

# TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

## MARK: AUTHORSHIP & THEMES

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Today we begin the Gospel of Mark, though we won't get into chapter 1 till next week. Instead, we'll look at issues of authorship and themes of the book. So let's begin by asking who wrote the book. This is actually pretty easy, since the entire early church was united in believing the author was John Mark. Mark was a close associate of Paul and Peter; we find him mentioned in a handful of places in the NT. I want to read a few quotes to you from early church leaders who attributed this Gospel to Mark. Let's start with Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor, some time before 130:

*“Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For Mark had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.”*

Then, a quote from Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, about the middle of the second century:

*“Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also himself handed on in writing the things that had been preached by Peter.”*

Next is Clement of Alexandria, a Christian theologian from the late second century:

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*“When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, that those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed [Peter] for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make record of what was said; and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel among those that asked him.”*

And finally, a document called the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, 160-180, contains the following in the preface to Mark:

*“...Mark declared, who is called ‘stump-fingered’, because he had rather small fingers in comparison with the stature of the rest of his body. He was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.”*

That Mark is Peter’s Memoirs found unanimous agreement in the early church. Now I won’t take more time to give evidence for date and place of writing, but suffice it to say there are strong reasons to believe Mark wrote from Rome in the mid 60’sAD. This is significant as a time of persecution.

So, that’s a brief look at Author, Date and Place of writing. Now for the rest of our time I want to give an overview of some important themes in the book. We’ll look at these themes under two headings: First, Mark’s presentation of Jesus, and Second, Mark’s call for a human response to that presentation.

### **MARK’S PRESENTATION OF JESUS**

#### **I. JESUS AS ULTIMATE AUTHORITY**

Mark presents Jesus as the ultimate Authority; this seen in a number of ways. First, in Jesus’ teaching. The Jews were used to bible teachers who cited endless authorities in their teaching to bolster their opinion. But that wasn’t Jesus’ style:

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Mark 1:21-22 And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus didn't need to cite anyone because he's Lord of heaven and earth; the Bible is his production and the Law is his handiwork. The people were continually amazed by how he spoke on his own authority, as if he was somebody special! Second, great authority was revealed in Jesus' dealing with evil powers:

Mark 1:23-27 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

Demon possession was a serious issue then, and it remains one today! Jesus stunned the crowds by commanding demons with a word; these were otherwise hopeless cases! Then we see his authority over our sinfulness and guilt:

Mark 2:5-7 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

The scribes were right, you know; they just didn't realize who they were dealing with. Neither did the disciples, one night on Lake Galilee:

Mark 4:36-41 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was

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in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

If Jesus’ authority over demons and human sin didn’t frighten us, this certainly should. Lastly, consider Jesus’ authority over The Word of God:

Mark 7:18-19 And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” ( Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Who has the right to change the Bible? Or God’s Law? He does this also in chapter 2 where he calls himself Lord of the Sabbath. Enough on Jesus’ Authority.

### **II. JESUS AS SUFFERING SERVANT**

Mark presents Jesus as the ultimate servant of God, along the same lines as the suffering servant in Isaiah:

Mark 1:10-11 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son;<sup>1</sup> with you I am well pleased.”

And Jesus himself makes the same connection later on, in describing his purpose:

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

There you have Jesus as the Servant who gives his life for the many; Mark is drawing from Isaiah’s teaching about the suffering servant of the Lord.

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And you see this idea further by simply observing Jesus' suffering in this Gospel; he is misunderstood, slandered, plotted against, betrayed, abandoned, arrested, falsely condemned, tortured, mocked and crucified. All of this is Jesus performing service for God and the people.

### **III. JESUS AS SON OF GOD**

Well, probably the most important aspect of Mark's presentation is Jesus as the Son of God. This is seen in a number of ways. The most striking is the opening and closing of the Gospel:

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 15:39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he<sup>1</sup> breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

These serve as bookends, enclosing the entire story within twin statements about Jesus as Son of God. Of course there is also Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, in both of which God speaks from heaven and identifies Jesus as his own Son:

Mark 1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 9:7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son;<sup>1</sup> listen to him."

And then, ironically, there's the witness which the evil powers give to Jesus:

Mark 5:7 And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."

So Jesus is presented as The Authority, The Suffering Servant, and The Son of God. Now how does Mark want us to respond to this presentation? With Faith and Discipleship

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## **FAITH AND DISCIPLESHIP**

The issue of faith comes up again and again. Some are set forth as examples of strong faith in Jesus, such as the friends of the paralytic, the leper, and the woman with the hemorrhage. On the other hand, Jesus will rebuke people for their lack of faith, such as the father of the demon-possessed boy, his own disciples, and his whole generation in general. It's obvious that a right response to Jesus requires faith. But faith isn't all. Jesus calls people to follow him as well, sometimes even leaving their vocation and families to do so. Jesus gathers followers, not half-hearted thrill-seekers. Jesus warns that coming after him will mean self-denial and cross-bearing. And the disciple is one who continually attends to Jesus' word and practices obedience to his commands.

## **CONCLUSION**

Jesus is the authoritative, suffering servant and Son of God and he calls for a response to his person and message; the right response is belief and discipleship.