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Bible reading Notes

February 2023 – Mark 1-4 & Psalms 135-141



How to use these Bible Reading Notes:

These Bible reading notes are a resource to help you feed on God's word a little and often and allow it to change your life. If you miss a day (or several!), don't feel guilty or try to catch up; just pick up wherever you left off – it doesn't matter if it's the wrong date.

Here are some tips on how to get the most out of this:

1. Find a time and place where you can be quiet but awake.
Maybe set an alarm on your phone to remind you each day.
2. Pray. Ask God to help you understand what he says.
3. Use the notes to help you think about the Bible passage (use a good translation of the Bible like the NIV).
 - *'Read' tells you which verses to read.*
 - *'Apply' shows how it affects you.*
 - *'Pray' suggests ways to talk to God about it.*
4. Pray about what you have read.
5. Look for a chance to share with someone what God has been saying to you.

*These notes are easy to install on most phones or tablets.
Install the 'PrayerMate' App and you'll find it under 'Add Subject →
Biblical prayers & devotions → Real Food.'
If you have any problems, email info@prayermate.net.*

1st February

Headline News

This month we are focussing on Mark's Gospel. This is an account of Jesus' life and death written for Christians who are suffering. Mark stresses that King Jesus came to die on the cross for us, and that following him will mean taking up our cross too.

Read Mark 1:1-3

- What sort of book is Mark (v.1)?
- Who is Mark about (v.1)?
- What is the role of the messenger and the voice (v.2-3)?

“Christ” and “Messiah” mean Anointed One, referring to the king God promised to send to make the world right. “Son of God” can refer to a king in David's family who will rule for ever (2 Samuel 7.13-14), and we'll soon see it has a deeper meaning too.

Apply

- How does this beginning excite you about hearing Mark's news?
- How do these verses change your view of who Jesus is?

2nd February

Baptising in water and the Spirit

Verses 2-3 promised us a messenger, and the Lord who would follow him. Let's meet that messenger and find out what the Lord Jesus will do for us.

Read Mark 1:4-8

- What blessing does John promise (v.4)?
- What condition is attached to the promise (v.4)?

“Repentance” means turning from sin and idols to love and worship and follow God. Baptism acts out the death of our old self-centred life, and the start of a new God-centred life. John says we need to change.

- What does John tell us about Jesus (v.7)?
- What will Jesus do (v.8)?

Pray

We need to change, and the good news is that Jesus can change us by baptising his followers with his Spirit.

- How does this help when we feel like we're stuck and can't change?
- What sins will you ask the Spirit to free you from?

3rd February

Here comes the Son

Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (v.1), the Lord (v.3). What sort of entrance will he make?

Read Mark 1:9-13

- What does Jesus do that is the same as other people in verse 5? (v.9)
- What does the voice from heaven tell us about Jesus? (v.11)
- Why would God's perfect Son be acting out a picture of death along with sinners?

Apply

Right from the start, Jesus' purpose is to die – as he passes through the waters of death in baptism. He became what we are (sinners) so that we might become what he is (sons of God). God says to us: "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

- How does this news make you feel?
- How will you remember that you are already God's beloved child and that he is pleased with you?

4th February

Jesus' first words

Parents treasure their children's first words. First impressions matter. Time to hear Jesus' first words:

Read Mark 1:14-15

Jesus' message is not a made-up story, and it is not advice on how to live. It's news – God's good news.

- What is the good news (v.15)?
- Why is that news good?

In the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 9:2-7, Daniel 2:44-45) God promised he would set up an eternal kingdom on earth, filled with peace, freedom and justice. Jesus' news is not mostly about how people go up to heaven, but about how God comes down to earth. The response is to repent (turn from being our own king or following other kings to having Jesus as our king), and to believe (trust that Jesus will bring God's kingdom).

- Why must we repent and believe?

Pray

- Pray "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Pray that you would live with Jesus as king over all of your life.

5th February

Fishers and Followers

“The kingdom of God has come near” says Jesus. So what does it look like to be a citizen of God’s kingdom?

Read Mark 1:16-20

- What command does Jesus give the men (v.17)?
- What promise does he give them (v.17)?
- What is striking about their response (v.18, 20)?

Apply

Jesus calls four labourers to be labourers in his line of business. To follow Jesus means to join him in his mission of fishing for people.

- How does this change your priorities?
- When we don’t feel up to the task, how is Jesus’ promise to “make us fishers” an encouragement?

James and John have to leave both their career and their family to put Jesus first.

- What does it look like for you to put Jesus before your family?
- What does it look like for you to put Jesus before your career?

6th February

When Saturday comes

Jesus claimed that the kingdom of God had come near. But how can we know? And what will it look like?

Read Mark 1:21-28

- What was the first thing that amazed them (v.22)?
- What else amazed people that day (v.27)?
- How is Jesus' "authority" revealed in the encounter with the impure spirit (v.23-26)?

Apply

We tend to either dismiss evil spirits as not real, or we dread them as having power over us. Jesus shows that they are real (so don't dismiss them) but in his kingdom he drives them out with a word (so don't dread them). He has come to release his people and his world from Satan's grip.

- How is this passage good news?
- What has amazed you about Jesus from this passage?
- What should you or others do if you live in dread of evil spiritual forces?

7th February

Saturday Night Fever

On the same day as yesterday's passage, more evidence that God's kingdom has come near in Jesus.

Read Mark 1:29-34

- How is Jesus' authority revealed at Simon and Andrew's house (v.29-31)?
- How is Jesus' authority revealed later that evening (v.32-34)?

Pray

Yesterday we read of a dramatic exorcism of a man in public with a word. Today we read of a simple healing of a woman in private with a touch. Together they show that God's kingdom is near, and that it is a world freed from spiritual evil and physical suffering (when it comes in its fullness at Jesus' return).

- Praise King Jesus for his authority, and that in his future kingdom there will be no more spiritual or physical suffering. Pray that news about Jesus would spread quickly in our whole region (v.28), and for God's kingdom to come!

8th February

The morning after

Have you ever discovered a great new restaurant or beach, and felt torn between telling people how good it is or keeping it to yourself?

Read Mark 1:35-39

- What surprising thing does Jesus do (v.35)?
- What does Simon think of Jesus' actions (v.37)?
- What does Jesus insist on doing (v.38)?

Apply

Jesus isn't saying he wants to preach and stop doing exorcisms and healings (see v.39). He's saying that he must preach about God's kingdom in other places, and Capernaum cannot keep him to themselves.

- How are you tempted to forget that it is urgent that people hear about Jesus?
- Are there any groups of people near you who don't get to hear about Jesus?
- What could you and your church do to "preach there also"?

9th February

Touching moment

A leper was the ultimate outsider. Cut off from society, unclean before God, with an incurable, fatal disease.

Read Mark 1:40-45

- How does this incident show Jesus' love?
- How does this incident show Jesus' power?
- What is surprising about how Jesus speaks to the cleansed leper (v.43-44)?
- What is surprising about how the cleansed leper responds (v.45)?

At the end of this episode, Jesus and the leper have swapped places. The leper is now a clean insider, going round "preaching" – but Jesus is now living the life of an unclean person, "outside", in "lonely places". Mark has told this story as a picture of the cross, where Jesus swaps places with unclean sinners like us.

Pray

"Thank you, Jesus, that I am an insider in God's people because you became an outsider on the cross. I praise you that I'm now clean because you became unclean."

10th February

Broken home

Back in Capernaum, focussing on Jesus' authority. Verse 1 suggests that this is Jesus' own house!

Read Mark 2:1-5

- How does Jesus react to his roof being dug through (v.5)?
- So what does Jesus think our deepest need is?

Read Mark 2:6-12

Which is easier? "Get up and walk" can be tested straight away. Forgiving sins sends Jesus to the cross. Only God can do either of them...

- What does Jesus want to prove by this act (v.10)?

Another picture of the cross: the paralytic walks "home" forgiven and restored, but at the cost of Jesus' "home" being broken.

Apply

- How does this episode give us assurance that are sins are forgiven by Jesus?

11th February

Separation vs Celebration

Jesus' next choice of follower is controversial...

