



## *Part VI : The Enthronement*

### **Readings for the week : Mark 14:1-16:20**

#### **Introduction**

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- **Pray:** Take a few moments of silence and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion.
- **Share:** Last week we discussed the theme of religious hypocrisy. Have you seen this theme come up again this week?

#### **Brief Summary of Mark 14:1-16:20**

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- This part of the Gospel tells of Jesus' betrayal, agony and death in Jerusalem.
- Mark shows how Jesus is abandoned and dies in solitude.
- The one who was the provocateur, who set all the action of the story in motion, becomes passive and suffers his fate. He seems to be the victim, even though everything happens just as he predicted.
- Mark presents the way to the cross as an enthronement ceremony, during which Jesus becomes the crucified king who receives his life by giving it up, and who becomes strong in his weakness.
- Mark's conclusion places before us the mystery of the Savior-King, crucified and risen, who seeks to gather his disciples to continue the work of proclaiming the Good News.

#### **Christ's Passion as Enthronement**

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The passion text in Mark functions as an enthronement ceremony. It's paradoxical: the death sentence is staged as an ascension to the throne. What elements of this week's reading make you think of an enthronement ceremony? Find them in the text and discuss.

## Text excerpt - The Son of God

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Reread Mk 15: 33-41

- This passage is a goldmine of allusions and references to biblical history. In our brief reflection, we'll confine ourselves to commenting on a single phrase: "This man was truly the Son of God." (v.39) This sentence will enable us to conclude our journey through Mk. by reflecting on what the author intended to convey in his entire narrative.
- In ancient texts, authors regularly used a rhetorical device called "*inclusio*." *Inclusio* simply means beginning and ending a story with the same words. Did you notice that the first and last time Jesus appears in Mark's Gospel, someone announces that he is "the Son of God"? (Compare 15:39 with 1:9-11.) This is a rhetorical *inclusio*.

In a few words, let's try to understand what Mark is trying to convey with this *inclusio*.

- This repetition shows us how intentional Mark was in the literary construction of his Gospel. Mark is not simply passing on a series of testimonies about the life of Jesus, he is constructing a narrative whose ultimate aim is to present Jesus as the Son of God.
- Here, Mark does not use the common understanding that contemporary Christians have when they read the Bible. Indeed, when we read "Son of God", we tend immediately to understand this expression as meaning "the second person of the Trinity".
- Mark uses the expression "Son of God" at three key moments in his narrative:
  - i. Jesus' first appearance, at his baptism (Mk 1:11)
  - ii. Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain (Mk 9:7)
  - iii. Jesus' death on the cross (Mk 15:39).
- These three key passages are moments of revelation: God reveals to the world who Jesus is. To reveal Jesus' identity, the text uses a quotation from Psalms 2.
  - "I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." (PSALMS 2: 7-8 - ESV)
- Psalm 2 is a messianic psalm, that is, it speaks of Israel's hope for a savior-king who would lead the people to freedom and salvation. The psalm describes a kind of ceremony in which God himself proclaims the king to be his son. Following this proclamation, the king of Israel, having become God's son, receives kingship over all the nations of the earth as his inheritance. In response to the chaos in the world, God establishes a Son as king of the world.
- By using the language of Ps 2, Mark is not implying that Jesus was not Son before he was baptized, transfigured or crucified. Jesus is the Son of the Father always and forever. However, Mark shows us how the Father made Jesus the King-Savior of Israel, who bears the title "Son of God".
- The repetition of the phrase "He is the Son of God" seems to tell us that the purpose of Mark's account is to present Jesus as the King-Savior of Psalms 2. It is this man (who is truly the Son of God) who has established himself as king over the whole world, and through whom God is putting an end to the reign of darkness.

- What's most surprising is that the ultimate revelation of this Savior-King comes at the most inopportune moment (on the cross, after the agony of one condemned to death) and from the mouth of a totally unpredictable person (the Roman centurion, one of the executioners).
  - In saying this about Jesus on the cross, Mark points out that the cross is central not only to the way Jesus becomes king, but also to the way he reigns.
  - By placing this word in the mouth of a Roman, Mark seems to be showing that Ps. 2 is being fulfilled, and that God has truly begun to gather people from all nations to recognize Israel's Savior-King.

## Discussion and reflection

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Discuss:

- What do you understand about the idea of Jesus becoming king through the cross? How does this make sense to you?
- Reread Mk 8: 34-38.
  - Does this passage help you understand anything about Jesus' kingship as Mark presents it?

## Conclusion

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- Mark's Gospel tells the story of the Son of God. The first part of the story (up to ch.8) shows us a powerful, miracle-working man who is misunderstood by his disciples. The last part (chapters 8 to 16) of the Gospel shows us how this misunderstood man is rejected, tortured and put to death. but paradoxically, this tragic end leads to an understanding of his true identity.
- Mankind's problem is linked to the sin that drives us to live for ourselves, seeking influence, comfort or personal satisfaction above all else. We think we're the center of the universe. To overcome sin, we needed someone who would renounce this logic and enable us to live according to another logic, that of love.
- On the cross, Jesus gave his life to save humanity (Mk 10:45), but he also set an example for us to follow (8:34). True life, life in abundance, requires self-denial in order to follow Jesus.

## Application and prayer

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- How do you react to the prospect of Jesus' revolutionary kingship?
- Are there any radical choices you'd have to make to follow Jesus?
- What might this mean for you in the days ahead?

Pray for each other and encourage each other to follow Jesus!

Attached below: "The mystery of Mark's finale".

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For more information on this series, or for more resources to help you move forward with God, please contact Ruben (ruben.binyet@icf-ge.ch).

To deepen and mature in your faith, consider registering for the next ICF-College session (info on icf-ge.ch).

## Appendix - The mystery of Marc's finale

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Mark's Gospel ends in a very strange way. Most of our Bibles contain verses 9 to 20 of chapter 16 in square brackets. Why is this? Because most manuscripts of Mark's Gospel, including the oldest and most reliable, do not contain these verses!

So, the text we receive ends in failure: we don't see the resurrected Jesus (even though the text presupposes the reality of his resurrection); on the contrary, the women who have been ordered to go and announce the resurrection are silent because they are afraid.

What are we to make of this?

There are several hypotheses about Mark's ending:

1. One widely accepted theory among scholars is that Mark intentionally ends his Gospel at verse 8. He wanted to end in a shocking way, leaving the reader surprised and wondering.
2. Another perspective considers that Mark's ending (beyond verse 8) would have been lost or never written even if Mark had intended to continue the narrative. Thus, an author or a group of scribes would have added a conclusion according to their understanding of the author's intention.
3. Some argue that the ending presented by some unreliable manuscripts is the true ending written by Mark.

Option 1 is the most popular among scholars. How do you understand Mark's intention if he actually intended to end at verse 8? Here's a commentary on this quite surprising ending:

"The more we reflect on the way Mark concludes his Gospel, the more bizarre and profound it becomes. It's a tall order for church audiences who want to belong to something that works. We want to be shaped by a story that ends well, that gives hope for the future. But Mark is a brilliant storyteller, and he knows that satisfying endings are far less effective than unsatisfying endings in getting people to go back to the beginning and think again about what it all means." (T. Gombis, Mark, The Story of the Bible Commentary)