

Tenth New Testament Summary The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark and the letters/epistles of 1st & 2nd Peter have their source in the apostle Peter (the evangelist Mark/"John Mark" took his account from Peter and the letters are Peter's). Peter is renowned for good reason. He is the leader of Christ's inner circle during the Lord's earthly ministry. He appears to be the primary leader among the apostles not only during the Lord's 3-year public ministry, but also for the first 12 chapters in the book of Acts (after-wards, the focus shifts to the apostle Paul). Peter is known for his boldness (in terms of his positive trait) and for his impetuous ways (in terms of his negative trait). For example and on the negative side of the ledger: 1) Peter walks on water, begins to sink and then cries out to the Lord to save him (Matthew 14:28f); 2) He counters Christ's prediction that he will deny him three times and says, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." {famous last words, since Peter went on to do exactly what Jesus predicted}; 3) He initially will not allow the Lord to wash his feet: "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." (John 13:8a) and then he goes to the other extreme, "Then, Lord, ..." "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (John 13:9); 4) He stands in front of Christ and tries to stop his mission to save us on the way to the cross: "Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'" (Matthew 16:22-23); 5) At the transfiguration of our Lord, Peter stumbles all over himself in utter confusion and offers to build three shelters for Jesus and the glorified Moses and Elijah (Matthew 9:4) and Mark records that Peter "did not know what to say" (Mark 9:6), but Peter true to form just said the first thing that came to mind! On the positive side of the ledger, Peter said some amazing things, truly powerful things: 1) Christ asks the disciples, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" And Peter answers: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:15-16) Jesus Himself tells Peter that what he said was given to him from the Father Himself! (Matthew 16:17); 2) After many disciples turn away from and reject the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus asks the 12, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" To which Peter gives this extraordinary reply: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69); 3) Peter who denied Christ three times is also restored/reinstated by the Lord Jesus Christ three times! (John 21:15-17); and 4) Who could miss the amazing sermon Peter preaches at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2? After that sermon, three thousand people accepted his message and were baptized (vs. 41)! So what is Peter? He is a living picture, an extraordinary example of every, true Christian with two natures (the sinful nature/flesh and the born again nature/spirit). Which of us cannot relate to Peter? Talk about hot and cold! He's a picture of you and me who also follow Jesus! To follow Christ is to know the power of the Holy Spirit

to lead us to speak things that quite simply had to come from God; and -- at the same time -- to know the weakness of the flesh, is to want to insert foot in mouth at times. Thank God for Peter! He gives us hope!

Do you remember my mentioning the different animals that symbolize each of the four Gospels? Mark is represented by the Lion, a symbol of the greatest power, courage and authority especially in the face of the Roman Empire that often stood against Christianity. The symbolism is fascinating, but entirely biblical. In the book of Revelation the Lord Jesus is called "the lion of the tribe of Judah." (Rev. 5:5), but the symbol of a lion may also represent the devil. In fact, Peter himself uses this terminology: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1st Peter 5:8-9) {recall that C.S. Lewis uses this symbolism of the lion for a Christ-figure in the Chronicles of Narnia} In reference to Christ, however; THIS lion in St. Mark is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. The Gospel according to Mark reveals this truth. Please note that Mark moves beyond Matthew's Jewish audience and moves towards Gentiles. The universality of the Gospel is depicted in St. Mark's Gospel. Sure, Peter makes his great confession (also recorded in Mark 8:29), but notice who is making another great confession at Mark 15:39! The words are these: "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (Son of God = a title of divinity) Guess who spoke the words? A Roman centurion! Even Roman commanders are coming to faith in Jesus Christ! This recognition of Christ's authority and power, however, goes way beyond even Gentiles in this Gospel! Get this: St. Mark's Gospel provided by St. Peter describes exorcisms and Christ's power over demons more than any other Gospel! After Jesus resists the temptation of the devil in the desert, he drives out an evil spirit from a man in the synagogue. In the meantime, the evil spirit cries out: "I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:21-25) Jesus is healing not merely the "sick," but also the "demon-possessed." (Mark 1:32) In Mark 3, Jesus is actually accused of being possessed by the prince of demons! (vs. 22), but Christ corrects them, "How can Satan drive out Satan?" (vs. 23) Indeed, just before this accusation against Jesus, Mark 3 also records, "Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.'" (vs. 11) Mark 5 records the healing of a demon-possessed man (the man in the region of the Gerasenes). The demon identifies himself as "Legion" and says, "for we are many." (vs. 9) Jesus sends the demons from the man into a herd of pigs that rush down a steep bank into a lake and drown. (vs. 13) Later, in Mark 7 the Syrophenician woman begs Jesus to drive a demon from her daughter. Mark records that the woman's daughter was "possessed by an evil spirit." (vs. 25-26) Jesus dispels the demon. (vs. 29) In Mark 9, Jesus heals a boy who is demon possessed. The situation about the boy is described in detail to Christ: "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and

becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." (vss. 17-18) The father gives Jesus more information: "[His son had been like this] [f]rom childhood," he answered, "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." (vss. 21-22) In describing the exorcism by Christ, the conclusion is fascinating: "The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, 'He's dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up." (vss. 25-27) What is so fascinating about all of this, however, is that these possessions are not substitutes for physical illnesses. Aside from the exorcisms, St. Mark records Jesus healing "many" (Mark 1:29-34) with everything from "fevers" to those who are "sick" and to those who had "various diseases." Jesus heals a man with "leprosy." (Mark 1:40f.) Jesus heals a paralytic. (Mark 2:1f.) He raises a dead girl and heals a sick woman. (Mark 5:21f.) Jesus also heals a man who was both deaf and mute. (Mark 7:31f.) The Lord heals a blind man at Bethsaida. (Mark 8:22f.) He heals another man who is blind, namely Bartimaeus. (Mark 10:46f.) Again, these are in addition to and are distinct from the exorcisms described above. What is going on here? First of all, it is crucial to understand that the reasons these things are recorded is so that we would know WHO Christ is, so that we may personally share in the confessions of faith recorded here in St. Mark's Gospel! Secondly, we also learn something about the complexity of our human make-up and constitution. Jesus is certainly addressing belief while at times also convicting the hearts and minds of men (notice for example the account of "the rich young man," Mark 10:17f.); he is of course also addressing spiritual conditions while conducting the exorcisms; and he is caring for the physical bodies of those who were healed from illnesses. That is, Christ is addressing the WHOLE person: body, mind and spirit! Liberal commentators and theologians want to reduce the exorcism references to the archaic descriptions of advanced disease beyond the diagnostic abilities of first-century "physicians" (we can't say medicine was practiced back then as it is now); however, this is NOT to say that the liberal critics are right. Much to the contrary, God is teaching us that people can be "sick" due to a range of possible causes: spiritual, mental/emotional, and physical (or a combination thereof). That is to say, we are holistic beings. In Scripture, we are quite simply described as having a heart, soul and mind! Note how St. Mark records the greatest commandment at Mark 12:30: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." In Scripture, the heart is the seat of loyalty, decisions and choices; the soul is the place where we know God (or do not know God); and the mind connects us to knowledge. You might say that God is covering the bases for what we ACCEPT, what we TRUST, and for what we KNOW. All of these elements relate to faith (in fact faith has been described theologically as notitia/knowledge; assensus/acceptance; and fiducia/trust), and God is interested in all of you, not just some of you. He wants your whole life devoted to Him and Christ died to redeem your whole life! But let me get back to the main point once again: we are holistic beings. Historically, however, Western Medicine has been short-sided and reductionistic. Give a patient some

pills or cut them open with a knife and their problems are solved! Really? What about the mind? What about the spirit? Can poor spiritual health impact the body? Can poor mental health impact the body? When we "treat" our patients what are we treating? Are we treating part of them or all of them? What if we only "fix" the physical symptom of a greater problem? Eastern Medicine is in some respects more advanced merely because from a cultural standpoint, there is more of a natural consideration for the whole person, at least in terms of ancient Eastern perspectives. For example, when the Israelites of the Old Testament heard "shalom" (PEACE), they understood that this meant health for their entire being, body, mind and soul! St. Mark's Gospel has HUGE ramifications on how one approaches the medical field. If you ever watch the movies "Patch Adams" with Robin Williams and "The Doctor" with William Hurt...you'll see the point I'm trying to make. In Christ, Dr. Espinosa