the contents of the manuscript (as would be common in an ancient world manuscript), we see this was meant to be a revolutionary account resulting in a paradigm shift of thinking.

Where: Everything Mark writes about takes place in the region of Judea and Galilee. However, the traditional view is that Mark wrote this account while living in Rome.

When: Most Bible scholars believe Mark's gospel was written well before the Jewish revolt of AD 66, perhaps during Nero's persecution of Christians c. AD 64. Some scholars think it was written as early as AD 40 or 50.

Why: It is assumed Mark wrote this gospel to codify the teachings of Peter. It was written at a time when some of the eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry were passing away. It was designed to inform and teach the church, to give them support and strength in times of persecution and to help believers understand the hardship they were enduring

Content

What was the original author concerned with and what did he want his original audience to understand? Furthermore, how would the original audience interpret it?

Mark wants his readers to associate world domination with Jesus the Messiah, the son of God. However, as his account will show, that supremacy has nothing in common with the empire building activities of the Caesars. Nevertheless, it would be understood as an historical event introducing a new situation in the world. Mark indicates a new era began with the coming of Jesus the Christ. Nothing will ever be the same again. Humanity must recognize this.

Unlike the Roman gospel, the gospel of Jesus the Christ is forward-looking. It is not just about history but about the salvific activities of Jesus now and forever. This is something that would have been understood from the words of Isaiah.

Jesus is "Yahweh saves." Thus, this momentous change in worldly affairs is not merely the work of man. God is the one who brings these changes to pass. The eternal son made flesh, Jesus the Christ, or, the anointed one. To be anointed is to be chosen by God to bring covenant stipulations to pass.

Without any explanation Mark designates Jesus the Christ as the son of God. Unlike Matthew or Luke, Mark does not provide a back story. Therefore, this is, once again, the challenge to the cult of the Caesars. In other words, the Caesars were simply proclaimed deity. Jesus is proclaimed deity as well with the very different characteristic of Christ's deity being true. The only apologetic Mark provides for this opening statement is his narrative. He leaves it to the reader to be convinced this is the good news of salvation in Jesus the anointed one who brings about change because he is the eternal Son made flesh.

Consideration

What are the principles found here and how do they apply to the modern Christian?

Modern Christians shy away from the idea of world domination. But this is what Jesus called us to do. He said go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). He commanded his followers to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all things that he commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Part of the revolutionary nature of Mark's opening line is the quality of the world domination his gospel proclaims. It is not realized through military might but through self sacrificial love. Nevertheless, to define his account as a gospel is to lay claim to all that term would have meant to his original audience.

Obviously Mark develops the idea in the body of his narrative but the fact he says it is the gospel of Jesus – Yahweh saves – defines the character of the good news. "Yahweh saves" forces the reader to look back at the Hebrew Scriptures in order to understand the type of good news Mark has in mind. Yes, it remains a proclamation of peace, prosperity, law and justice, victory over enemies, and expanding kingdom and so on but in what way, by what means?

Yahweh saves by his anointed one. Again, the reader must be familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures in order to grasp Mark's meaning. The anointed one in the law and the prophets is ultimately the suffering servant. This re-images the good news. It is a kingdom realized through self sacrificial love.

The kicker of course is that the good news of the "Yahweh saves" Messiah is actually about God himself.

Why then do we hesitate to proclaim this world upending good news? Why do we shy away from telling people that all things are new in Jesus. Could it be because we don't accept the lordship of Jesus in our own lives?

Study Questions

1. *True or False: Mark is identified as the author of this gospel in the New Testament.*
2. *What was the common meaning of the term "gospel" in the first century?*
3. *What passage from Isaiah is cited in the video?*

If you would like input on your answers to the study questions you may message me through myFaithBase.com or email me at mfb@davidericwilliams.com