**The Four Gospel Accounts**

***#1478***

**Part 2: Mark**

**Baxter T. Exum (#1478)**

**Four Lakes Church of Christ**

**Madison, Wisconsin**

**December 9, 2018**

This morning I would invite you to turn with me again to the four gospel accounts. **\*\*PPT\*\*** Last week we started something of an overview based on a request that came in from one of the women of this congregation. She was asking for “a sermon comparing and contrasting the four gospel [accounts]; studying the differences and why they are important.” By way of brief review, we learned last week that there is a benefit to having four accounts as opposed to just one. We learned that there is a huge value in getting different points of view, and so we appreciate these perspectives.

As we continue in this study, I would mention again the value of a book that I have highly recommended in the past, **\*\*PPT\*\*** *A Harmony of the Gospels (NASB)*, by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry. Whenever we study pretty much anything from one of the four gospel accounts, there is a huge value in seeing the four accounts laid out in a parallel way. Again, this is available on Amazon for less than $25, and they will get it to you in a day or two at the most. This morning, one of these was placed in the church library in memory of brother Walt, so if you are waiting for your book to come in, you can check this one out or at least look at it this morning if you’d like to see one before you get one of these for yourself. But this is a valuable Bible study tool that I would highly recommend. And it is now on the shelf in our church library.

Last week we had a handout, **\*\*PPT\*\*** if you need another one, these are coming around again this morning - just take one and pass it on - and there are also several in the back room again. And for those who were not here last week, we have a grid on one side and a reading guide on the other. I don’t know how all of you read the Bible, but this has been helpful to me in the past, so I am passing it along to all of you.

On the grid side, we started last week, of course, by looking at Matthew’s Gospel account. **\*\*PPT\*\*** Matthew was written by Matthew, which is his Greek or Roman name, and he is also known as Levi, which is his Jewish name. Matthew was a tax collector who wrote his account of the life of Christ at some point in the 60’s AD. He wrote primarily to his fellow Jews, to convince them that Jesus really is the KING, the MESSIAH. Matthew, therefore, focuses in on Jesus being the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, and his book is full of quotes from the Old Testament, proving to the Jewish people that Jesus is the one they’ve been looking for. Over and over again, we have Matthew saying something like this, ***“Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet,”*** and then we have a direct quote from Isaiah or Jeremiah or whatever. We learned last week that Matthew is structured around five major sermons. And tying in to Jesus being the Messiah or King, we have a huge emphasis on the ***“kingdom”*** in Matthew - the ***“kingdom of God,” “the kingdom of heaven,”*** and so on. There’s also an emphasis on Jesus’ ***“authority.”*** As God’s chosen King, Jesus has the authority to rule in our lives. And then, as a King, Jesus also has many ***“disciples”*** or ***“students.”*** He is worthy of being followed. And in closing, we learned that Matthew’s gospel account is concise; there are no wasted words, but every word seems to be very carefully chosen.

This morning, we continue by moving over into Mark’s gospel account. **\*\*PPT\*\*** And we start with what might seem obvious, but the author of Mark is Mark! As we know, names can be somewhat common, though, so it might help to narrow this down to the man who is also known as ***“John Mark.”*** In Colossians 4:10, we find that this Mark is a cousin to Barnabas. John Mark apparently worked quite closely with the apostle Peter (we have a reference to this in 1 Peter 5:13, where Peter is sending greetings at the end of his first letter, and he says, ***“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”*** Some of the so called “church fathers” from early church history tell us of a tradition that Mark served as Peter’s interpreter as they traveled together. So, Peter would preach and teach, and Mark would translate. They were close to each other, and so it’s no surprise that Mark seems to base much of his gospel account on eyewitness testimony from Peter. Some have noticed that he seems to be writing from Peter’s point of view. With this in mind, the book is not necessarily chronological; but instead, he seems to be writing about things that happened, but in not particular order. We think of biographies we might read today: Some are arranged chronologically, but others are not. Some just focus in on things that happened, with no real emphasis given to a timeline. That is what we find in Mark.

He is also referred to in a similar way somewhat later by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:11. Near the end of his life, Paul says, ***“Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.”*** And this reminds us of the tension between Paul and Barnabas at the beginning of the Second Missionary Journey in Acts 15. After Paul and Barnabas get home from the first journey, we pick up with Acts 15:36-41,

***36 After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. 40 But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.***

So, it seems that Mark had bailed at some point on the first journey, and Paul didn’t want to go through that again. Barnabas, though, didn’t want to write the young man off permanently as a quitter. Paul and Barnabas, then, get into it. And the disagreement was so intense that they had to separate. They went on two different journeys instead of one together. But this Mark seems to also be the author of Mark. And as we learned from that passage in 2 Timothy, Paul seems to smooth things over with Mark toward the end of his life. As he is about to be executed in Rome, Paul calls for Mark, ***“who is useful to me for service.”*** But the point here is: John Mark is the author. Mark, by the way, is not one of the apostles (unlike Matthew and John). So, Mark is the first non-apostle to write a gospel account.

Continuing on our chart, **\*\*PPT\*\*** it seems that Mark writes his gospel account at some point in the 50’s AD, which makes Mark the first of any of the accounts to be written. Last week we learned that Matthew was probably written in the 60’s, so that means Mark is writing roughly a decade earlier. Mark goes first!

And connected to this, **\*\*PPT\*\*** Mark seems to be writing to a Roman audience, and by Roman I mean Christians in the city of Rome. Mark seems to be encouraging Christians who were going through a time of persecution, and so there is an emphasis on suffering in this book. In Mark 10:30, for example, Mark actually uses the word ***“persecution”*** when the other accounts do not. I hope that you can turn there with me. It is very obvious if you are using a Harmony of the Gospels, but notice the emphasis on persecution. We’ll start in Mark 10:29. In context, Jesus has just dealt with the Rich Young Ruler, telling him to sell everything and give it to the poor, Peter responds privately as the man walks away sad, and Peter says to Jesus, ***“Behold, we have left everything and followed You.”*** Jesus responds in verses 29-30, ***“Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.”*** I just want to emphasize that Mark has Jesus using the word ***“persecutions.”*** That word is not found in Matthew and Luke. So, this is evidence of Mark emphasizing persecution. As he writes to the church in Rome in the 50’s AD, he knows that those people need some encouragement, and what he’s saying is: Jesus predicted what you are going through, so hang in there - the Lord understands!

We see something similar a few chapters later in Mark 13, starting in verse 8. As Jesus is talking about the persecution leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, he uses a few words in Mark that make it just a bit more graphic than the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke. In Mark 13:9, for example, he says, ***“But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.”*** Matthew and Luke do not mention being ***“flogged,”*** but Mark does. So again, Mark seems to go out of his way to emphasize this idea of suffering or persecution, and he does this because he is writing to the church in Rome as they go through some intense persecution of their own.

So, this emphasis on persecution gives us some insight into Mark’s audience, but we also find that Mark goes out of his way to explain Jewish customs. If you look at the beginning of Mark, notice that it doesn’t start with a genealogy. The Romans didn’t really care about that. The Romans did, though, need some help understanding what in the world was going on with some of those Jewish customs, things that Matthew’s audience would have totally understood. In Matthew, for example, Matthew tells us about how concerned the scribes and the Pharisees were that Jesus’ disciples did not wash their hands before they ate (Matthew 15:1-11). When Mark writes about the same thing, he goes further. Notice, please, this account in Mark 7:1-4 (and notice especially the explanation in parentheses in my translation, starting in verse 3) - Mark 7:1-4,

***1 The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)***

I hope we all caught that: In verses 3-4, Mark explains why this was a big deal. The Romans apparently didn’t care about washing their hands before they ate, but for the Jews this was a matter of spiritual life or death, so Mark has to explain it.

We could also consider just a brief statement in Mark 13:3 where Mark explains that Jesus sat down on the Mount of Olives ***“opposite the temple.”*** A Jewish audience would have known this. They could have seen it in their minds. They had all been to the Mount of Olives. But the Romans had never been there, so Mark had to explain it. We have something similar in Mark 14:12, as Mark says, ***“On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, ‘Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?’”*** So, he doesn’t just refer to the ***“first day of Unleavened Bread,”*** but he explains that this is ***“when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed.”*** The Jews would have known this, but a Roman audience had to have it explained so the story would make sense. In Mark, by the way, we don’t have a single reference to the “Law” or the “Law of Moses.” And again, the reason is, the Romans don’t really care about the Law. Mark, then, is writing to a Roman audience, most likely to the church in Rome itself.

