

# Guess Who's Coming to Galilee?



BRYSON SMITH attempts the seemingly impossible task of preaching Mark's gospel in just four parts. Here's how ...

During the late 1960s a movie called "*Guess Who's Coming To Dinner*" rolled out of Hollywood. It won two academy awards and has since become a timeless classic. The movie tells the story of a white, upper class American couple who are very excited about meeting their daughter's fiancée over dinner. They haven't met him before but everything they've heard sounds good. He is a very successful and highly respected doctor. The twist in the movie comes however, when the parents finally open the door to greet their future son-in-law.... and he's *black*!

With this discovery the parents' built up excitement and joy evaporates into a mix of surprise, confusion and shock. He is so different to what they were expecting or wanting.

A good subtitle for Mark's gospel would be, "*Guess Who's Coming To Galilee*." That's because Mark's gospel is also about the arrival of an eagerly awaited person who turns out to be completely different to what others were expecting or wanting. The person in question is of course Jesus Christ. And Mark's gospel quite ingeniously describes Jesus' arrival on the scene in such a way that we truly sense both the anticipation and the unexpectedness of his life and ministry.

## THE STRUCTURE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Even a quick reading of Mark's gospel reveals that it falls into two quite distinct sections. The first half of the gospel (ch 1-8) centres on the question of Jesus' identity, and it is here that Mark chooses to record most of Jesus' miracles. A closer reading of the text further reveals a recurring cycle of miracle and rejection narratives. This can be presented by the following table:

### Cycle 1

miracles (1:14-2:17): Jesus has great authority!

rejection (2:18-4:34)

### Cycle 2

miracles (4:35-5:43): Jesus has greater authority than anyone else!!

rejection (6:1-29)

### Cycle 3

miracles (6:3--56): Jesus has as much authority as God!!!

rejection (7:1-23)

### Cycle 4

miracles (7:24-8:10): Jesus has authority to bring blessings even to gentiles!!!

rejection (8:11-21)

It can be seen from this pattern that each of the four miracle clusters focuses on a specific aspect of Christ's authority. The effect of this is an ever growing picture of Jesus' majesty. This in turn serves to heighten the tragedy of the rejection narratives. The more majestic Jesus is seen to be, the more terrible it becomes that people should reject him.

The first half of Mark's gospel culminates in Peter's identification that Jesus is the Christ (8:22-38). Despite this technically correct answer, the disciples still don't really understand what type of Christ they're dealing with. They are in danger of seeing but not really seeing (8:18). As such the blind man from Bethsaida is a living illustration of the disciples predicament. He could see, but not clearly (8:24).

It is with the second half of the gospel (Mk 9-16) that a truly, crystal clear picture of Christ develops. Far fewer miracles now occur and much more teaching develops. Teaching on the nature of the Christ and His Kingdom receives special attention (eg 9:30-10:52). Furthermore the cyclic pattern of miracle-rejection is replaced by a more sequential pattern of events. This is highlighted by an increase in references to time (eg Mk 14). All of this creates tension and anticipation as the reader senses that events are now moving towards a conclusion.

As the story unfolds Jesus is systematically abandoned by Israel, Judas, the disciples, Peter and finally by God himself. Images of the suffering servant from Isaiah and the Son of Man from Daniel are intertwined as the event all of history has been leading to finally occurs. The Day of the Lord has come. Sin is judged and God's enemies are defeated at the cross.

As in Mk 1-8 the climatic point is reached with a person testifying about who Jesus is. In Mk 8 the testimony was from Peter. Now the testimony comes from a gentile soldier! We are to see that the Kingdom of God has broken free from the confines of national Israel. Now the Kingdom even involves the gentiles -something Mark has been hinting at all through his gospel.

## **PREACHING ON MARK**

The possibilities on preaching from Mark's gospel are endless. For this series it was decided to do something a little different by focussing on the big picture of the book. The entire gospel was covered in just four talks. The reasons for this were three fold:

1. Appreciating the big picture of Marks gospel helps us see how all the individual incidents fit together. Quite often we are familiar with many specific stories without knowing how they relate to each other. We know that somewhere Jesus feeds five thousand people and somewhere else He rides a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and somewhere else Jesus heals a blind man. But often we don't see the full importance of those little events because we don't appreciate the big picture that is happening around them. A series such as this helps people make fuller use of the knowledge they already have. Hopefully this excites them in their own personal reading.
2. People had never been exposed to such an approach to a gospel. The novelty of the series helped make it attractive.
3. The series tied in with the Easter period and several members of the church family said that they appreciated having Easter talks as the culmination of a bigger picture, rather than simply a couple of "one-off" Easter talks.

Despite the above benefits, approaching Marks' gospel from the perspective of a broad overview has its problems. Since so much biblical material is being covered in each talk, there is a danger of saying too much. It's important to remember that in an overview series such as this, the primary focus is not on WHAT Mark specifically records. Instead the focus should be on the pattern of Mark's writing and HOW he records

events. This will in turn help us discover the pastoral reasons of WHY Mark writes in the way he does.

## **PREACHING PLAN**

The four talks on Mark covered the following sections:

Talk 1: Mark 1:1-13

Talk 2: Mark 1-8

Talk 3: Mark 9-13

Talk 4: Mark 14-16

This breakup, in the main, reflects the structure of Mark as discussed above. The one notable exception is the first talk, which only dealt with the first 13 verses of the book. This would seem a disproportionate interest in these verses given the amount of material covered in the subsequent talks. Nevertheless the following points need to be made:

- a) Mark 1:1-13 are pivotal verses which set up the pattern of the entire book. They, like the rest of the book, set up a majestic picture of Christ only to provide an unexpected twist concerning what He has come to do. As such these verses provide a very good way of setting up the series by introducing the overarching pattern of the gospel (see Talk 1 outline for more details).
- b) The early verses of Mark have a very concentrated use of the Old Testament. Concepts such as the Day of the Lord, the Messiah and the suffering servant are all alluded to. Taking time to discuss these helps to develop the proper background for appreciating what Mark intends to teach in his gospel.

## **RESOURCES**

There is a mountain of good material that has been produced on Mark. Lane's classic commentary in the NICNT series is still hard to beat. For an overview series such as this though, Lane can be almost too detailed. Barnett's commentary, "The Servant King", in the Reading The Bible Today series is probably more helpful. Matthias Media have an excellent study book on Mark. It's entitled News of the Hour and is by Peter Bolt. Several bible study groups at DPC were working through these studies at the time of this sermon series on Mark. The two seemed to work very well together. Finally, the Katoomba Christian Convention Tape Catalogue has a very helpful series of tapes by Perspective's own Phil Campbell (Cat No.556-560). These are particularly good for equipping people with the reading skills necessary to appreciate the overarching themes of Mark.

## **OUTLINES**

### **TALK 1 - THE BEGINNING OF THE END**

*Mark 1:1-13*

#### **1.0 GUESS WHO'S COMING TO GALILEE?**

The movie, "Guess who's coming to dinner" was used as an example of the pattern of events that occurs in Mark's gospel (see intro to this article).

#### **2.0 THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK**

We can think of Mark's gospel as falling into two main halves. After a brief introduction, the first half of the gospel consists of a prolonged build up concerning Jesus' identity. In these chapters you get lots of miracles which pose the question, "Who is this man?" Finally the answer comes in ch 8. Jesus is the Christ, God's

appointed ruler of the world. Having now set up the truth that Jesus is the Christ the second half of Mark's gospel then describes what sort of Christ he is, and what it means to follow him. But it's not what we're expecting. There is a huge surprise in store in the second half of the book. Essentially that's how Mark's gospel fits together, a big build up, followed by a big surprise. We'll see more of this over the next three talks. Today we're going to ease into things by simply looking at 1:1-13 because here we get a mini version of the entire book. These verses form an introduction in which we also discover a big build up followed by a big surprise.

### **3.0 A BIG BUILD UP....**

#### **a) ...from the First Sentence**

Mark's very first sentence uses the word gospel. It's a word which means important news, urgent news. When the television says "We interrupt this bulletin to bring you an important news flash...." That's a gospel. And so in his very first words Mark is saying, "Look, I want to interrupt your life to bring you an important news flash. Forget what you're doing, put the paper down, stop day dreaming, turn off the video, this is important - this is big news about God visiting this world!!"

When I was at university I did a subject called the philosophy of religion in which we spent a whole year thinking up arguments to try and prove whether there was a God or not. We looked at the ontological argument and the cosmological argument and the teleological argument. It was all about abstract ideas and complex logical arguments and philosophising about life. Mark says, "You can know for certain whether there's a God because he's been here. If you had lived in the right period of history you could have given God a hug." As it is you can read the first hand accounts of people who did give God a hug. Mark lists three more ways we can see how important this is.

#### **b) ...from the Old Testament**

In v1:2-3 Mark quotes some slabs of the Old Testament for us. They come from Malachi and Isaiah and they predicted what was called the day of the Lord. A day when God himself was going to come and judge sin and set up an eternal kingdom. Mark is saying, "That day has arrived." God has come! The event that the OT has been predicting for thousands of years is finally here. God is coming to fix up the world's problems and deal with sin. You don't get anything more important than this!

#### **c) ...from John the Baptist**

Indeed so important is this day that both Malachi & Isaiah predicted that a messenger would be sent to get things ready for God when he came (v3-4). John the Baptist is that messenger (1:7). He's like a car with flashing lights, letting us know that something important is coming behind.

#### **d) ... from God himself**

In 1:11 God himself tells us how important Jesus is. The verse is a combination of OT quotes from Ps2 & Is 42. In a stroke of absolute genius God identifies Jesus as both the suffering servant and the Messiah. This is a staggering moment in history. Last April Bill Gates flew into Australia. Bill Gates is the chairman of Microsoft computer software and is worth an estimated \$60 billion. He earns \$20 million a day. The Australian newspaper reported, "if Bill Gates were to drop a \$500 note it wouldn't be worth his time to reach down and pick it up." But Mark's gospel says that for all the wealth and power and influence of Bill Gates, Jesus would have more in his little finger. Jesus is the most important person in the world. Mark therefore announces his coming as a gospel, as important news, and the OT predicts Him, and John the baptist announces Him and God the Father himself announces it. That is a big fanfare! And it makes what follows especially surprising.

#### **4.0 A BIG SURPRISE**

Jesus has just walked onto the centre stage of history but in v12-13 it's as if he walks straight off again. Jesus goes walkabout in the desert for a month or so. This is very unexpected. But of course it's only unexpected because we don't think enough like God. From God's point of view this is exactly what Jesus should be doing.

#### **5.0 JESUS: THE ANSWER TO THIS WORLD'S PROBLEMS**

God looks at our lives and he sees that we and our friends and family are sinful people living under the influence of evil forces. Therefore God sees that what we need most is not higher education or full employment or more entertainment or self esteem courses or lots of money. What we need most is to be saved from the forces of evil. So God doesn't send us an accountant or a doctor or a counsellor or a politician. God sends his Son to confront Satan, which is what Jesus starts to do in the desert. And which Jesus will finish doing on the cross. No wonder Mark gives Jesus such a big build up. Jesus comes as THE answer to this world's biggest problem. Does your life reflect it? Are you any more passionate about Christ than you are about your career or your friends or your family? If Jesus is not the most important person in your life, then you don't think enough like God and you don't understand Mark 1:1-13!

#### **TALK 2- WHO IS THIS MAN**

*Mark 1-8*

##### **1.0 BIGGER THAN YOU THINK**

Back in 1985 Sue and I visited the Grand Canyon in America. We were on holidays driving across from the east coast to the west coast of America and the trip had developed into a meandering drive through many of the national parks in central west USA. In fact we'd seen so many scenes of unbelievable beauty that as we approached the Grand Canyon we were starting to think that we might even be a little disappointed. After all, it's just a big hole in the ground, and we had already seen so many extraordinary things! But then we pulled up on the south rim, and we walked over to the edge. And I looked into the biggest landscape I have ever seen in my life. It literally just took my breath away. It is huge. No description and no picture can do it justice or prepare you for it. It is astounding. Now, what I felt concerning the Grand Canyon, is a glimpse of how we should feel about the bigness of Jesus as we read Mark's gospel. As verse after verse goes by Jesus just keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger. Mark very cleverly shows this by the way he puts his gospel together. Especially chapters 1-8.

