



# Leader's Guide

## Session 1: This Changes Everything

(Please note that this is a "Leader's Guide," not an "Answer Guide." First, I do not have all the answers to the questions that I ask. Second, I believe that you will come up with better answers through the process of discussing the questions with one another. Third, some of the questions can only be answered on an individual basis. The Lord be with you!)

### For Your Consideration Questions:

- 1) It would be helpful if we knew exactly who the author was and his situation in order to better understand some of the things that are written. On the other hand, regardless of who the author was, this Gospel is in our Bible, and it is the Word of God to us today. It actually is interesting that the Gospel is written anonymously, because it means that the author is not trying to influence us by impressing us with his credentials or authority or even his reliability. What this means is that the story of this Gospel stands on its own and calls forth faith and not simply intellectual assent or subscription to an dispassionate set of facts.
- 2) In contrast to the 'glorious' events of Christmas and Easter, Mark focuses more on the inglorious events of Jesus' suffering and crucifixion. In this way, Mark encourages us to realize that faith in Christ is not simply concerned with good stuff like miracles, power, resurrection, and life, but that it also involves suffering service, and perhaps even death.
- 3) Simply note that, after Jesus' baptism, the movement is from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south and that after the resurrection the disciples are pointed back to Galilee. You might want to reflect on the significance of Galilee. There is some hint that Galilee points to the wider scope of Jesus' ministry. As described in Isaiah 9.1, this region is known as "Galilee of the nations," that is, a place that includes both Jews and non-Jews.  
Also note that while 10 chapters have Jesus outside of Jerusalem for an indefinite length of time in his ministry, chapters 11-16 all are located in Jerusalem and cover one week. We hear early on how Jesus is doing things "immediately" and quickly moving from place to place. As we head to Jerusalem, though, the pace slows down dramatically and draws our attention to the centrality of the events that happen in Jerusalem.
- 4) Assumptions:
  - ◆ ability to read (manuscripts were rare, and not many people were able to read) or being in a situation where it could be read to you (hence, it is likely that this document was meant to be shared in a Christian community, not simply passed around like an evangelistic tract to individuals)
  - ◆ unless Mark did not intend the allusion to Genesis 1.1 to be grasped, then we must assume that the reader has some knowledge of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament)
  - ◆ the title "Christ" requires a recognition that it refers to the Jewish Messiah as one who would in some way restore Israel
  - ◆ the title "Son of God" was probably more widely and popularly understood to refer to someone with divine characteristics
- 5) ...
- 6) ...
- 7) John the Baptist's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" is not the same thing as the Baptisms we celebrate in church on Sunday morning. For us, Baptism is a sacrament whereby God welcomes us into the Kingdom of God and delivers us from the power of sin. Or, as Luther says, "In Baptism God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised." Repentance is a change of heart, a regret for having erred, and a commitment to act rightly. Forgiveness is God's gracious way of setting aside our sins for the

sake of Jesus Christ.

- 8) The text is vague about who sees and hears what is going on. According to verse 10, only Jesus is mentioned as seeing the heavens tear apart and the Spirit descending. It is not clear who hears the voice. *But*, you the reader see and hear! We are being given privileged information that helps us form our understanding of Jesus. (By the way, whose voice is it? Are we told? How do you know?)
- 9) The parallels involve a) the "tearing apart" of the heavens /curtain, b) the Spirit descending at the baptism and Jesus expiring (literally, "ex-spiriting"), and c) the voice saying, "You are my beloved Son..." and the centurion saying, "Truly this man was a son of God." By paralleling the two events, we are provided a frame for understanding the Gospel. In particular, we come to realize that the start of Jesus' ministry is fulfilled in his crucifixion.
- 10) Depending on one's relations with god, Jesus' words can be either good news or bad news.
- 11) ...
- 12) The text tells us nothing about what these first disciples knew about Jesus. It also does not tells us why they so promptly followed Jesus, so we can only make guesses. One way to talk about it is that these fishermen were ready for a change and that Jesus gave them the opportunity to make a new beginning. We will learn more about the disciples in Session 3.
- 13) ...
- 14) In Mark 6.7-13 we read about how Jesus sent the disciples out on a mission journey, apparently with some success. More importantly, however, the promise to fish for people is fulfilled after Jesus' resurrection, beyond the end of Mark's account. In spite of the abruptness of Mark's conclusion, we the readers are given some sense of how the story must have continued. (In a similar vein, Mark 1.8 says that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. When does that happen? Pentecost as described in Acts 2?!)
- 15) Mark does not say that Jesus' authority is primarily evidenced by his ability to cast out unclean spirits, though that may well be an additional sign. (Note that Jesus' authority is affirmed in 1.22 *before* he casts out the spirit. Also note the phrasing in 1.27. Though some versions may differ, the best reading is probably that of the NRSV: "A new teaching—with authority! He commands..." instead of "A new teaching. With authority he commands...") The authoritative nature of Jesus' teaching is never fully explained or demonstrated in Mark though it is a n ongoing theme. Additional references to "authority" are in 2.10; 3.15; 6.7; 11.27-33.
- 16) Watch for the various ways that Jesus is addressed by various people (and spirits!). You will note many instances where the 'wrong sort' get the 'right idea.' In this case, the unclean spirit has it right while the people are only starting to glimpse what Jesus is about.
- 17) ...