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Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to "New'brew", the new *Project Zion* series that takes us through the New Testament. So, all you "He'brew"/"She'brew" listeners, yes, we are done with the Old Testament and we're on to the New Testament. And we will make our way through the New Testament in the same way by explaining, exploring, and experiencing the text. And our esteemed guides through the New Testament are Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. So, before we begin, I want to remind listeners that you can, not just listen, but view all of the "New'brew" episodes and see Tony and Charmaine's wonderful slides and timelines and all the things that Bible geeks adore. You can see those on the Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube channel. So, today's episode, we're going to begin with the Gospel of Mark. Now, Mark's gospel is not the first Gospel in the New Testament when you open the bound book, but I think probably we'll hear why we're beginning with Mark as we go forward. So, let's get to that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:54

All right, well, it's good to be here. And we'll go ahead and, kind of, dive into Mark and see what we can come up with, see what we can, what the landscape is, and what we can help to get you started on.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:11

Probably people are wondering already, why would we start with Mark? It's the second one in in the New Testament. And the reason we would start with Mark is because scholarship unanimously sees it as the earliest of the four Gospels. So that would be a good reason to start with Mark. I mean, if we wanted to be super, super chronological, we wouldn't start with the Gospels at all, we would start with some of Paul's letters, which were written even before the Gospels.

Karin Peter 02:39

Okay, okay, okay, I can do the New Testament, Tony, but I can't start with Paul. So, we have to do something I like first...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:47

Easing you in.

Karin Peter 02:47

...before we go on to Paul.

Tony Chvala-Smith 02:49

We, yes, that we will. You can put your feet in the New Testament water just an inch at a time. We'll finally get to Paul, Karin, and hopefully help you, if not dislike him, like him maybe a little more than you did before. Well, we'll...

Karin Peter 03:08

We'll see. We'll see.

Tony Chvala-Smith 03:09

We'll cross that Pauline bridge when we get there. But I just was making the point that the New Testament is not arranged chronologically. The order of books in the New Testament, which evolved over time, puts the Jesus story first, so. And the Gospel of Matthew probably became first in the canon simply because in the earliest church it was the Gospel most frequently used. So, it had a lot of street cred, but in reality, Mark was written before Matthew, Luke, and John. So that's why we're going to start with Mark. Our process, you know, when we are doing explain and then explore, we wanted to start with the questions that we'll ask each time; who, what, where, when, and why. These are really good questions to pose a biblical Book, and we'll be relying on standard critical scholarship, the kind that would be taught in university or seminary course. And, of course, our viewers and listeners should be advised that this old standby, Fant's *Introduction to the Bible*, is a really good, really good resource for the Old Testament, the New Testament and the stuff in between, and for understanding the context and world of the Bible. Even though the, that text is over 20 years old, it's still really up to date and solid and quite, quite readable too, so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:41

And so, one of the things we'll also be revisiting as we go through the New Testament is this process of canonization, which we will, which we've covered in the "Intro to the New Testament", and that will give you some, if you, if you're losing track of why we're doing, talking about things the way we are, go back to the "Intro to the New Testament" that will, that is out there. And you'll get a sense of how these writings have become scripture over that long period of time of people reading them, finding value in them. They're not writ-, they weren't written originally to be scripture. They were written to be helpful to new Christians. And so, we have, in Mark, this, the earliest of the writings around 65 to 70, we have a writer who's trying to give a bigger picture. Who is this Jesus? The people who he's writing to, most of them, probably all of them actually, never saw Jesus before, in his, you know, when he was alive, and before his death and resurrection. They didn't have any experience with him. And so, they're trying to, the author is trying to put together a picture that will give a, kind of, a storyline. But so, so cleverly, tying in all of these different themes to say, so that the hearer, because they probably would have heard it rather than read, because not very many people were literate, and the Gospels were read aloud, whole big segments of them during a worship service. And so, they would have heard, and they would have overheard then, the themes about who is this person? And what is his relationship to God and to the Old Testament, which was their only scripture. And so, there is lots of overhearing and hearing and, and there's just, the author is so clever in helping to keep pointing the listener forward into the mystery. And it's, like, it's a little like cliffhangers, right? You know, it's, like, giving part of the story and it's, like, but what, who is he? What's he about? All of that. So, it's all very clever, even though the author of Mark, not the best, you know, not the best writer. He might have got a B, a C.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:26

I, in Greek style class, he would have got a C, for sure.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:29

Okay

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:30

But he's a fabulous story teller.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:33

Exactly.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:33

So, we can say more about Mark's Greek in a little bit. But this is great. So, the question right now we're dealing with is, what is this text that we're going to read?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 07:45

So, it's a gospel, and if you were to define what a gospel is, it's a biography, but it's a certain kind of biography shaped by the time in which it was written. So today, we might think of a biography, as you know, telling us all about how somebody grew up, and you know, what their favorite color was, and you know, who they first dated, and, you know, the disappointments and things in their lives. And all of those, what their first job was, and all those kinds of things we would expect to see, some psychological development to understand why persons react the way they do. And that is not really important in an ancient biography. An ancient biography...