As to Jesus, **\*\*PPT\*\*** Mark seems to emphasize that Jesus is the ***“Son of God.”*** Some have seen an emphasis in Mark on Jesus as the “Suffering Servant.” I’ve put an article in the cubbyholes that has an interesting acrostic spelling out “SUFFERING SERVANT” along with a pretty good summary of what is in each chapter (almost like the ABC’s of Acts that we’ve used here before). But even more often than the “Suffering Servant,” we have Jesus described in Mark as the ***“Son of God.”*** We have testimony from God himself in 1:11 and 9:7. The demons testify that Jesus is the Son of God (in 3:11). And then, toward the end of the book, we have the Roman centurion confessing at the Lord’s death (in Mark 15:39), ***“Truly this man was the Son of God!”*** And again, when we remember that Mark is most likely writing to Rome, it’s interesting to me that Mark remembers: There was a ROMAN among the early believers that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God. And the confession of the Roman centurion is only found in Mark, not in the other gospel accounts.

When it comes to big ideas in Mark, **\*\*PPT\*\*** we see an emphasis on the POWER of Jesus, almost as if he is a superhero of some kind, which he is, of course! He does amazing things that are not possible - from the opening chapter all the way through to his death and resurrection. One author reminds us that, “Mark gives more space to the miracles than any other Gospel; for it records eighteen out of a possible total of thirty-five.” So when we add up all of the miracles in all four accounts, we have a total of 35. Eighteen of those are found in Mark. And this ties in to Jesus being the Son of God. Mark makes the claim, and then he sets out to prove it, to demonstrate Jesus’ power. We think about that passage we studied in our Sunday Bible class [last week]. As Jesus heals the paralyzed man in Mark 2, he actually says, ***“My son, your sins are forgiven,”*** and he seems to do this to prove that he is the Son of God, that he does, in fact, have the power not only to heal, but also to forgive. And then, of course, the book closes with Jesus giving his apostles the power to perform miracles as well. So, this power is transmitted, it is gifted. And this power given to them allows them to prove to others that Jesus really is the Son of God. This power, by the way, is almost undercover at times. He heals, but often in Mark, he tells certain people not to tell anybody what he did. And when we study this in Mark, many times when he tells them not to tell, he is in a Jewish area of some kind, but when he allows somebody to tell, he is usually in more of a Gentile setting. And again, this is especially interesting considering the audience - like the Romans, the Gentiles were the only ones who could truly handle the truth about Jesus. Mark, then, is telling his readers: Be like those Gentiles over in Palestine. Be convinced by his power just like they were!

As to the arrangement **\*\*PPT\*\*** of Mark, we could almost say that there isn’t any! This is a book of non-stop action. And really, these last few categories could almost be combined. We see Jesus doing things, powerful things, especially in the first part of the book - one amazing thing after another - healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding thousands, walking on water, and so on. There is something of a slowdown toward the end of the book, as we get to the last few days. But overall, Mark emphasizes action. Last week, you might remember how Matthew is arranged around five of Jesus’ major sermons. Mark, though, only tells us about one of those sermons (in Chapter 13). Remembering that Mark is writing to Rome, he knows that Romans love action, and Mark delivers.

As to key words, **\*\*PPT\*\*** the word ***“immediately”*** is repeated over and over in Mark, more than 40 times! And this ties in to the interesting facts. **\*\*PPT\*\*** We’ve touched on this a bit here and there already today, but Mark is a book of fast-paced ACTION. “Breathless” is a word that comes to mind. And that’s where we get back to the word ***“immediately”*** - more than 40 times, primarily in the opening chapters. Just in Chapter 1, you might want to underline or highlight the use of the word ***“immediately.”*** I think I found it ten times just in Chapter 1! In verse 10, we have Jesus ***“immediately***” coming up out of the water. In verse 12, ***“Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.”*** In verse 18, ***“immediately”*** the apostles left their nets and followed Him. In verse 20, ***“immediately”*** Jesus calls James and John. In verse 21, they go to Capernaum; and ***“immediately”*** on the Sabbath He enters the synagogue and begins to teach. In verse 28, ***“immediately”*** the news about Him spreads everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee. In verse 29, ***“immediately”*** after they come out of the synagogue, they come into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. In verse 30, Simon’s mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and ***“immediately”*** they speak to Jesus about her. In verse 42, ***“immediately”*** the leprosy leaves the man who is cleansed. In verse 43, Jesus sternly warns the man and ***“immediately”*** sends him away. And this is just in Chapter 1. Mark loves the word ***“immediately.”***

He also loves the word ***“and.”*** As I just briefly alluded to last week, Mark is shorter than Matthew (16 chapters as opposed to 28 in Matthew), but Matthew is concise. In Matthew, every word seems to be carefully chosen. Mark, though, as I mentioned last week, comes across like a 4-year old telling you what he did at his grandparents’ house at Thanksgiving. He’s excited, almost rambling. The book comes across almost like one long run-on sentence. And it focuses in on ACTION. It’s just one long string of everything Jesus actually DID, “Jesus went here, and he immediately did this, and then he did this, and then he healed this person, and immediately he traveled over here,” and on and on and on. It’s hard to know where to take a breath when reading the book of Mark.