Read Mark 2:13-17

As a tax collector, Levi was despised as a traitor (he worked for the Romans) and a thief (he got rich taking more than he should).

Pharisees were keen Jews who wanted to get back to distinctive, biblical living.

- Why are these Pharisees offended (v.15-16)?
- How does the image of a doctor turn their assumptions upside-down?

Apply

Jesus is a doctor who heals sin. Anyone who knows they are sick can come to him. We see a hint of the cross again: Jesus welcomes sinners, at the cost of being rejected himself.

- How does Jesus challenge us when we feel too holy for other people who want to know him?
- How does Jesus comfort us when we feel too sinful for God?

12th February

Fasting vs Feasting

One group is fasting and praying. Another is feasting and partying. Which group is most spiritual?

Read Mark 2:18-22

- What is the objection to Jesus this time? (v.18)
- How does the image of Jesus being a bridegroom turn their assumptions upside-down? (v.19-20)
- How does the image of wineskins turn their assumptions upside-down?

Apply

Jesus is like a bridegroom: he brings the joy of salvation, and he becomes the centre of all our relationships, changing everything

- Is there any way you are living as though your Saviour has not yet arrived?
- Is there any way you are trying to attach Jesus to your old way of living, rather than making him the new centre of everything?

13th February

Religion vs Rest

Round 4 of this fight between the religious leaders and Jesus, with the tension growing each time.

Read Mark 2:23-28

The David episode is in 1 Samuel 21. When Jesus calls himself “the Son of Man”, he means the person who God puts in charge of all the world (see Daniel 7:13-14)

- Why don't the Pharisees like the disciples' choice of snack (v.23-24)?
- What claim to authority does Jesus make by comparing himself to King David (v.25-26)?
- What other claim to authority does Jesus make (v.27-28)?

Apply

Jesus confronts the Pharisees with his authority. This authority cuts across all human interpretations of God's law. Jesus uses his authority to give us rest!

- Will you follow the religious traditions you were brought up with today, or will you follow Jesus?
- Will you enjoy the rest Jesus gives today?

14th February

Doing Evil vs Doing Good

The fifth and final conflict story (for now). This time it's Jesus asking the questions, and his opponents have no answer...

Read Mark 3:1-6

- How do Jesus' questions expose the wrong motives of his opponents?
- How does Jesus feel towards his accusers (v.5)?
- Since Jesus' rivals accuse him of breaking God's law, what is ironic about their response (v.6)?

Pray

In Jesus' future kingdom, people are restored, but this happens at the cost of Jesus being rejected. Here's the cross again (v.6): the man with a shrivelled hand is given life, as Jesus is sentenced to death.

Praise our Lord Jesus, who heals the broken, pities his enemies, fears no-one, does good, hates hypocrisy, sees hearts, and faced death so you might live!

15th February

Chosen People

Jesus has been firmly rejected by the Jewish leaders. What will he do?

Read Mark 3:7-12

- How does Mark show us that Jesus is still both popular and powerful?

Read Mark 3:13-19

- How does Mark stress that the Twelve were chosen by Jesus?
- What were the Twelve to do?

Apply

At Mount Sinai, the Lord chose the twelve tribes of Israel to be with him and to make him known to the world (Exodus 19:4-6). Now on another mountain, the Lord Jesus chooses the twelve apostles to be with him and to make him known to the world. God's blessing to the world goes out through them!

- How does this passage encourage us to listen to the message of the Twelve that we have in the New Testament?

16th February

Power source

No-one in Jesus' day could deny he did miracles. But where does Jesus get his amazing authority from?

Read Mark 3:20-30

- Where do the teachers of the law say Jesus' power comes from (v.22)?
- Where does Jesus say his power comes from (v.27)?
- What warning does Jesus give to people who say he has demonic power (v.28-29)?

Apply

Jesus' power can't come from Satan – he's using it to beat Satan up and free people from Satan! The “unforgiveable sin” is deciding that Jesus' power comes from Satan (see v.30) – it's unforgiveable because it's rejecting Jesus, the only source of forgiveness.

- Where do you think Jesus' power comes from?
- Will you trust the promise of v.28 as well as the threat of v.29?

17th February

Family guy

Ever been misunderstood by your own family? So was Jesus...

Re-read Mark 3:20-21 and read Mark 3:31-35

- What do Jesus' biological family think of him?
- Who does Jesus say are his true family?

Apply

What a warning: even close biological ties with Jesus don't make us part of his family if we don't listen to him. And what a promise: Jesus counts us as his brothers, sisters and mother if we do listen to him!

- How is this an encouragement to keep listening to Jesus?
- What would change if you thought of yourself as Jesus' brother or sister?
- How does knowing we are in Jesus' family help when our own family disapprove or disown us?

18th February

Sting in the tale

We've reached the parables. Think they're simple stories to make things clear to simple people and children? Think again!

Read Mark 4:1-12

We'll come back to what this parable means tomorrow

- What two groups does Jesus talk about (v.11)?
- What differences does Jesus describe between the two groups (v.11-12)?

Apply

With a parable, the medium is the message. It reveals the kingdom of God to those who listen to Jesus, but it conceals it from those who don't listen. Jesus started by preaching openly (1:14-15), but now changes after the rejections of chapter 3. A parable is like a stained glass window: dull to those outside, but radiant to those inside.

- How do Jesus' words here make you more grateful for his clear teaching on the kingdom?
- How does Jesus warn you here against treating his message with cynicism or indifference?

19th February

Sowing class

If Jesus is so great, how come so few people follow him? If he's bringing God's kingdom, why are lots of people in Israel rejecting him?

Re-read Mark 4:2-9 and read Mark 4:13-20

- What command does Jesus give (v.3, 9)?
- Why do many people reject Jesus' word (v.15-19)?
- Overall, was the Sower's work a failure or a success (v.20)?

Apply

Where there is no crop, the problem is not in the seed (the message), but in the soil (the hearers). The seed is wonderful – it produces a miraculous crop in the right soil.

- As hearers of Jesus' words, how does this parable encourage us to keep accepting his message when other people don't?
- As speakers of Jesus' words, how does this parable encourage us to keep speaking his message, even when many people reject it?

20th February

Full disclosure

If Jesus is so great, how come he revealed himself to so few people? If he's bringing God's kingdom, how come we don't see that more obviously in the world now? Jesus has spoken about the "secret of the kingdom" – will God's kingdom always be hidden and secret?

Read Mark 4:21-25

- What does Jesus say will happen to his kingdom that is currently hidden (v.21-22)?
- What incentive does Jesus give us to listen to his message about his hidden kingdom (v.23-25)?

Apply

Like a birthday present, Jesus' kingdom is concealed now so that it might be revealed in the future. But at the moment it is heard but not seen, so we must pay careful attention to Jesus' words now.

- How does this passage help you to keep listening to Jesus when you can't see his rule?
- What will it mean for you to "consider carefully what you hear" from Jesus?

21st February

Seedy stories

If Jesus is so great, how come so few people were persuaded by him? If he's bringing God's kingdom, how come we're still waiting for it 2000 years later?

Read Mark 4:26-34

- How does the story of the seed help us to wait for God's kingdom to come fully?
- How does the story of the mustard seed help us to wait for God's kingdom when church is so small?

Apply

Yes, Jesus' kingdom takes time, but so does farming, and the harvest still comes. Yes it looks small, but so does a seed, and the tree is still huge.

- How has Jesus' kingdom been growing over the last 2000 years?
- How do these stories give us confidence that it will keep growing?

22nd February

God's forever name

We're going to spend the rest of the month looking at Psalms 135-141. Psalm 135 begins and ends in praise. In between are 3 great reasons to praise God, even when things aren't going well for his people

Read Psalm 135:1-4

- What can we praise God for (v.3)?
- How has God shown that he is good (v.4)?

Read Psalm 135:5-12

- What can we praise God for (v.5)?
- How has God shown that he is great (v.6-12)?

Read Psalm 135:13-21

- What can we praise God for (v.13)?
- How can we know that God's reputation (his 'name') will last forever when he has so many rivals (v.15-18)?