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:32

An ancient biography, and there's all kinds of these from the Greco-Roman world, but an ancient biography focused on either-or. Either those things about a particular person's life, that would make you want to copy them or imitate them, or those things about a particular person's life that would make you not want to copy them. So, the genre of the biography in the ancient world is quite different from our genre biography. I mean, nobody reads a biography of, you know, Richard Nixon, or Harry Truman says, "What can I learn from this that I want to do?" You know, we're just more into the information and the background but, ancient Christian readers who, and hearers, who knew what biographies were, they wanted to know; I've believed in this guy, Jesus, what am I supposed to do? And, what can I learn from his life that would teach me how to do it? So, that's this biography genre. And Mark, as far as we know, Mark is the first Christian to take the proclamation about Jesus as the Messiah, crucified, raised from the dead and present, and turn it into a, kind of, story of Jesus' life. Obviously, he doesn't start at the beginning, right? Because Mark 1:1 is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Boom, we're right into the John the Baptist story. And so, we're, you know, if all we have in our head is Matthew and Luke, we're thinking, "Wait, there's no nativity? Where did he come from?" Well, that's not Mark's...

Karin Peter 10:05

And who did he date? That's not right. This isn't a biography.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:08

Oh, I know.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:10

What did he like on this pizza?

Karin Peter 10:12

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:14

Right. So that's, none of the Gospel writers are really concerned about those kinds of details per se. They're more interested in different ways trying to say, this is why we follow and try to imitate this man and who we think he is. So, that's Mark's starting point. He's borrowing this genre from his culture, and tweaking it, and using it to say something about Jesus Christ, whom he calls in the first line, "Jesus Christ, Son of God". You know, the narrative then, is going to, kind of, explicate what he means when he uses that language. So, that's the what. And the next thing would be the who. Who wrote this? All right, now, I guess we're gonna get this right out here, right at the start, Karin. Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, those names were appended to manuscripts sometime in the second, late second century. Actually, we don't know who wrote any of these gospels. The names are placeholders. And we know that all of them are early Christians. Go ahead Charmain.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:23

And the other thing that we know is that none of them were with Jesus himself.

Karin Peter 11:29

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:30

So, they're not walking around with a little, you know, notepad and writing down everything Jesus said. They're all, they all indicate, in one way or another, either through their language, or, actually, sometimes, actually, their experience, that they weren't there, that they are receiving this and passing it on. So, I think that's always a really important thing, too. Especially, like, when we have, when we give exams, and we ask, you know, for the names of some of Jesus disciples, and they, students always think that's a giveaway, you know, "Oh, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John". And you know it's like, well, you know, that's true, but.

Karin Peter 12:12

Not quite.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:13

Yeah

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:14

You got 50% on that one.

Karin Peter 12:15

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:16

I think that's a helpful thing is to, in reality, all four gospels are anonymous.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:23

Right. We can tell things about each author.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:26

Right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:27

Right. We can tell that Mark is literate in Greek but not, he's not able to write really stylistically perfect Greek. Luke does that, Mark does not. Mark's Greek is choppy. It's grammatically rough. Stylistically, he does things that a good Greek writer in ancient world would not do. He's, he writes like somebody who talks, he talks his story, but then puts it in print, and that's how it comes across. So, when reading the Gospel of Mark, it's, "and then this, and then this, and then this, and then this." Sometimes it feels like a teenager describing what happened at school. "And then there was this, and then this happened, and then this." So why the name Mark? Well, in the second century, the tradition arose that there was this disciple named Mark, who was a disciple of Peter, and that he wrote down stuff that Peter said, and turned it into a Gospel. That comes, we can trace that to a Christian writer named Papias, whose stuff we don't have, but who is quoted by a later Christian author in the fourth century. The thing is, there's no, that, what's really strange, when you read Mark, is that you can tell that the author had no clue about Palestinian geography. He had no idea where things were. And so, he's definitely telling the story of Jesus. I mean, it's ballpark right? It's Galilee, and Judea, but when you start following Jesus through Mark's narrative, there are places where it's, like, this author doesn't know where he is. So, we know that the author of Mark's Gospel was not there firsthand, and that he's using oral traditions that he has inherited, and crafting them into a biography of Jesus. So, that's what we know. We can tell also some things about the background of Mark's gospel from, internally to it. And also, something that we'll bring up next time when we deal with Matthew, and then subsequently when we deal with Luke, is that as Luke Johnson puts it, "Matthew was the most successful edition of Mark's gospel." You know, there's, Matthew and Luke both make use of this as a source, and when they do, they do a lot of correcting of Mark's stylistic faux pas and his redundancies and so on. We'll talk about that when we get to those Gospels, but. But so, this author is a great storyteller, and we can tell that he and his community, the community he's writing for, are dealing with serious, serious persecution. And we can, kind of, locate this late in the 60s of the first century. The Emperor Nero had a local persecution, a local pogrom, against this minority group called Christians. And Roman historians from the period described Nero's real cruel treatment of Christians. There are some Latin loan words in Mark's Gospel, which means that you can tell that the author is trying to explain things for non-Jewish people, and that he himself doesn't

