

## MEETING GOD IN MARK

### ROWAN WILLIAMS. SPCK 2014

*Euangelion* – routine official important proclamation.

Richard Baukham: no need to question date within eye-witness period.

MARK? ‘shortfingered’. IPeter 5:13 – my son Mark - with him in Babylon. Fell out and then reconciled.

Acts 12:25 – friend/relation of Barnabas, John Mark. Wealthy merchant family?

Mark 15:21 Alexander & Rufus sons of Simon Cyrene known to readers. Also traders?

This would place Mark on network of merchant links through diaspora. (traditional connection with Alexandria in Egypt)

KOINA GREEK: merchant not scholars’ Greek.

Round about AD 70 when Rome attacked and captured Jerusalem (probably before since Dead Sea Scroll fragment quotes? Mark)

Individual and Community created Gospel together. Mark’s symbol – not a tame lion!

#### Chapter 2: Telling **Secrets**

Mark 4:10-12: *in parables so that they see but not understand*

Mark 2:1-12: ‘stand and walk’ is easy, difficult thing is to forgive sins. Encourages them to look deeper, not assume he is just charismatic healer.

When not among Jews & before Pilate he is more open. ‘go and tell’, ‘I am’.

Miracles arise from Jesus’ compassion or his anger at authorities fear of release.

But he requires trust or belief (eg 9:21-24) because his healings need relationship with him – ‘help thou my unbelief. Miracles in a vacuum are not on.

God is ‘beyond’ ‘power so does not coerce but requires relationship and trust: this is the secret! . So, 1. Miracles are not the main point 2. Involves relationship.

**Why parables?** The great irony is we look at God all around and don’t see him!

Not that disciples are example of failure but that it is always mysterious for us all.

When we think we’ve got it, we’ve missed it. Even those closest get it wrong [then why do women get it?] Even Jesus struggles for words in Mark’s gospel. Not tidy.

End of the Gospel: *ephoboounto gar* ‘they were afraid, you see...’

Here they are told to say something and this time they don’t! But how on earth are they going to talk about this experience? The crucifixion of the leader is not a conventional triumph, yet it is the regime changing moment. Resurrection silences us.

“God is not an inflated version of how we would run the universe if we had the chance.” (p50) Brings regime change in our world, plus changes what we can say about God.

### CHAPTER 3: A LIFELONG **PASSION**

One third of Mark is the last week of his life. Clear locations – upper room etc – so perhaps based on early ‘stations of the cross’ liturgy in Jerusalem? Jesus is more and more alone as it progresses – even God abandons him eventually: he carries whole weight. In Gethsemane there is no ‘answer’ from above – God is no longer separate from him. Chilling Kafkaest experience for him. And when he is stripped of all hope and power he is able to answer Pilate’s question forthrightly: “I am” (14:61) the divine name itself! Only then does God declare himself. So we don’t listen to Jesus because he does wonderful things – God now cannot be dethroned by any degree of pain or failure – it is here that God chooses to manifest Godself. God is not where you thought he was.

#### **Human and divine power** (Chapter 10)

Disciples seek to gain advantage – Jesus is here to gainsay all that.

His execution is the price to free us from the fantasy that God is only a hugely inflated version of how we would run the world. His death dismantles the myth. (so the usual notion of atonement is debunked – who is the ransom paid to anyway? Does God have to negotiate with a higher authority to save us?) So the end of Mark is a way of saying: now you think you’ve got it, go back and start reading over again!

**Resurrection** is God putting his seal on the failed abandoned Jesus. Words were found and the women did say something. Note that only in resurrection is there no OT-prophecy road-map alluded to. They had forgotten any words of hope about resurrection that Jesus had offered them – all totally surprised. After the event has sunk in, only then do we look back over OT and see the sense.

A lost ending? But surely not only one copy; and this *gar* ending is in keeping.

Mark's Gospel does not say everything, but it is the *arche* upon which all is built.

Matthew has stress on continuity and climax, very orderly, so less disturbing.

Luke: similar stories and concern for outcast, with Mk's inversion of values.

Yet Mark is bedrock – like John, begins radically, in heavenly places – begins and ends in mystery. John is like Mark in saying, “the gospel is now over to the reader” (‘not possible to write everything down’)

This gospel is not an ‘edifying text’ but summons to *metanoia*

Peter is the typical witness who misses the point constantly but is still held by the questioning eyes of Jesus. Just when Jesus is declaring himself to Pilate at last, there is Pete denying him. ‘I am’ says Jesus and Peter says, ‘I am not’. He is empty.

Peter is us.