##### **2.0 THE PATTERN OF MARK 1-8**

###### **a) a pattern of miracles followed by rejection.**

These chapters revolve around 4 cycles in which Jesus first does some miracles and then he faces some level of hostility & rejection. The really interesting thing is that each clump of miracles revolves around a central idea which shows you something extra about Jesus. In other words, in each section of miracles we discover something new about Jesus so that the picture of "who Jesus is" gets a little clearer. We'll very quickly go through the first 3 cycles and then we'll slow down a bit for the 4th cycle.

###### **b) cycle 1**

These mainly involve healing illnesses and driving out demons. They give a basic introduction to Jesus' majesty (eg 2:7). We see that Jesus is a person with amazing authority. Despite this, Jesus is still rejected by the Pharisees and by 3:6 they are already trying to kill him. It's into that context that Jesus starts teaching in parables, so as to sift out the trouble makers from those who are fair dinkum about him.

###### **c) cycle 2**

The next section of miracles revolve around Jesus doing things that no other person has ever done (eg 5:4,

5:26). Finally Jesus does the unimaginable, he brings back a little girl from the dead. In all this, the picture of Jesus is getting both bigger and clearer. Jesus is not just someone with authority, He is someone with more authority than anyone else. Tragically he is still ignored by some.

#### **d) cycle 3**

The 3rd set of miracles focuses on Jesus doing miracles that imitate God. Jesus miraculously feeds 5000 people in an isolated place. And the words which Mark uses deliberately conjures up images of God miraculously feeding Israel in the OT. Jesus walks on water, which is something God does (Job 9). While walking on the water, Jesus uses language similar to the way God talked about himself from the burning bush to Moses. The conclusion: Jesus has equal authority to God! And the sadness of people turning their backs on Jesus, only gets more and more terrible the bigger the picture of Jesus gets.

### **3.0 THE 4TH CYCLE IN DETAIL**

The key for us here is to see that Jesus is now doing miracles in gentile country (7:24-26). Jesus' strange conversation with the greek woman is all about Jesus being so great, and Jesus' blessings being so abundant, that even the dogs (the gentiles) can benefit at the same time. The point is reinforced as Jesus now goes about in gentile country deliberately repeating miracles like the ones he's done among the Jews. It's all showing us that Jesus can bring blessing to anyone and everyone. You don't have to be a Jew! The picture of Jesus has now reached unheard of proportions. The Messiah has come not just for the Jews but for us all. Peter however hasn't understood this yet (8:27-33). He's still locked into thinking that the Messiah will come for the Jews only, to help Israel be a great nation. How can that happen if he's killed? Well its all got to do with the fact that Jesus is a Christ who has come to help all humanity not just the Jews. But more of that next talk.

### **4.0 BIGGER THAN YOU THINK**

For now the truth to grasp is, quite simply, the bigness of Jesus. He is more powerful, and He carries more authority than we can possibly imagine. All of which carries implications for us.

#### **a) obedience**

Jesus is not our equal. He is superior to us. He doesn't ask or suggest or advise. Jesus tells and orders and commands. Is that what Jesus does in your life?

#### **b) trust**

But there's another side to the importance of Christ. We can have a high degree of trust in following someone like Jesus. You will never need for anything that Jesus cant give you. You will never be in so much trouble that Jesus cant help you. Nothing is beyond him. And so following someone like Jesus is actually an honour and a privilege because of who he is and what he is capable of doing. Mark wants us to vividly feel that truth. Mark wants us to see that Jesus' is so impressive; why wouldn't you follow him? Even if following Jesus gets awkward and a bit scary. Why on earth wouldn't you still follow him? It's not as if there's someone else more important to follow.

## **TALK 3 -THE SERVANT KING**

*Mark 9-13*

### **1.0 AN NEVER ENDING PACKET OF TIMTAMS**

Most of us have seen the TVadvertisement for chocolate TimTam biscuits in which a young couple discover an old lamp from which a genie pops out and offers them three wishes. The punch line of the ad is that girl asks for a never ending packet of TimTams. What would you wish for? A never ending bank account? A never ending fashion wardrobe. Never ending health? In Mark 10 Jesus asks his disciples, "What do you want me to do for you?" Its almost exactly what the genie in the bottle offers. But what the disciples do

want shows that they haven't figured out the first thing about the KOG yet.

## **2.0 THE PATTERN OF MARK 9-13**

This all comes at a very significant point in Marks gospel. We have seen that the disciples have identified Jesus as the Christ in Mk 8. Whereas this is technically correct they still don't understand what type of Christ. The second half of Marks gospel now moves on to describe what sort of Christ he is, and what it means to follow him. As such 2 big surprises are now in store. Firstly there is the surprising nature of the Christ & His kingdom. This comes to the fore in ch 9-10. After those chapters there is a 2nd surprise, the surprising rejection of the Messiah by Israel. This really comes to forefront in ch 11-13 when Jesus enters Jerusalem. It culminates in his crucifixion in ch 14-16. In this talk we think mostly about the first of these surprises ie the unexpected nature of the Christ & His kingdom.

## **3.0 THE SURPRISING NATURE OF THE CHRIST & HIS KINGDOM**

Ever since Mk 8, Jesus has been talking about his death. This is strange. Jesus is meant to be the Christ, so why all this talk about dying? He's talking like a loser rather than winner. But its because the KOG operates in a very different way to this world. The KOG operates on the basis of self denial, both in Christ himself, and in those who follow him. In ch 10, when a couple of the disciples come and ask Jesus for a favour, Jesus sees the opportunity to really spell out the importance of self denial.

### **a) the request**

James' and John's request is a very big one indeed! They selfishly want places of privilege in the Kingdom. They, like us, reflect a "Me First" mentality. Their request framed from the perspective that they are the important ones.

### **b) the reply**

Jesus' first words are intriguing (v40). Jesus is referring to the way that he will only ever do and only ever say the things that His Father wants him to do. Despite the fact that he is equally God and has the right to do and know things, He never exercises it. Jesus now leads on to his main lesson, that the KOG is all about self denial (v42-44). Here in a nutshell is perhaps the most unexpected element of the KOG and of Jesus: greatness is measured not by being served but by serving. Jesus uses himself as the supreme example, his death on the cross paid the ransom for our release. His whole mission in life therefore was to serve others. Indeed Jesus not only exemplifies the principle of servanthood. He also exemplifies the purpose of that servanthood. Serving one another is never an end in itself. It is serving other people first, SO THAT THEY CAN KNOW GOD. Now all this is a very big surprise. The Jews aren't expecting a kingdom like this or Christ like this! Which is partly why a second surprise now comes.

## **4.0 THE SURPRISING REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH**

When Jesus finally enters Jerusalem in ch 11 it is as if all hell breaks loose. People haven't got a clue what he's on about. They confuse Jesus' servanthood for softness and he is ridiculed and he is rejected. A running dispute develops between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Israel rejects Jesus and Jesus now unambiguously rejects Israel. Jesus curses a fig tree to symbolise his curse on Israel, he cleanses the temple in righteous anger, he predicts the temples destruction, and Jesus tells parable after parable condemning Israel. In the space of three chapters events escalate to flash point. Next talk we'll think more about this.

## **5.0 THE SERVANT KING**

For now though, our focus is on the first big surprise of the second half of Marks gospel. The unexpected truth is that *the Christ is a servant King and that greatness in the KOG is measured by servanthood*. Greatness is measured by being inconvenienced so that others will know God. And not just being inconvenienced for

the attractive, popular, high profile people. Greatness involves being a slave of all. So are you? Are you like our servant king? Who are you spending time listening to so as to help them be the best follower of Christ they can? Who are you consciously building up in your speech? Who are you doing things for so as to help them follow Christ? Who are you going out of your way to help? Who are you serving? Do you think Jesus would ever call you great?

#### **TALK 4 -WHEN GOD ABANDONS GOD**

*Mark 14-16*

##### **1.0 THE DEATH OF AN INNOCENT MAN**

On the 5th October 1974, 5 people died and 65 were injured in IRA bombings at two pubs in Guildford, England. The public were outraged and the British police were desperate for an arrest. The next month they arrested Guisepe Conlon along with other members of his family for the crime. In their investigations the police actually received evidence to show that Conlon was innocent, but so keen were they to satisfy an angry public that the police suppressed the evidence and Guisepe Conlon was sentenced to life imprisonment for a crime the authorities knew he never committed. He died in prison. So what makes Jesus' death any different to that? Isn't his death exactly the same? A innocent man being wrongly sentenced. What's the big deal about Jesus? Mark gives us clues as to the importance of Jesus' death through the last words that Jesus speaks.

##### **2.0 JESUS' LAST WORDS**

"My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" are the last words which Jesus ever speaks in Marks gospel. They are remarkable words, because they take us to the heart of what is so special about the cross.

###### **a) the real pain on the cross**

Hanging on the cross the thing that fills Jesus mind is the spiritual loneliness rather than the physical pain. Jesus is in hell. Lots of people joke about hell, "Why go to heaven with all those boring Christians!" People only say those stupid things because they've never been to hell. Jesus has. Jesus knows that the pain of having a lacerated back in which your muscles are shredded and your bowels exposed, the trauma of having nails driven through the wrists, the humiliation of people spitting at you and mocking you for things you haven't even done, the grasping for breath as your whole body is racked with cramps; all of that is nothing compared to the terror of being in hell.

###### **b) the way Mark records the words**

Interestingly Mark goes out of his way to record the actual Aramaic words which Jesus cries out. It's a clue to what is happening. There are two other moments in Marks gospel where we also read Jesus' Aramaic words. Both times are when an important miracle is being performed. In ch 5:41 Jesus original words are recorded when he brings a 12 year old girl back from the dead. An event in which death itself was being overcome. In ch 7:34, Jesus original words are also recorded as he heals a deaf and dumb gentile. In the context of Marks gospel that also is a very profound miracle. Jesus was showing that he had come to bring blessing to the gentiles as well as to the Jews (see talk 2). It is the genius of God that the miracle taking place on the cross, is actually a combination of both those other miracles. On the cross death is again being defeated and God's blessings are again being poured out to all people.

###### **c) the death of death**

Death is again being defeated at the cross. in the sense that death as a penalty for sin is being done away with at the cross. On the cross Jesus accepted our punishment for us. As a result the curtain of the Temple was torn in two (v37-39). Direct fellowship with God is now possible. We can now walk right into the presence of God.

###### **d) blessings to the gentiles.**



On the cross Jesus is again bringing blessings even to the gentiles. Mark throws in an additional clue for this as well (v39). Of all the people present at the crucifixion Mark chooses to record the testimony of a gentile centurion. The implication is that the cross has now made it possible for anyone of any nationality and background to have fellowship with God. It is an enormously important thing that happens on the cross. And Mark very cleverly reinforces that to us, in the way that he now closes his gospel (Mk 16).

### **3.0 "THEY SAID NOTHING TO ANYONE..."**

It's curious that the gospel closes so abruptly. Mark finishes like that because he wants us to sense the tragedy of the ending. The angel at the tomb had expressly taught the women to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen. But they said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. The very abruptness of that, heightens the sadness of it. All the way through Mark's gospel there has been the sadness of people coming face to face to with the Son of God but failing to respond as they should. Even after all the miracles he did people rejected him. Mark's gospel is full of people who are confronted by the greatest event in history but who fail to respond the right way. And here at the end, the same thing happens. The sadness of the ending, has the effect of turning the spotlight on ourselves. Mark's gospel has confronted us with Jesus in all his authority and unexpectedness. Mark's gospel closes by asking us; "So what are you going to do about him?" Are you also going to be like the women and be too afraid to respond the right way? Or are you going to be obedient to Jesus?

During April 1998, a breast cancer trial in Australia was cancelled two months earlier than it was due to finish. In a trial of 1500 women, half of them had been given a drug called Tamoxifen and the other had been simply given a placebo. But news arrived that a similar trial in the United States conclusively showed that Tamoxifen cut the rate of breast cancer by 45%. So the trial in Australia was immediately called off and the 750 women on the placebo were offered the real drug. Sometimes news is so important that it needs to be shared with an urgency. It would be wrong to keep it a secret. So who are you talking to about Jesus?