quite get it well himself. But there are all kinds of reasons to think that Mark's Gospel was written for Christians in and around Rome during the time of Nero, when Nero was torturing Christians. And it was becoming really not much fun to be a follower of Jesus. And so, suffering is a key theme in this Gospel then. So yeah, let's make that clear. So, Jesus was a Jew. His first followers were Jews. The earliest church in Jerusalem was Jewish but very quickly the word got out, and Gentiles, who are non-Jews, found themselves attracted to this message and this community. And so, one of the things we'll explore with other books in the New Testament is how, what started off as a Jewish religious movement, by the end of the first century, is primarily a Gentile religious movement. And so, Mark is writing to Christians whose background, who would not have a lot of background in Judaism, maybe what they learned when they first were baptized, a little bit about the one God and so on.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:58

And though some of them probably were Gentiles who had some association with the synagogues where they lived, and so had some understanding of God, of Yahweh, of the God of the Old Testament. And lots of those kinds of Gentiles who already had some exposure, are those who, those first Gentiles who become followers of Christ, become Christians. Well, if we're in the year about 65 for the writing of Mark, it's still the weight of membership, if you want to call it, because it's not, by 65 it's, Christianity is not its own thing yet. It's still under the auspices of Judaism. It's still seen as a sect within Judaism, that, yes, Gentiles can be a part of, as well. So, we have this mix of Jewish and Gentile Christians who usually are worshiping together. And, but there are some stresses beginning to show by this point with whether or not, Jews who aren't followers of Christ, think that these folks should really be that associated with Judaism. But Mark is trying to help Gentiles, Gentile Christians, start to put together; who is Jesus for everybody, and what does it mean for us? And so, he's giving this big, sweeping story with these really poignant, little experiences that are quite, both revealing and, kind of, stark. Some of the other Gospel writers are going to tie all of these stories together in a very smooth way and fill in some of the blanks and, you know, tell us what people are thinking. But Mark is, like, this story, and then there's this story and, and lets them each have their own power. So, it's kind of fun.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:21

Mark loves the word "immediately". And so, he uses it over 40 times, and this book is scarcely 16 chapters long. It's not very long, but that's a lot of times to use a word. If I were grading the paper, I would say; can you find another word? Use the thesaurus and find another word here. But what happens is, when you're reading Mark, there's this real, almost, like, react...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:46

Breathlessness.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:47

Breathless pace, that go, go go, and the action starts off in Galilee, and then, that's chapter one, and then, by chapter 10, Jesus and his entourage are heading to Jerusalem. So then, the rest of the action, well, after you get out of chapter 10, 11 to the end of the book, is the passion story, basically.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:09

But I think it's really important because, in Mark, the majority of the book is about Jesus' ministry in Galilee. You know, I think sometimes I've heard Christians say, "How is it that the Jews couldn't have understood who Jesus was. They're seeing him do all of these things." And it's like, well, some people in this little area, in the, far away from Jerusalem, are seeing Jesus do some things, and it's not going to be the same people in every instance. But in Mark, Jesus only makes one trip to Jerusalem, and that's to his death. And so, the people, the Jewish leaders and the people around Jerusalem, which is the core of Judaism in the first century, would have had little or no experience with who Jesus was, not maybe even to recognize him, and probably have heard lots, some things but, you know, it's like, he's perhaps a troublemaker from Gali-

Karin Peter 21:15

From the backwaters.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:16

Exactly, who has a strange accent. You know, he's from the sticks. Yeah. So, yeah, I think those are helpful things. Structurally in Mark, is that really, the only people who have, know much about Jesus, are people in Galilee, and except for that one fateful trip to, down to Jerusalem. So, it's, it gives you a different kind of an answer for the question; well, how come the Jews didn't see who Jesus was? And it's like, his own disciples, and this is true in Mark especially, his own disciples don't know who he is? And how would they, you know?

Karin Peter 21:56

Because Mark gets a little snippy about that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:59

He does. He really does.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:00

Yes, he paints the disciples as, kind of, you know, we sometimes say Homer Simpson-like for those who...