Pray

Praise God that in Christ he has chosen us (see Ephesians 1:3-5). Adore God that in Christ he has given us an inheritance (see 1 Peter 1:3-5). Rejoice that his goodness and greatness are unstoppable forever.

23rd February

God's forever love

No prizes for spotting the repeated idea in this passage...

Read Psalm 136:1-9

These verses focus on God as supreme Creator.

- How does each verse display God's love?
- How does each verse assure us that God's love endures forever?

Read Psalm 136:10-26

These verses focus on God as strong Redeemer.

- How does each verse display God's love?
- How does each verse assure us that God's love endures forever?

Pray

- How should we respond to God's forever love (v.1-3, 26)?

God's actions in creating and redeeming the world through Jesus all stem from his love (Colossians 1:15-20). Spend time giving him thanks for that love today.

24th February

Remembrance day

This psalm is deeply unhappy – even bitter. That's because it's written in exile, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and deported its people

Read Psalm 137:1-6

- Where is the singer of this psalm, and where does he want to be?
- How does he feel towards Jerusalem, the city where God dwells and reigns?

Read Psalm 137:7-9

- What shocking things does he want God to do to the tormentors of his people?

Apply

We read this psalm from the other side of the cross. There we see that God hates evil, so it is right at times to pray against God's enemies and that evil people will be repaid. But there we also see God's Son loving and dying for those that hate him, so we must also pray for God's enemies and for evil people to be saved.

Pray

Pray against evil and for your and God's enemies. Thank Jesus for his death on the cross that makes it possible to do both.

25th February

To the praise of God's glory

Read Psalm 138:1-5

- What does King David praise God for (v.1-3)?
- What does David want other kings to praise God for (v.4-5)?

This leaves us asking what it is that makes God's glory so great...

Psalm 138:6-8

- What does David tell us about God's great glory?

Pray

We might feel that God's greatness makes him distant from us, way above us. But God's greatness is that he loves and looks kindly on the lowly.

- Praise our great and glorious God with all your heart today, like David does in this psalm.

26th February

Being known by God

We might long to be known intimately, but we also shy away in shame and fear people seeing 'the real me'.

Read Psalm 139:1-12

- What pictures does David use to show that God knows all about him (v.1-6)?
- What pictures does David use to show that God knows him in all places (v.7-12)

David seems a bit unsure whether being known by God is a good thing – he's thinking of fleeing and hiding!

Read Psalm 139:13-24

- What pictures does David use to show that God knows him through all his life (v.13-18)?
- What does David pray about the wickedness God sees in the world and in his heart (v.19-24)?

David can find God knowing him "precious" because this is the God who made him so carefully.

Pray

- Thank God that he knows you – and still loves you! Pray verses 23-24 for yourself.

27th February

Praying to a just God

God's chosen King David is praying for justice against his enemies – but where do we fit into this psalm?

Read Psalm 140

- What does King David ask God to do (v.1-5, 9-11)?
- How does King David express his trust in God (v.6-7)?
- What does King David know about God (v.12-13)?

Apply

Who do you identify with in this psalm? David? The needy? No-one? Paul quotes this psalm in Romans and gives us a bit of a shock:

Read Romans 3:9-18

In verse 13 Paul identifies us not with God's king (that's Jesus) but with the enemies of God's king! Not the victims of injustice, but the doers of injustice!

- How does this make you more thankful that Jesus died so the unjust can be counted just?
- How does this perspective change the way you read Psalm 140 and pray to our just God?

28th February

Deliver me from evil

David's life is threatened, but there's another danger he prays about first...

Read Psalm 141

- What is the first thing David wants to be guarded against (v.3-4)?
- What is David focussed on in the middle of his troubles (v.8)?
- What else does David want to be guarded against (v.9-10)?

Apply

David prays about his sin before he prays about his safety. As Jesus taught us in the Lord's prayer, we need to pray about the evil inside us as well as the evil outside us.

- What spoken (or written or typed) sins do you need God to guard your heart against?
- What evil deeds or company are you drawn to that you need God's help in resisting?

Pray

Pray verse 3 and 4 for yourself in conflicts you face!