Some of you might remember that Jerry Jenkins came from Alabama to preach twice in Madison nearly twenty years ago, and his two sons, Dale and Jeff, have a blog. I found one of their old blog posts as I was preparing for today’s lesson, and they point out that,

[Mark] tells us in sixteen chapters what John took 21 to do, Luke 24 and Matthew 28 chapters to record. In the first 20 verses [Mark] has Jesus born, baptized, tempted in the wilderness, preaching and the disciples called! Matthew doesn’t get all that done till chapter five and in Luke’s rendition it takes 225 verses to get all that done!

In terms of interesting facts, they also point out that,

In Mark you have Jesus connecting with individual’s lives MORE than in the other accounts: Get-it-done people tend, if not careful, to ignore others as we move from project to project; or worse, toward using people to accomplish our ends. Jesus didn’t do that. In Mark, [Jesus] shows us how to accomplish WHILE caring. In the first 30 verses He has interacted directly with at least 21 people, helped a possessed man to find peace, raised up a friend’s hurting mom, and healed MANY people. You see Him moved with compassion (verse 41) rather than irritated by the troubles of others that might slow Him down.

So, this is a good reminder, that although Mark is fast-paced, Jesus still takes time to care for people, and that seems to be a good reminder for us. As busy as we are, as much as we also rush from place to place, Jesus is our perfect example: Although he had so much to do, Jesus still paid attention to people individually.

And we cannot miss the last bit on the wall up here. There is a chance that Mark is the naked guy! You might want to turn with me to Mark 14. As Jesus is betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane, he is arrested, and Mark tells us in Mark 14:50 that all of Jesus disciples left him and fled. The other gospel accounts pretty much leave it at that, but Mark goes a bit further! And there is some speculation as to why. Notice what the text tells us in Mark 14:51-52, ***“A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.”*** That’s a rather strange reference, isn’t it! Some of you might not have realized that we have a streaker in the Bible! Why does Mark tell us about this when the others do not? Some have suggested that Mark writes himself into his own account here. And if this is true, this is basically Mark’s way of saying, “I was there!” And assuming this is true, not only was he there but he also ran away just like all of the others. And so it might be Mark’s way of admitting his own weakness, “I let the Lord down, just like everybody else.” I obviously wouldn’t swear my soul on this being Mark, but I can’t think of any other reason for this being in there. But I did want to at least mention this in the “interesting facts” category.

**Conclusion:**

We’ve come to the end for today, **\*\*PPT\*\*** but hopefully we can get back into it next week by continuing with Luke. If you have a chance, I would encourage all of us to read the book of Mark this week. Yesterday afternoon I asked Google how long it would take to read the book of Mark, and all kinds of charts popped up. There are charts listing the time it takes to read each book of the Bible. And Mark apparently takes about an hour and a half, about 90 minutes. That’s about how long we might spend watching Netflix. Many of us spend more than 90 minutes driving each week. Have your phone read it to you. But I am hoping that we can try to read Mark this week as we keep an eye out for some of what we’ve learned today.

I am especially thankful for the songs we’ve been able to sing this morning. We’ve been singing about Jesus, and in just a moment, we’ll be singing about the “Wonderful Story of Love.” The book of Mark is a love story. The book of Mark is an account of everything Jesus did for us. It’s a story we never get tired of hearing. It’s a story we never get tired of telling. In Mark, we’ve learned that Jesus is the all-powerful Son of God, a man of action who came here to save us from sin. And right at the very end of Mark, **\*\*PPT\*\*** Mark gives us some of the Lord’s last words on this earth as he says to his disciples, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*** We respond to Mark’s account, then, by believing in Jesus. Do you believe in Jesus? Have you really looked at the evidence? Have you considered these four eyewitness accounts? Like the centurion, do you believe that he is the Son of God? If you do, **\*\*PPT\*\*** then know that he is telling the truth about the importance of baptism, ***“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”*** We would love to help you with this in any way we can. If you are interested in studying further, get in touch. But if you are ready to obey this good news right now, we invite you to let us know right now as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing…