

The gospel according to Mark is Mark's attempt to paint a vivid picture of who Jesus and what he came to accomplish. That is, Mark wants you, the reader, to grasp both the identity and the mission of Jesus. In order to make sense of this we have to remember the setting of the story Mark is telling.

The setting is Israel approximately 2000 years ago. Israel is in a unique spot in their history as a nation. You see they are no longer scattered in exile, but they still feel scattered in the land. In large measure they are all back in the promised land, but it is far from what God has promised. Israel is waiting for God to act. They are back in the land but they do not have a sense of God's presence and blessing because though they are back in the land they are still oppressed and harrassed by Roman rule, a pagan nation. Israel lives under the thumb of Rome. On the one hand they feel oppressed and harassed by Rome and on the other hand, with respect to God, they feel alone. Though there are positive signs, a return to the land and the re-building of a temple, they are all too aware that God has not arrived in the power and glory that the prophets promised. "Where is God?" is the cry of the first century Israelite. So Israel feels harrassed and Israel feels alone. There was also an increasingly frenzied anticipation for God's arrival. Israel doesn't want to miss out on this. They want to be included in the community of blessing. This is the stage on which Jesus arrives.

I'm not sure about you, but I can relate to Israel. Have you ever felt harrassed and out of control in life. Have you ever felt tormented? Have you ever felt bullied by either a person or by your circumstances or by forces darker and bigger than you? Have you ever felt powerless in the face of things like addiction, depression, or anxiety? Have you ever felt so alone that you look up to heaven and literally cry, "Where are you, God?" Have you ever felt like you are an outsider to God's good purposes for other people? Well, if that is true, you can relate to what is taking place in the story Mark is telling.

This is the stage on which Jesus arrives. And Israel is responding, not all the same, but the response is incredible. Our passage begins by summarizing the tremendous popularity of Jesus' ministry. We get a sense here of the crowd's desire not to miss out on what God is doing in Christ. Starting in v. 7,

*Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea <sup>8</sup> and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. <sup>9</sup> And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, <sup>10</sup> for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.*

Something is different about Jesus. Though the crowds look to him for healing and other miracles, it becomes clear, as Mike has pointed out, that even they don't understand who Jesus really is and what he came to accomplish. But we'll see in our passage that Mark is show us who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish. Specifically we'll see that Jesus has come (1) to defeat darkness, (2) rescue a people, and (3) make them family.

### **Jesus has come to defeat darkness.**

The first thing we'll notice is the way Jesus comes to defeat darkness. Right away in this passage we see Jesus exercising his authority not over Rome, but over the powers of darkness. Isn't this interesting, sometimes God wants to fix a problem that is deeper and behind our circumstances. In v. 11 Mark writes,

*<sup>11</sup> And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."*

Though the prophets and though Israel at the time believed that Rome was their greatest enemy, Jesus comes and pulls the curtain back, as it were, and shows them who the tyrant really is. And we see this particularly in his interaction with the Scribes starting in v. 22,

*<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.*

You see, ever since Genesis 3 when the serpent tempted Adam and Eve, mankind has been under the dominion of a foreign tyrant.

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.<sup>1</sup>*

I find this to be incredibly interesting. Remember that Israel is in the situation she is in because of her own doing. Israel sinned over and over, they rebelled against YHWH. Israel got themselves into the mess they are in. Maybe you can relate. What do you think God's posture toward you is if your spiritually hard heart has brought you all kinds of trouble? While it is true on the one hand that you are morally accountable for your sin, it is also true, on the other, that your sinning is the result of your captivity to sin and satan: "the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers." And Jesus has come to do business with the god of this age. God's posture toward you is one of compassion. We'll see this more as we continue.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2016 (2 Co 4:3-4). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Whether it was merely in his incarnation, his taking on flesh, or whether it was a result of his overcoming temptation in the wilderness, Jesus implies here that he has bound the strong man. The Kingdom of God has broken into this world with his arrival. And he has come to defeat the powers of darkness. Satan is described in this parable as a strong man. That is, he is a bully. He is in charge on the block, until Jesus shows up understandably, and righteously, ticked off. We love this right? Jesus is saying salvation in him is like a father saying to his son, “your brothers and sisters have been kidnapped. They are locked in a house in a bad part of town. Go get them.”

Satan is the strong man, but Jesus is stronger. Jesus is fed up with the town bully and so comes and grabs him by the scruff of his neck so that it is clear to all who is actually in charge.

But he doesn't just come to prove a point to the bully, he comes to first bind him and then in v. 27, “plunder his goods” or “plunder his house.” This is clearly referring to people. The people who have been oppressed by Satan's tyranny. The people who have been harrassed and tormented by the powers of darkness, which, according to the Apostle Paul, is every one of us. It turns out Rome was only a shadow of the true bully Israel was up against.

Isaiah describes the coming Messiah as God's warrior. Mark is steeped in Isaiah so let's listen to Isaiah 49 to shed some light on what Jesus is doing here. Starting in v. 24,

*Can the prey be taken from the mighty,*

*or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?*

<sup>25</sup> *For thus says the LORD:*

*“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken,  
and the prey of the tyrant be rescued,  
for I will contend with those who contend with you,  
and I will save your children.*

<sup>26</sup> *I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh,  
and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine.*

*Then all flesh shall know  
that I am the LORD your Savior,  
and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”<sup>2</sup>*

What others are powerless to do, the LORD almighty is not. It is usually a lost cause when a mighty tyrant has taken captive his prey. What can be done?

“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken and the prey of the tyrant be rescued”

Jesus has come as the fulfillment of Isaiah 49. He has come to “contend with those who contend with you”, that is, he has come to rescue a people by binding the bully.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2016 (Is 49:24–26). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

**Jesus has come to rescue a people.**

This brings us to the second point of our passage. Jesus has not come merely to put a good beating on Satan, but he has come to plunder his goods, to rescue captives, to liberate those who feel harrassed and oppressed by the cosmic tyrant. This is wonderfully good news. Jesus has come, and is present with us now, to rescue a people for himself. But what kind of community has he come to rescue.

What's the significance, let me ask you, of the appointing of the twelve disciples? Starting in v. 13,

*<sup>13</sup> And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and have authority to cast out demons.*

Just as the people of Israel, the twelve tribes, rescued from Egypt were gathered around Moses at the base of a mountain and were covenantally constituted as a nation, as a people, so also here we see Jesus re-gathering Israel around himself.

Why is this significant? It means that when Jesus rescues someone it's not a sidenote or rabbit trail off of God's cosmic purposes for all of history, it is the very fulfillment of God's purposes for redemptive history. That includes you too! Did you know, Christian, that when you were called out of darkness into his marvelous light you were grafted in to the tree of God's most central plan for human history? The best is yet to come, and you get to be part of it!

So, the tyrant is bound. His house is being plundered. Jesus is creating a people around himself. But it actually gets even better than this.

**Jesus has come to make this people family.**

While the heart of our passage is Jesus' encounter with the Scribes in vv. 22-30, we can see that this scene is bookended by an interaction he has with his family. In v. 20 Mark writes,

*<sup>20</sup> Then [Jesus] went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."*

Then after the scene with the Scribes it picks up again in v. 31,

*<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you."*

Now there are some layers to what is going on here. Notice that Jesus has just appointed twelve disciples and has therein created this new community around himself. Now,

Israel's understanding of God's people, up to this point, was primarily biological. Abraham had Isaac and Isaac had Jacob. Though Isaac and Jacob were children of promise, they were still children, biological heirs, bloodline descendents, nevertheless.

Here Jesus' biological family is outside of this house, who think he is crazy, and they are laying claim on him. But Jesus is making a point out of the situation. Inside the house with Jesus, not standing, but sitting in fellowship around him, were his followers. Listen to how he responds to his mother and brothers:

*<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."*

Jesus has come to defeat the powers of darkness and rescue a people for himself, but what kind of a people has he created? Is it a community like the one you have at work? Is it a community like you might find at the rotary club where people bond due to partnership in service projects? No, it's deeper than that. In fact this community that Jesus is gathering around himself is a family that is even more family than your blood family. Did you hear that? The community of rescued captives Jesus has come to gather around himself is truer family than your biological family. You are not a number. In Jesus you have, as John says, . . .

*" . . . become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."<sup>3</sup>*

In Christ you are family. God is now your father who names you with an authority that transcends that of your earthly parents. Jesus is your elder brother. And to your right and to your left sit brothers and sisters and mothers as God's gift to you. This is a tremendous privilege but it is also a calling. When Jesus rescues us and grafts us into this new family—that is, when we are adopted into it—our identity and our most fundamental commitments are transformed. Mark Dever puts it this way,

*"when you became a Christian, you underwent a complete identity shift. Now, you are a new creation (2 Cor. 5: 17); you are a child of God (Gal. 4: 5); you are united to Christ (Rom. 6: 1– 8). Being a Christian is more fundamental to your identity than your family, your ethnicity, your profession, your nationality, your sexuality, your personality— or any other way this world defines identity. And so the unity you share with every Christian supersedes every other bond."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2016 (Jn 1:12–13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>4</sup> Dever, Mark; Dunlop, Jamie (2015-04-16). *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive* (9Marks) (pp. 69-70). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Jesus has come, all that to say, to gather a family around himself. He has come to make outsiders insiders. He has come to those who are alone and harrassed, he has bound the bully, and taken back all that—or better, all who—are rightfully his.

But this family isn't for everyone. All Israel isn't Israel, that is to say. We see in our passage very different responses to Jesus, not at all disimilar from the responses we see to Jesus in our day. Jesus' family thought he was out of his mind. This stuff is nonsense. This stuff is ridiculous. Maybe some here today feel this way. The Scribes response was even more intense, they accused him of not merely being a nutjob, but of being in league with Satan. That is, their response was one of disgust and aversion. They thought he was evil and that what he was teaching and doing was wrong.

And then there are his disciples, those who followed him, those in that house who sat around him. Jesus says about them, "whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

You see, friends, do you remember how at the beginning of our passage Mark writes in v. 11,

*And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."*

It's one thing to know in your head that Jesus truly is the son of God. I wouldn't be surprised if the Scribes really believed in their heads that Jesus was the Son of God; though they, as well as the demons Jesus cast out, hated it. This passage forces us, just by virtue of entering into this story, to respond to Jesus. Is he out of his mind? Is he evil? What do you see when you look at Jesus? Though all around you might agree with his family or with the scribes, when you see Jesus, do you see the work of the Holy Spirit of God? Do you see one who is stronger than the strong man, under whose tyranny you have been captive? Do you see God's warrior who has come to pierce the darkness you have lived in, remove from you your grave clothes, and make you free and make you family? When you look at Jesus, do you see the very heart of God's deepest will for the world being revealed?

Maybe you see the glory of this Jesus but you feel that you may have already committed the unforgivable sin. Is that you? Let me tell you.

"All sins will be forgiven the children of man."

"All sins will be forgiven the children of man."

The only sin unforgivable is if you go to your grave with the Scribes. If you go to your grave attributing the work of the Holy Spirit in the arrival of Jesus to Satan. But if your heart is warmed to Jesus. If by faith, no matter what sins you have committed or for however long your heart has been numb to him, if by faith you see him as a the defeater

of the powers of darkness, God's appointed rescuer and head of the new family he is gathering around himself, you will never be an outsider to Jesus.

So far we I have only asserted that Jesus has come to defeat the powers of darkness, rescue a people, and make them family, but I have not yet addressed *how* Jesus does this. I think if we pay careful enough attention to our text we will see clues. As Mark's story unfolds, we opposition to Jesus increasing. There is a mounting opposition to Jesus. Which begs the question of what will come of his popularity and ministry success. How does this square with Jesus' victory? With his defeat of darkness?

While Jesus does exercise incredible authority over the powers of darkness, he has bound the strong man and he casts out demons, he also tells those demons to keep their mouth shut. Almost as if to say, there is something greater that I came to accomplish than a temporary binding of your boss.

Finally, in this climactic new community he has created around himself, the reconstitution of Israel, we read about the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle that will betray Jesus. Where is this all going?

You see, Jesus came to defeat the powers of darkness, not just daze them. He came to rescue captives, not merely rally them for a time. But how? What kind of victor do we have in Jesus. What kind of savior is Jesus? Let me tell you, he is our kind of Savior. Which is to say, he is a suffering savior. He didn't come in untainted might and strength, but he came, ultimately, in weakness. He entered into your situation. As the story goes on Mark shows us that the opposition continued to build and the scribes' accusations eventually were prosecuted against him. They arrested Jesus, that is, he became a captive. Though he had 10,000 legions of angels at his disposal, he subjected himself to torment. Jesus became bullied, he was struck and mocked and spat on. He was tormented and harrassed by the powers of darkness and ultimately he was crucified in weakness and defeat. He was left all alone. He was made an outsider.

Now listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1,

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is the kind of savior who dies. His victory is accomplished through defeat. His strength is seen in weakness. He was harrassed and tormented and haunted and forsaken

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2016 (1 Co 1:20–25). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

so that all who feel harrassed and tormented and haunted and forsaken might come to him, forever, for real rescue.

So, what is your response to him? Is it, crucify him? Or is, together with the hordes of rescued captives who are being called out of darkness from every corner of the world,

“All hail the son, to him be all blessing and honor and glory and might and majesty and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”





### **Cutting Room Floor:**

“In this climatic confrontation we have Mark’s clearest statement that Jesus’ authority over the demons constitutes the inbreaking of God’s reign, heralding and effecting the demise of Satan’s dominion over humanity.”<sup>6</sup>

“Thus, while many commentators have noted that to reject Jesus, God’s agent of eschatological salvation, is in the nature of the case to cut oneself off from the possibility of forgiveness (e.g., Lövestam 1968: 62), the OT backgrounds suggest a sharper edge. In grieving God’s Holy Spirit by rejecting his messenger who bears his name, Jerusalem’s officialdom is in grave danger of making God himself their enemy.”<sup>7</sup>

“But this again means that to reject Jesus is to exclude oneself from God’s servant community.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (148). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

<sup>7</sup> Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (150). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.

<sup>8</sup> Beale, G. K., & Carson, D. A. (2007). *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament* (150). Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos.