

Notes Toward Preaching and Teaching the Gospel According to Mark

**Topics in Marcan Theology** (passages relevant to each indicated by Roman numeral after each passage summary below).

- I.** “The Way of the Lord”: The Path Jesus Walks and Disciples Follow
- II.** “Who Then is This?": The Identity and Destiny of Jesus
- III.** The Renewed People/Family of God That Jesus Gathers and its Mission
- IV.** Jesus' Conflict with the Current Custodians of Israel's Spiritual Heritage
- V.** “Whoever Does the Will of God”: Membership in Jesus' Family

**Passage Summaries**, grouped by sections of the Gospel (outline adapted from Joel Marcus, *Mark*, vol. 1, p. 64):

Prologue

- 1:1–8: In fulfillment of God's promises of redemption recorded in Israel's Scriptures (cf. Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1; Isa 40:3, quoted in Mark 1:2–3), a herald is sent to travel in advance the path that the Christ will walk, the same path by which the LORD himself will return to Zion (cf. Isa 40:10–11) to establish a kingdom among his renewed people that will extend over all the nations. **I**
- 1:9–13: Upon identifying himself with God's penitent people in John's baptism, Jesus is acknowledged by God as his “beloved” (cf. Gen 22:2, 12, 16 LXX) “son” (cf. Ps 2:7), in whom he “delighted” (cf. Isa 42:1), thus previewing his destiny as the sacrificed son and suffering servant (by whose stripes God's people will be healed and in whose resurrection they will be renewed with the life of the age to come). **II**
- 1:14–15: Jesus begins preaching “the gospel of God” in Galilee, announcing the arrival of the kingdom/ship of God and the necessity of repentance and faith/trust. **III**

Ministry in Galilee: To the Beginning of Opposition

- 1:16–20: Jesus calls his first disciples to “follow” him in his mission and become “fishers of men” (cf. Jer 16:16, where the image suggests God's regathering of his people after he has purified them from idolatry and faithlessness). **III**
- 1:21–45: Proclaiming [the kingdom of God] and exorcism/healing (restoration and purification/sanctification of the people of God) are the foundational activities of Jesus' mission (cf. Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20). **III**
- 2:1–17: Jesus, as “the son of the Man” (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*, v. 10), not only exercises divine power to heal but also claims the divine power to forgive sins and restore sinners to the people/family of God (cf. Dan 7:13–14, 17–18, 21–22, 26–27). **II**
- 2:18–3:6: Pharisees (and others) oppose Jesus' seeming freedom with respect to the Law as traditionally interpreted because they fail to recognize who he is and what his arrival means. **IV**

Ministry in and around Galilee: Conflict Intensifies

- 3:7–21: As Jesus' following within Israel grows, he appoints twelve “patriarchs” for the renewed people of God (cf. Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30). **III**

- 3:22–30: Scribes from Jerusalem attribute Jesus’ ability to exorcise to possession by Beelzebul (i.e., “the Satan” of 1:13). **IV**
- 3:31–35: Relationship to Jesus (and membership in the renewed people of God) depends not on bloodlines but on obedience to the will of Jesus’ Father. **V**
- 4:1–34: The seed sown in Jesus’ ministry (which reveals the condition of the hearts of those who receive it, vv. 1–20) will by God’s power have an effect out of proportion to its modest beginnings (vv. 26–32). **III**
- 4:35–41: Jesus exercises the power of God to still the sea (cf. Ps 107:23–30), so that disciples wonder, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:41) **II**
- 5:1–20: Jesus exorcises a legion of demons from a sufferer in gentile territory and authorizes publication of this news there. **III**
- 5:20–43: The power of God at work in Jesus heals one daughter of Israel through her trust (a.k.a. “faith,” *pistis*) and “raises” another to restored life thanks to the trust of her father. **III**
- 6:1–6a: Trust in Jesus as God’s anointed is needed to open ourselves to the good that God would do us. **V**

#### Ministry throughout Galilee: Jesus Feeds His Flock

- 6:6b–13, 30: The mission of the fellowship Jesus forms depends on trust in God and his provision through those who are receptive to the preaching of his kingdom. **III**
- 6:14–29: John’s path led via arrest (“handing over,” 1:14) to a tomb. [Jesus’ path also leads to “handing over” and a tomb (16:1–8), but Jesus’ tomb is a beginning rather than an end.] **I**
- 6:30–44: Jesus feeds those who seek him out for guidance and healing (cf. 2 Kgs 4:42–44). **III**
- 6:45–52: After praying, Jesus walks on the sea (cf. Job 9:8), seeking at first to “pass by” (cf. Exod 33:17–34:8; 1 Kgs 19:11–13) the disciples in their boat, but he declares, “Be of good courage” (cf. Exod 14:13; 20:20), “I am he/I AM” (cf. Exod 3:14 especially, but also Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10–11), “fear not” (cf. esp. Isa 40:9), and having joined them in the boat stills the wind. **II**
- 6:53–56: Jesus is sought for healing by many in Gennesaret, in the vicinity of Capernaum. **III**
- 7:1–13: Jesus clashes with the Pharisees and scribes over the value of external observance of the Law vs. seeking the good the Law encourages, tradition vs. the word of God. **IV**
- 7:14–22: Jesus draws a general lesson from the particular point of controversy: the evil that originates in a person’s “heart” (the seat of perception, will, and moral decision as well as emotion) is defiling (with examples listed in vv. 21–22) rather than foods entering from outside the body. **V**
- 7:23–37: Jesus drives an unclean spirit from a gentile girl because of her mother’s persistence in faith, then opens the ears and looses the tongue of a man in the predominantly Gentile Decapolis. **III**
- 8:1–10: Jesus again feeds the crowd gathered to hear him or (more likely in the context, cf. 6:53–56, 7:23–37) receive healing from him. **III**
- 8:11–21: The (blind, cf. 8:22–26) Pharisees seek a sign (!), but Jesus refuses; warning his disciples to shun “the leaven [i.e., perspective, mindset] of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod,” Jesus finds the disciples themselves regrettably slow to perceive. **IV/II**
- 8:22–26: Jesus heals a blind man in stages and enjoins him to isolation at home. **III**

### Jesus Teaches His Disciples “On the Way”

- 8:27–30: Jesus polls the disciples on his identity and, receiving a correct answer from Peter (in multiple choice format), enjoins them to silence on this question (cf. 8:26). **II**
- 8:31–33: Jesus begins in stages to reveal to the disciples his destiny as “the son of the Man,” in response to which Peter fails the essay portion of the exam. **II**
- 8:34–38: Jesus draws the lesson from his Christological instruction: those who would “follow after” Jesus must assume a cross in imitation of his example. **I/V**
- 9:1–13: Having promised disciples that some would live to see “the kingdom/ship of God come with power,” Jesus is revealed in heavenly splendor as God’s “beloved Son,” not to be venerated alongside Elijah and Moses (cf. Mal 4:4–5) but to be heeded uniquely; descending the mount of transfiguration, Jesus reveals that Elijah’s (re)sending as promised through Malachi has already come in the ministry of John, and the promises of Scripture still awaiting fulfillment concern “the son of the Man.” **II**
- 9:14–29: Jesus expels a spirit rendering a boy mute and raises him up, counseling faith/trust and entire dependence on God (“prayer”). **III**
- 9:30–32: Jesus offers a second stage of instruction on the destiny of “the son of the Man,” to his disciples’ incomprehension. **II**
- 9:33–37: In response to the disciples discussion of their respective greatness (which reveals their incomprehension), Jesus draws the lesson from his own destiny for leadership in the renewed people/family of God: the one who would be first must be “last of all and servant of all.” **III/V**
- 9:38–50: John (with James?) seeks to limit the power to do good in Jesus’ name, but Jesus encourages self-policing as the disciple’s prior obligation. **III/V**
- 10:1–12: Jesus’ disciples (and all followers of the Law who want to please the one who created humankind as male and female, i.e., naturally complementary beings) recognize marriage as a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, wrought by God. **IV/V**
- 10:13–16: Jesus receives children and insists that we must receive God’s kingdom as children (i.e., insignificant, dependent, subservient, needy, weak). **V**
- 10:17–31: Jesus demands that a wealthy man obedient to the Law (whom Jesus “loved,” v. 21) sell all his possessions to follow Jesus; he laments the man’s failure but offers assurance that God can overcome this and describes the reward temporal and eternal for those who forsake all to follow. **V/III**
- 10:32–34: Jesus instructs his disciples a third and final time on the death and resurrection that awaits “the son of the Man” in Jerusalem. **II**
- 10:35–45: Occasioned by the request of James and John to outflank Peter (and anyone else) at his side in his glory, Jesus draws again the lesson from his destiny for leadership in his community: “whoever would be first among you must be slave of all,” just as “the son of the Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many.” **III/V/II**
- 10:46–52: Jesus heals a blind beggar who perceives him clearly and whose faith/trust secures his healing. **III/II**

### Jesus Teaches in the Temple of His Father in Jerusalem

- 11:1–11: Jesus fulfills prophetic hopes for the arrival of a king in Zion (Zech 9:9; cf. Matt 21:4–5), and the crowd of followers hails him in the language of the Hallel as “the one who comes in the name of the LORD” (Ps 118:25–26), bringing “the coming kingdom of our father David” (v. 10). **I/II**

- 11:12–25: Disappointed by a fig tree that promised him fruit out of season (cf. Jer 8:13; Mic 7:1), Jesus dramatically demonstrates his disappointment in the custodians of the temple, which they have perverted into organized theft; the next morning he and disciples find the fig tree withered, portending God’s judgment on the temple and underscoring the power available to those who trust in God, pray in dependence on him, and practice forgiveness. **IV/V**
- 11:26–12:12: The chief priests and other custodians of the temple challenge Jesus’ authority; he neutralizes their attack and in a parable accuses them as wicked tenants of opposing the “beloved Son” the temple’s true master. **IV/II**
- 12:13–17: Pharisees and Herodians sent to entrap Jesus are taught a lesson in discrimination — and dialectic! (Jesus’ followers are called to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”) **IV/V**
- 12:18–27: Jesus teaches the Sadducees a lesson in scriptural interpretation and the power of the God who raises the dead. **IV(/II, cf. 12:35–37)**
- 12:28–34: Jesus commends as “not far from the kingdom/ship of God” a scribe who approves Jesus’ answer to the (common) question about the greatest commandment(s) and recognizes the love of neighbor as greater than all the apparatus of ritual sacrifice. **IV/V**
- 12:35–37: Jesus offers a riddle about the descendant of David whom David honors as Lord (in the OT text most often quoted in the NT, Ps 100:1, as expositing Jesus’ resurrection): whose son is he, really? **II**
- 12:38–44: Jesus warns against the scribes’ pretense of religion and their rapaciousness, and he celebrates the humble but sacrificial voluntary gift of a poor widow. **IV/V**
- 13:1–37: Jesus prepares his followers for the destruction of the temple, the attendant distress and potential apostasy, and the coming glorious advent of “the son of the Man” to gather his chosen ones: “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch” (KJV). **III/II**

### Jesus’ Passion

- 14:1–2, 10–11: The chief priests and scribes seek Jesus’ arrest by stealth and find an opportunity in the greed of one of the Twelve. **IV**
- 14:3–9: In the home of Simon the leper, Jesus commends a woman for her sacrificial voluntary gift of a pre-burial anointing in the home of a leper: “wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.” **II/V**
- 14:12–25: Jesus celebrates Passover (the festival recalling the deliverance of God’s people from death and their liberation from bondage) with the Twelve (one of whom will hand him over) and other disciples, interpreting the most mundane elements of the meal (bread and wine as staples, the rest of the meal as extraordinary) as anticipating his impending sacrifice and offering his followers a share in his passion (and resurrection).<sup>1</sup> **II/III**

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<sup>1</sup> Note Mishnah *Pesachim* 10:3–4: “And in the time of the Temple they would bring before him the carcass of the Passover offering. They mixed for him a second cup of wine. And here the son asks his father [questions]. But if the son has not got the intelligence to do so, the father teaches him [to ask by pointing out:] ‘How different is this night from all other nights! For on all other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread. But this night all of the bread is unleavened. For on all other nights we eat diverse vegetables, but on this night, only bitter herbs. on all other nights we eat meat which is roasted, stewed, or boiled. But this night all of the meat is roasted. For on all other nights we dip our food one time, but on this night, two times.’ In accord with the intelligence of the son the father instructs him. He begins [answering the questions] with disgrace and concludes with glory, and explains [the Scriptures from], *A wandering*

- 14:26–31: Jesus predicts the disciples’ rupture and his restoration of the fellowship he has just sealed in their Passover observance. **III/V**
- 14:32–42: While Jesus watches and prays, surrendering himself to his Father’s will, the disciples sleep (cf. 13:33–37). **III/V**
- 14:43–52: The rupture of the fellowship begins in earnest, as Judas leads a crowd sent by the chief priests, elders, and scribes to arrest Jesus, who thus begins to walk the path on which John the Baptist preceded him (cf. 1:14). **I/III/IV**
- 14:53–65: Interrogated before the high priest and his council, who seek any pretext for disposing with him (specifically falsified threats against the temple, cf. Jer 26; Acts 6:12–14), Jesus is silent until asked about his unique relationship with the Father, which he will not deny. **IV/II**
- 14:66–72: Peter denies Jesus, to his regret.<sup>2</sup> **III**
- 15:1–15: Presented with Jesus as a royal pretender by the chief priests (v. 12), but recognizing the chief priests’ “envy” as the motive for this (v. 10), Pilate offers the crowd a choice between “the king of the Jews” and *Barabbas*, “the son of the father” (cf. “Abba,” 14:36). [Note the comment by Joel Marcus: “One ‘son of the father’ ... has tried in vain to usher in the heavenly *Abba*’s dominion through revolutionary violence against the Romans; the other succeeds in doing so by dying on a Roman cross. The genius of our scene is well expressed in Samuel Crossman’s Good Friday hymn: ‘A murderer they save; the Prince of Life they slay’ (‘My Song Is Love Unknown,’ 1664).”<sup>3</sup>] **I/II**
- 15:16–32: Pilate’s soldiers sadistically mock Jesus, “the king of the Jews,” and crucify him on this charge, while bystanders mock him in his shame and suffering. **I/II**
- 15:33–41: Devoting himself wholly to the Father’s will (cf. 14:36), Jesus dies abandoned, seemingly even by God (cf. Bauckham, “God’s Self-Identification with the Godforsaken”), mocked by the centurion overseeing his execution as “a god’s son” (who speaks the truth without realizing it, like the Roman soldiers who hail Jesus as king of the Jews; for this interpretation, see Juel, *Mark*, pp. 227–8), and attended only at a distance by the women who traveled with his company from Galilee; but his death ransoms captive humanity (10:45) and moves the Father to release his sanctifying presence from the temple to fill the earth (15:38). **I/II/III**
- 15:42–47: Following the path marked out by John the Baptist (cf. 6:29), Jesus (3X noted as dead; cf. the Apostles’ Creed: “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried”) is laid in a tomb by Joseph, who looked for the reign of God; Jesus’

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*Aramean was my father ...* (Dt. 26:5ff) until he completes the entire section” (trans. Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* [Yale University Press, 1988], pp. 249–250).

<sup>2</sup> There is an insightful treatment of this scene in “The Face of the Faceless,” chapter 10 of David Bentley Hart’s *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies* (Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 166–82.

<sup>3</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark*, vol. 2, p. 1036. Marcus also notes two striking details in the interrogation by Pilate in 15:2: First, “Jesus employs none of the respectful rhetoric (‘my lord,’ etc.) that might be expected from a low-class provincial on trial for his life before the supreme Roman official in Palestine (contrast the deferential address to officials from Christians in the trial scenes in Acts 24:10; 26:2–3, 19, 25–27). By ‘answering back,’ rather, he displays the very royal consciousness that he is being interrogated about, since no one would dare to answer a ruler in this way unless he felt himself to be somehow his superior” (p. 1034). Second (p. 1035), Jesus’ silence and Pilate’s amazement each bring to life aspects of Isaiah’s portrait of the Suffering Servant, who “opened not his mouth” before his accusers (Isa 53:7), and before whom “kings shut their mouths” in amazement (Isa 52:15).

devoted and faithful women observe his resting place, which they evidently suppose to be final (cf. 16:8). **I/III**

Epilogue: The Empty Tomb and the Summons

•16:1–8: Coming to honor Jesus in death, the women find the tomb where his body was laid opened, and learn there from an angelic young man in white (cf. Ezek, chaps. 9–10; Dan 10:4–7) that he has “been raised up” from among the dead (by God, contra ESV “has risen”) and wills to renew fellowship with his disciples — even Peter! — in Galilee; at this news, the women are astonished and depart the tomb in fear. [FREEZE FRAME: how did the women respond, and if they told the men, what did they do?]

**I/II/III/IV/V**

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- \_\_\_\_\_, “God’s Self-Identification with the Godforsaken in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 254–68
- Robert Jensen, “How the World Lost Its Story,” *First Things*, October 1993 (<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/how-the-world-lost-its-story>). Suggests as a model for contemporary preaching: Tell me the story of Jesus, so that we may all discover our story in that of Jesus.