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:10

Twelve of them.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:12

Well, they see something and they think, wow, and then, you know, the next day, it's like, ah, I don't know, you know. He seems like a nice guy. We'll keep following him. But, you know, they don't really have any idea as to who he is. And you have to be fair, because it's, like, how would they? What reference point do they have? And in Mark, Jesus doesn't say a whole lot about who he is. So, it is a mystery.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:41

And that's, and Mark has set up the narrative exactly to hold the mystery off until very late in the gospel. So, this is one of the tricky questions that we have to deal with, and that is, gospels are not photographic records. They're pieces of literature. And so, the authors have control over the material they've received. Mark, for Mark it's all oral material, as far as we know. And they have to arrange the material and tell the story in a way that is both true to the material, but also relevant to the people they're writing, they're telling the Jesus' story for. And so, once we can discern that Mark's readers, his first readers and hearers, were Christians, probably new Christians, who are, like, why did I sign up for this? Everybody's being murdered by Nero? What's in this? And, we call Jesus Lord and Son of God, and now we're getting in trouble with the empire for that. What are we supposed to do? And so, Mark tells the story of Jesus in such a way that he wants the reader to understand that the real thing here is not understanding, but it's following, right. The disciples are, kind of, in the dark most of the way. There's a few moments of light and then the light goes off. And in Mark's narrative, from the start of the narrative, the only individuals who know who Jesus is would be the narrator of the story, would be us, the reader, because we've been told in chapter 1:1, and the demons, right. The demons in the story know who Jesus is. "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." And so, but the disciples in the story are like, yeah, no, yeah, no, I'm not sure. I don't think I get this. You are the Christ, the Messiah. I don't want to suffer with you. That's stupid. And so, the disciples in the storyline don't actually get it. And the way Mark sets the story up, it's not until chapter 14, when Jesus is arrested, powerless before the high priest, that he himself ever says publicly to the question, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am." He says that. And so that's...

Karin Peter 25:17

But, Tony, you said earlier though, that he was a really gifted storyteller. And so, as you've laid this out, what this looks like, this is really great, intriguing writing, when you think of genre, the demons, almost like your Greek chorus over there, that they know what's going on, and the narrator having already clued us in. I mean, you can just do like a movie unfolding in this. It's wonderful storytelling.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:42

It's wonderful storytelling. My point is that he is, his Greek style is not great.

Karin Peter 25:51

Right. Right.

Tony Chvala-Smith 25:52

You can be a great storyteller, and, you know, if I think of family members in Michigan telling stories, I'm not interested in their grammar at all. I'm interested in the story. I'm interested in...

Karin Peter 26:02

Right. Much love to everybody in Michigan, by the way, and we all think you're great dramatists.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:08

I, I'm interested in Dad, in hearing Dad's story over and over and over again about how Great-Grandpa Burgie always sold Christmas trees in November and December, but he never owned any land that had Christmas trees on them. Hmm. One of my ancestors, Karin, was a Christmas tree thief.

Karin Peter 26:25

It sounds like it.

Tony Chvala-Smith 26:26

I love this story. My dad tells it really well, but. So, but yeah, Mark, Mark's strategically telling the story because he wants to say, wait, you guys are all, you were all baptized into this person. And you were baptized into his death, and his dying, and his suffering? And so, it's not until Jesus has breathed his last, that a Gentile, the centurion who's the soldier who's standing there says, "Truly, this guy was God's Son." That's the first public declaration, right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:60

Which is just amazing because, you know, from this religion that is, Christianity is still in, within Judaism at this point, and it's only a Gentile who recognizes who Jesus is, as Son of God. And, yeah, and the disciples, aren't there. They're, they've deserted, the male disciples I should say. The female disciples are there and keeping an eye on things, and have not left. And we'll talk about that a little bit later in the experience part. But, yeah, it's fascinating what this author does. And so, you keep asking yourself the question. And so, but here's the, one of the themes is, you will see in Mark, suffering. You'll see Jesus as suffering because it's speaking to these believers, these early Christians, who are suffering, who are suffering for what they believe in. And so, there's these connections being made all the way along. The disciples don't get it. And you don't always get it. I know this already. You know, there's already saying, yeah, yeah, you know, you fall down, you, maybe, denied Christ, you, maybe, walk away, but they did too. And Jesus was there, they, was, still wanted them. So, I think it's just that those, all these pieces, that places where they would have had doubt, where they would have had fear, the author's saying, "Yeah, well, the first disciples did. Yeah, Jesus suffered. Yeah, God is still with him." So.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:47

Yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:48

...giving those assurances.

Tony Chvala-Smith 28:49

So, this might be a good place for us to switch to explore and take a look at some themes, and also any questions that you have about Mark, Karin, that have come up for you, in your many readings of Mark. Yes, well, we understand, so.

Karin Peter 29:08

Actually, Mark's one of the easier ones to read through when you are reading through the Gospels because of the, kind of, brisk pace and.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:17

Yeah, it's actually a fun read, I think, so. Yeah. So, we picked out some themes that recur in the story. And, you know, one of these is mystery. Jesus is really mysterious to people. And, one of Mark's recurrent questions is, who is this?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 29:37

And the questions that people are always asking, how is he doing what he's doing? There's lots of miracles in Mark and especially those where he's casting out demons. It's, like, how is he doing this? What's this power that he has? What is it pointing too? And so, they're constantly puzzled, as much as anything, the onlookers. Some readily follow, but lots of people are just, hmm.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:15

So related, this is another theme of secrecy. And you could spend years reading all the scholarly literature on the theme of secrecy of Mark, but we'll just cut to the chase. We'll save you the years of laborious...

Karin Peter 30:30

Be a long podcast if we're gonna go through all of that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:34

So, secrecy, perhaps, in the historical Jesus's ministry, it may be that he told people, don't say anything, because he was trying to avoid his ministry getting outed real quickly, you know. It's possible. But for Mark it's a literary, theological theme. I'm not saying the secrecy wasn't there. But I'm just saying for Mark, Mark heightens it quite a bit. And one of the reasons Mark heightens, by secrecy, I mean, not in every healing, or exorcism, but in many, Jesus says, "Shh, don't tell anybody. Don't tell anybody. Don't tell anybody." And one of the things that Mark is doing in terms of the book, in terms of the story is, he does not, it appears that Mark does not want his readers to think of Jesus as solely a miracle worker who can do anything he wants to, but they really want, he really wants the readers to understand, following Jesus is about following him even into suffering and death. And so, the secret isn't out until Jesus is being slapped down by the high priests' court, in chapter 14, and until he's dead, he's crucified, then the secret is out. And that's Mark saying, if you really want to understand what it means to call this guy, Lord, Christ, Son of God, then you have to focus on his suffering for others. That's where you'll get it. And so, hence, the secrecy is a way to push the reader here ahead to the end of the story, where finally the secret is out. But when the secret is out, it's like, oh, that's what I signed up for. I signed up, I signed up also, to be willing to suffer for others? And so, it's a, that's a difficult part, I think, of Mark's Gospel. It really is about being willing to suffer.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 32:34

Yeah. There's a lot of discussion about why is it that, you know, the Gospel of Matthew or the Gospel of John are the ones that are most well-known, or people's favorites, and Mark doesn't usually get up

there on that list of the favorites. And that's partly because Mark's not saying, you know, if you follow Jesus everything's going to be good, you're going to be rich and famous and have an easy life, not at all. And, you know, you think about in our culture, you know, Christianity is often sold as, you know, if you do everything right, and if you love God, then, you know, God wants you to have, you know, a Porsche, and a big house and a great retirement fund. And, you know, and we, there's this, kind of, cultural assumption that, if you're good, it's almost like in Old Testament, right? If you do the right things, then God will bless you with an easy life. And, you know, we've heard, we've talked about that whole debate going on in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament it's even harder to try and say that because though Mark is the most stark, the, all of the Gospels indicate that following Jesus leads, not to fame and fortune and an easy life, but to a life that is full of meaning and wonder. And, but you may, but it can end in suffering. It can end in death. It can end in martyrdom. And yeah, the, those other narratives about, you know, if you believe enough, or if you do enough good things, your life is going to be easy. You couldn't use Mark to justify that at all.

Tony Chvala-Smith 34:34

There is no prosperity gospel within 1500 miles of the Gospel of Mark. It doesn't fit.

Karin Peter 34:44

So, Mark is much more mysterious. It's a little darker. I mean, if you look at how it actually ends, it's just a little bit darker, a little bit harder to grasp when you compare it, when you were talking, or comparing it, like, to Matthew. Matthew was grand. Matthew paints grand pictures and does that. Mark doesn't give you that. You have to supply that yourself, all the in between the lines part. So, it's almost like it takes more work to delve into Mark.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:12

It does.

Tony Chvala-Smith 35:15

Good point.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:15

It does, yes, Matthew wants to tie all the pieces together and keep proving how, this is proving of prophecy from the Old Testament. And as it was said, in the Old Testament, and everything Jesus does, is, you know, there's, all, this is a further affirmation of something from the Old Testament. But no, Mark is, it's pretty, you know, raw in some way.

Karin Peter 35:40

Which makes sense if he's writing in a regional gospel to a people who are suffering, and would, I assume, spend part of their community life in secrecy and some of the other aspects that you were talking about. It starts to make sense if you know that context.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:59

Exactly. And the other piece that is really important in Mark, and both Matthew and Luke, who are drawing from a manuscript of Mark, use this theme and develop it in slightly different ways. But it's the

theme of the kingdom of God, that this new life in Christ is possible here in a different way of living, and how we interact with each other in different ways. And so, the focus is the kingdom of God. And it's not talking about heaven. It's, you know, we'll keep reiterating this throughout the Gospels. Jesus doesn't talk very much about heaven at all or hell for that matter. There's a few little pieces here and there. And you know, there's been whole Christianities that have been based on, it's all about heaven and hell. Well, actually not, not in the Gospels, not in Paul's letters. It's about the kingdom of God. In three of the four Gospels, that's the primary focus. And that's about how we live here, and how we take what it means to follow Jesus, how we rely on the Spirit, how we know that we are centered in God, that changes the kind of life we have, and the kind of life we have with each other. It's a big theme.

Tony Chvala-Smith 37:25

So, Mark, in Mark chapter one, Jesus starts off his ministry after his baptism by saying, "The reign of God is at hand, repent, or turn around. Believe the good news." And so, this, I think kingdom of God has been an unfortunate English translation of the text. Reign of God is better, because actually the word that Jesus was using in Aramaic, and it has its similar meaning in Greek, is, has to do with an activity, not a place. Now, that doesn't mean it's somewhere else, it's here, but it's God's activity made visible in what Jesus is doing. Well, what is Jesus doing? Well, he's feeding people. He's healing people. He's delivering people from things that bind them. He's being open with Gentiles. He's got women traveling with him. This is the reign of God. The reign of God is not a piety show here. It's actually God's activity of bringing people into a brand new relationship with each other, and with God, in the here and now, right here.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 38:29

And we'll probably say this about all of the Gospels, but Mark is a really good example. And if you start going through and listening, who is it that Jesus is reaching out to? Who is it that Jesus is healing of demons? Who is it that Jesus is physically healing? You'll see that it's the marginalized people. It's the people who don't have a voice, the people that people are suspicious of. You know, we're talking about people who have demons, and, you know, we can psychologize what that might or might not mean, but in that time, these were people who, you know, it's, like, oh, we don't want to go there, you know, and it's very unpredictable. And, you know, is this something that's evil. Did they, are they being punished for something? And so there would have been this social distance for people who had these expressions of unpredictability, of hearing voices or acting in ways they couldn't control? And so, for Jesus to go straight to them and say, I'm going to rid you of this thing that is ruining your life or your family's life, I think is really, it's kind of breathtaking when you really start looking at the instances. Who is it that Jesus is going to? Is Jesus just going to the people who believe in him? Well, no, not at all. Is he just going to good Jews? Well, no, he's going to outsiders too and bringing hope, or healing, or light, so.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:17

It's interesting in the, in Mark's Gospel, and you see this in the other ones too, that the reign of God that Jesus represents, embodies and so on, its staunchest opponents turned out to be religious authorities, maybe no surprise there, but, and this is not to dis...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 40:37

The ones with the most to lose.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:39

Yeah, this is not, I don't want to historically paint Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes etc., into, in a bad light because that would be grossly unfair, but they, but the people that Jesus encountered, they were representatives of official churchdom that didn't like what he was doing. It messed everything up. It messed up their sense of inside, outside, top, bottom, who's good, who's not good. Jesus simply evaporated those boundaries in front of them, and it made them nervous. I had a professor of preaching once, 100 years ago, who said to us, I remember this very clearly, he said, "When you're preaching on Gospel texts that mention the Pharisees, just remember, the Pharisees in the Gospel texts really are the good church going people, who are the people you're preaching to." And there's,

Karin Peter 41:33

ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:34

There's so much truth in that, right, right. It's not about they're being Jewish. It's about they're being puritans.

Karin Peter 41:43

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:45

And Jesus pushes back on that. He pushes the puritanical buttons, then and now. Mark captures that pretty well.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:54

Yeah, I, and I like to think of it as Jesus cared enough about the Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees to give them another way of thinking, and he had to challenge where they were, because they couldn't see outside of that. But he cared enough to keep trying, keep trying to help them see something else. And, you know, we often don't think of our critics in that way. But, you know, that's, he wasn't gonna say, oh, you guys, you're doing just great. You just keep judging all those people that are different than you, and that have mishaps in their lives and you'll be good. No, he's not gonna do that. So, I think it's a way that Jesus is trying to show God's love to everybody.

Karin Peter 42:40

I think it's Nadia Bolz Weber, who said that whenever there's a line drawn between yourself and those other guys, she always discovers Jesus is on that other side, with the other guys, so.

Tony Chvala-Smith 42:51

Yeah, I think it's very, very, very true to the Gospels and to the story of Jesus. And it's, there's a, I mean, I think there's a warning in all the Gospels to us good church people, or us bad church people, whoever we are, to us church people. There's always a warning that religiosity is not what the kingdom

of God is about. And Jesus is not into religiosity. He sees through it. It's, in a way, it's, a kind, of a recapturing of that prophetic theme from the Hebrew Bible; do justice, love kindness and mercy, seek God, be open to God, confess. I mean it's, be vulnerable before God. It's that kind of thing that matters to Jesus in the Gospels. So, one, I think maybe one final thing I can mention here in terms of exploring the text, is that the Gospel of Mark has three or four possible endings. It's, in the manuscript tradition, the Gospel of Mark got, kind of, messed up at the end. But here's the thing; current scholarship agrees unanimously that the original Gospel of Mark ended at verse eight of chapter 16.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:06

And we'll be taking a look at that in a few minutes.

Karin Peter 44:09

Oh, good, good.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:10

It's, and Charmaine is going to walk us through that. It's a fabulous, fabulous ending to a Gospel that deals with secrecy, mystery, and disciples who are dumber than a box of rocks. So, I love that.

Karin Peter 44:21

Male disciples that are dumber than a box of rocks.

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:24

I will own that. I will totally own that. But the, what's called the shorter and longer endings of Mark, those endings were created by copyists, manuscript copyists who knew Matthew, knew Luke, knew that there was more to the story than where Mark ended, and they couldn't stand his ending. Like, they just, there's got to be more of this and so they wrote so, they added different, they use different traditions to create different endings. One thing I wish the New Revised Standard Version would do, and there's a new edition of it coming out soon I, I'd like to, I want to see if they do anything with this, but one thing I wish that it would do is simply take Mark's Gospel through verse eight of chapter 16 and stop it, and then give a long footnote down below saying, hey, there's some other endings in ancient church, but this is where the gospel really stopped. Because it's the perfect ending for this gospel.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:17

It definitely is. Definitely, yes. So, should we go on to?

Karin Peter 45:22

Yes, absolutely. Let's do that.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 45:24

Alright, so I'm gonna go ahead, and here we go. So, what I have is a segment, it's starting at Mark chapter 15:37, and going through then to the end of 16:8. And I'll go ahead and read it. And then we're going to recap it in a little bit here to gather what else, what all is here, because there's so much here. And it's consistent with those things we were just talking about, about Mark. But it also, there's some other subtle themes that are really worth looking at. So, we're looking at the end of the crucifixion.

“Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Now, when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way, Jesus breathed his last he said, ‘Truly, this man was God's Son!’ There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow Him and provided for him when he was in Galilee...Then Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus... Then Joseph brought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock... Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid... When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, brought spices so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he's not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go tell the disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him just as he told you.’ So they went out and fled from the tomb for, terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” That's where it ended, “...for they were afraid.” And when you think about the audience for whom this was written, they were afraid, and...

Karin Peter 48:22

Perfect ending.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:53

...they had reason to be afraid. And so, we see this place that Tony had mentioned earlier, where finally we're told who this Jesus is, and it's from this Gentile, the enemy, a Roman soldier, the occupying force, that's the person who finally says who Jesus is. And then you're introduced to some of his disciples, some of Jesus' disciples, to Mary Magdalene, and to Mary the mother of James the younger, and of Joses. And you meet also Salome. And it says, “These used to follow him, and provided for him in Galilee.” And this is something that people forget. These are numbers of Jesus' disciples who traveled with them everywhere, and they're his financial backers. He's, they're the ones that make this possible at all. And as you read through the Gospels, there's only women named as the financial backers. You'll also see a place in Luke chapter eight, the beginning of the chapter, and there they add the names Joanna and Susanna, who also are financial, part of this group of women, who are bankrolling this whole deal. And so, it's, we get this other picture of what these disciples look like. And you also see that they are there watching what happens as he dies. And then, as Joseph of Arimathea retrieves the body and puts it into a tomb, it is the two Mary's who are watching. They're still insistent on taking care of Jesus' body, even though whatever it was they hoped for has been dashed, they've not deserted. They are still there to do what they can to care for him. And I love it that when they go, and then Salome joins them, when they take the spices, and what they're doing is they're going to the tomb, and they're going to prepare Jesus for proper burial. He's been just, kind of, very quickly put into this tomb, and they brought the things that would be needed to do this right. And their first reaction when they look into this empty tomb, and there's this young man there, they are alarmed, as one might be, when one was expecting to find the body of one that you love and instead, it's, he's not there, and

there's somebody else there. And then this, probably, this young man, probably, is identified by some as an angel, but a messenger of some kind from God. "Do not be alarmed, you're looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He's been raised; he is not here." And then, "...go and tell his disciples, and Peter...". Peter has apparently separated himself from this whole movement, because of his denials of Jesus. So, it's, like, his, go and tell Jesus' disciples, and Peter probably, like, underlying, he needs to hear this most, that he's going ahead of you to Galilee. "...There you will see him, just as he told you." But then here's what happens to these women who have heard this amazing thing. They went out, and they fled from the tomb, "...for terror and amazement had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Now, we already know that they did tell someone.

Karin Peter 53:03

Somebody told somebody something.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:04

Somebody told somebody something somewhere. But this just captures that whole sense of; Oh, my goodness! What, what is this? You know, and all the fears of; Would we even be believed? And, you know, some of the other Gospels have the woman telling and the rest of the disciples not believing so, there's this, they've, there's, what do they do but run, run away and not say anything?

Karin Peter 53:30

[inaudible] moment, fade to black?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:33

Exactly, perfect, perfect. So, we've got these, all of these things being revealed. But the story ends with the word "afraid". And, yet, we know that in spite of their fear, that they do proclaim that Jesus is not there, that Jesus is risen. The women are the faithful ones, in spite of their alarm, and their terror, and their amazement, and even more, their fear. And that insistence, on the angel's part, that Jesus wants to meet with them again, even those who denied or deserted. So, I think those are all wonderful things. All these things tell us some things about discipleship and about Jesus. Jesus keeps inviting us back, no matter if we've walked away, even denied. Even when we're afraid or terrified, Jesus welcomes us back. And even when we do not, don't have any hope left, Jesus invites us back. And I just think that that's a wonderful way to end any Gospel, Gospel meaning, good news, and in this case, the good news of Jesus Christ. So, here's some questions to think about, and as we've said previously, that when we do this part with the scripture, we recognize that people have sometimes been harmed by the use of scripture, and how we want to approach it is to hear the stories, and to try to identify with the people in the stories and see whether or not their struggles, their questions, might be our questions and our struggles and might speak to us, even if we have some suspicion or mistrust about scripture in general. And so, this is a question to draw from this passage, and this is related to the Roman centurion, who names who Jesus is. When has someone, completely unexpected, helped me see more clearly who Jesus is? Just to think about your own experience, and maybe even write down some names of people who have helped you understand, maybe, different dimensions of Jesus than you'd ever have imagined. Then, thinking about the women who made this all possible, footed the bill for this endeavor, who are the less visible disciples, who has sustained me or my congregation? And to think about those who have perhaps not drawn a lot of attention to themselves, or what they provide or offer,

and yet, it's what has kept other people going. And that's, not just financially, but more emotionally and spiritually as well. And then this is just to your own heart searching. Which of these, do you think, has disqualified you as a disciple at some time; the loss of hope or terror, or deserting your faith, or denying Jesus, or being fearful? So, we sometimes tell ourselves these stories that, because we have thought this, or done this, or felt bad, that we must not be good disciples. And this Gospel reminds us over and over and over again, that the disciples that Jesus chose, they didn't just happen along, he chose them and invited them, they experienced all of these things, and more, that we would think of as negative or that would keep you from being considered a good disciple. And yet, he invited them to meet him again in Galilee. He wants to be with them. He wants to be with us. So, your list might be longer than this.

Karin Peter 58:26

My list is immense.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:30

And the thing is, Jesus says, no, no, none of them are big enough to keep me away. So, that invitation, always there. And then, the last one is, what will you do with the fact that Jesus wants you to join him anyway? And if you have a little time for a journaling exercise or a prayer time for prayer, that might be a question to take into it. What will you do with the fact that Jesus wants you to join him anyway? Whatever the argument in your head is about, why surely, Jesus wouldn't want you around.

Karin Peter 59:18

Well, thank you, Tony and Charmaine, I'm not sure how, I feel. It's probably appropriate for Mark that we've ended this conversation with a long list of all the reasons why I'm a crappy disciple, but it's, doesn't make me feel all that wonderful.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 59:35

The author already knows it, yeah.

Karin Peter 59:37

Already knows. But I think it's really important how we bring these themes out because it's back to what we talked about in the "He'brew" episodes, which is the context, and who were the original hearers of this, and what was going on? It's those questions, the who, what, when, why, how that help us respond to those deeper experiencing kinds of questions, whether it's, whether we respond through journaling, or action or conversation with ourselves, whatever it may be. Those questions are best answered when we've done responsible scripture study and answered those questions before. And so, I personally love the Gospel of Mark. I love the, kind of, dark mystery of the Gospel of Mark, but we're going to move on in our next episode, and we're going to move to Matthew, who is like the opposite of this. He's wordy, and he's got a huge agenda. And, I mean, it's just, there's all this stuff going on in Matthew. So, do you have any, like, little tidbit you want to offer so that we want to come back now and revisit Matthew?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:00:56

Well, so again, our rule, context, context, context. Matthew's got different fish to fry.

Karin Peter 1:01:05

Literally.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:07

And so, his situation?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:01:09

Don't tell it all.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:10

I won't tell it all. His situation is...

Karin Peter 1:01:12

Just a hint.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:15

Here's the hint; you remember that great early 19, I think it's early 1960s movie, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*

Karin Peter 1:01:21

Yes, Sidney Poitier.

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:01:22

Guess who's coming to dinner? Oh, it's Gentiles.

Karin Peter 1:01:29

Oh, excellent. Especially nowadays that's perfect, that's perfect. We can, "But oh, it's...", and then fill in the blank, whoever other is for us? Well, in keeping with our "He'brew" series, I do have a quote to end our episode today. And this quote actually comes from Rob Bell, who is a really popular Christian writer. Many people have read a lot of his work, but it has to do with those very questions. And he says this, "What's the best question to ask when you're reading the Bible? Well, why did people find this important to write down? Why did people write this down? What was going on in their world that was, this became important to them? Why did they feel the need to put words to this? Start with that question? Start with those questions and see what happens." So, with those words, I will thank both of you for continuing to be our guide through scripture as we explore the New Testament. And until our next episode, I'm Karin Peter here with Tony and Charmaine Chavala-Smith. Thanks for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:02:52

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