

It's all about Jesus. It's not our way; it's not New Covenant Baptist Fellowship's way. It's about His way, or it's no way. It is by the effects of that Name preached and applied to us by the Holy Spirit that God saves his people. Thus it has been and ever will be until the end of the world.

THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

The heart of the Christianity is this person, The New Covenant Person. The heart of Hinduism is everyman, the heart of Buddhism is the inward journey of self-discovery, the heart of Islam is the Koran, but the heart of Christianity is Jesus Christ. It is not a set of rules, though it has very important rules and we must obey them if we are truly Christ's. Christianity centers on who and what Jesus Christ has done rather on rules we have to obey.

Notice these opening words: "the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ." What other absolute good news is there?

Any other news we hear, outside of Scripture, regardless of the accuracy of the report, is temporal. The news may discuss the eternal but the news itself is temporal, it merely becomes a part of recorded history and it will eventually disappear

But, the good news about Jesus is Jesus himself and He is eternal. The good news is He does what He does because of who He is.

A message like the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law, which keeps telling us do this and do that, is scarcely good news. God Himself is the good news, the Mosaic law was a means for God to express Himself to a people.

Neither is Christianity a set of ceremonies, though we do baptize and participate in the Lord's Supper because Christ commanded us to do those things. But they cannot be the heart of Christianity because the thief who was crucified alongside Christ was neither baptized nor did he come to Holy Communion and yet he went to paradise

because of his special relationship with the Lord Jesus prior to Pentecost and the establishment of the New Covenant era. He cried to the Lord that he would remember him. People may be baptized by each and every mode of baptism, and kneel at a communion rail every day and have a wafer placed on their tongues, or take a piece of bread as it is passed to them, and still they may be lost in their sins

Christianity is not sitting with the right group doing what the group do though they are the most beautiful and powerful group in the world. It is not joining a cause to put wrongs right. The apostles didn't travel the Near East going from town to town urging people to come and sit with their crowd or join their cause. Rather they went everywhere talking about the Messiah who had come: who he was and what he, by himself, had achieved. Christianity is a person called Jesus. Many would agree with but then we must ask "Just a minute, please," which Jesus are you talking about?" Is the Jesus you are promoting the Mormon Jesus, or the Jehovah's Witness Jesus, or a homosexual Jesus, or a Marxist revolutionary Jesus, or the well-fed, slick, health-wealth-and-prosperity Jesus?

Or is it the New Covenant Person Jesus, the eternal son of God and son of Man whose life transformed and transforms many from every nation kindred and tribe throughout the globe until He returns for His bride the church.

Fifteen years ago, in 1992, an Australian woman named Barbara Thiering, got into all the papers through a book she had written called, "Jesus the Man: A New

Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls." The most distinctive thing about the book, which resulted in her appearing on TV chat-shows and in the tabloid press for about a month, was her suggestion that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that he had by her three children, a daughter and two sons. Then they were divorced and Jesus married again, but that is not the Jesus of Mark's gospel, is it?

Nothing new here in light of the DaVinci Code and The Last Temptation of Christ, both

So the question we must continue to ask is:

Which Jesus Christ do we believe and who are we following? There is only one who can properly be named 'Jesus' and that is the Jesus of the New Testament Scriptures who is The New Covenant Person.. One evangelical minister spoke of his shock in hearing a liberal clergyman actually say, "I hate the Bible." Well, to hate the Bible is to hate the God of the Bible. To deny Christ is to say that God does not exist.

MARK IS ONE OF FOUR GOSPELS.

There are four gospels, but Paul tells the Galatians there is only one gospel. He pronounces an anathema on anyone who maintains another gospel. Paul is dead right, of course, and we must take his warning seriously. There is only one gospel, one message of good news for the world, relevant to every person in every age. So it might be better not to speak of the Gospel of Mark - or of Matthew, of Luke, or of John for that matter. Instead we should speak of the Gospel according to Mark.

So we are studying the Gospel according to Mark.

It is the shortest gospel made up of about 660 verses, and some 606 of them reappear completely or partially in Matthew, and about 380 in Luke. It was the Lord's will that our knowledge of the words and deeds of Jesus should come to us from separate sources, and this has marvellous advantages. It means that all the work of the Redeemer is illuminated from four sides. We have a multi-perspectival view of the Son of God.

This word 'gospel' is not a special New Testament word. It was not invented by Christians as they did seem to have taken up quite obscure words and filled them with new meaning and made them their own. The Romans used this word 'gospel' and associated it with the cult of the emperor. His birthday, the day he came of age, the day he acceded to power were all 'good news' days. The festivals that celebrated these days were called 'gospels' or 'evangels'

But the Jews also in their translation of the Old Testament into Greek, had used this

word 'gospel' concerning a future blessed day of salvation. The word is especially found in the prophet Isaiah. "Blessed are the feet of those that bring good news," Isaiah cried. "It will come one day," said all his fellow Jews. "No, the good news is here in the Emperor," said the Romans. Christians said to both Jew and Gentile that the good news is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

What struck the early observers of Christianity most forcibly was not merely that salvation was offered by means of the good news of Jesus Christ, but that all other means was summarily rejected. Such exclusiveness ran directly counter to the prevailing syncretism of the Hellenistic age.

It also runs hard against the grain of today's post-modern and New Age culture.

However, this is the truth that was preached by the Apostles and should be preached by us.

Let's use Peter, from whom Mark probably got his record for his Gospel.

"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by the witnesses whom God had already chosen - by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (Acts 10:36-43)

This outline of what Peter says is the same basic approach as that which Mark gives us in his gospel, in a brief sixteen chapters, covering the two or three years of the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Like Peter's speech Mark starts with Jesus' baptism by John, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him, and the ministry of our Lord in Galilee and ending in Jerusalem. Then we are given an account of his trial, crucifixion and resurrection. Mark is following that outline of Peter's sermon. They both tell us that on a literal, twenty-four hour day a man called John led Jesus into the wet water of the river Jordan and John baptised Jesus. On that same occasion God anointed Jesus with the

Holy Spirit and power. For about three years-three and a half years (each year consisting of three hundred and sixty-five days, and each day being twenty-four hours in length), this same Jesus walked all over the land of Israel and he visited Samaria too. He opened his mouth and taught in a variety of pulpits - the homes of real people, from a boat, on a mountainside, in the streets, in a synagogue and in the Temple in Jerusalem. This same Jesus was really crucified, he actually died, and was literally buried in a rock tomb. Three twenty-four hour calendar days later, this same Jesus rose from the grave. He talked and ate and drank with his disciples. For forty literal days, he spent time with them, finally exhorting them to go into all the world with the good news of what they had seen and heard in him, and then he ascended into heaven.

The history of Jesus is history and history is HIS-STORY. It is not merely an epic like The Lord of the Rings or The Chronicles of Narnia.

In this 21st century we are surrounded by men and women who say, "It makes no difference whatever if Christ literally and bodily rose from the dead, whether that did or did not happen is immaterial.

The important thing is the power of truth today. What did or did not happen in history is totally irrelevant to your truth and mine." They speak to us condescendingly about the power of myths to teach great truths. But death is not a myth.

It is true that there are those without Christ who truly do not fear death but that is not the majority of the human race.

Deepak Chopra, M.D., a pioneer of alternative medicine, and New Age guru once said that everything we fear has already happened. In other words, there's no need to fear most of what we spending time fearing.

www.sixwise.com/newsletters/05/07/13/the_six_most_feared_but_least_likely_causes_of_death.htm.

The six highest fears of death in one poll are as follows: airplane crashes, shark attack, being murdered, falling to death, terrorist attack and natural disasters.

But here are the facts based on a 2000 study:

Biggest fears aside, the Journal of the American Medical Association published a study that uncovered the actual leading causes of death in the United States (in 2000). Overwhelmingly, these causes stem from our own, modifiable behaviors

- Tobacco (435,000 deaths, 18.1 percent of total U.S. deaths)
- Poor diet and physical inactivity (400,000 deaths, 16.6 percent)
- Alcohol consumption (85,000 deaths, 3.5 percent)
- Microbial agents (75,000)
- Toxic agents (55,000)
- Motor vehicle crashes (43,000)
- Incidents involving firearms (29,000)
- Sexual behaviors (20,000)
- Illicit use of drugs (17,000)

Death is the fearful reality towards which we are all heading and only Jesus raised himself from the dead.

The purpose of Mark's Gospel can be presented in this way:

1. To make the good news accessible to Gentiles

Rome was a Gentile city, though naturally there were many Jews there as well, drawn by trade and business. To judge from Paul's letter to the Roman Christians, the church there contained both Gentiles and Jews, and feelings probably ran high between them at times. A gospel produced in and for such a 'mixed' church would have to explain carefully Jewish words and customs, so that the non-Jewish readers could understand. That is exactly what Mark's gospel does and in that sense it is a gospel for the non-Jew, the Gentile, the outsider. This also explains why Mark does not quote nearly as much from the OT as Matthew does. Mark's Gentile Christians would not have known the OT as well as Jewish Christians, nor indeed would they have had the same interest in it. (New Bible Dictionary)

Nevertheless, much of what needed to be known by them was preached from the Old Testament Scriptures and made clear in light of Christ.

2. To encourage those facing persecution.

The story of Christ's suffering is always used to encourage believers and Peter is one who does so in his letters as well.

3. To defend the faith

Mark makes clear that in the case of Jesus, the charges that he was a rebel against Rome were trumped up and completely false. Mark wants to explain the true nature of Christianity and remove false ideas about it that might hinder evangelism. This too is an important task before the church today, both in countries where other great organized religions co-exist (and Christians are sometimes at risk from jealous 'fundamentalist' religious leaders) and in so-called 'Christian' lands, where there is pagan ignorance and indifference.

4. To explain the significance of the cross

For example, Muslims find it a great stumbling-block that God should have allowed such a good man, and indeed such a prophet, to die such a terrible death yet Mohammed was poisoned by the wife of a man he murdered according to some authentic Islamic sources.

Mark points out in his gospel that Jesus was not merely a good man or even a prophet: he was the Son of God. He proves this, not by telling the story of the virgin birth (which he must have known) but by showing how God himself proclaimed Jesus as his Son at his baptism and later at the transfiguration.

Mark's gospel is not just a collection of sayings and doings of Jesus with no particular plan or connection. If you read Mark through at one sitting, you will see this. It has a definite plan and outline.

The 'good news' had been planned by God long before. Mark quotes the prophets Malachi and Isaiah to prove it, though he only mentions Isaiah by name. Mark shows that the 'messenger' prophesied, was John the Baptist, while the Lord of v 3 is Jesus. So Mark is already equating Jesus with God, for 'Lord' usually means 'God' in the OT. These were

the very claims for which the priests and elders would crucify Jesus. It is impossible to be neutral when faced with Christ: was he the Messiah and God's Son, or not? Which side do we stand on?

And by the same reasoning we must have a clear understanding of what the Gospel is.

The Gospel is not, "God has a wonderful plan for your life."

The Gospel is not the Roman road.

The Gospel is not "Christ came and died for sinners."

First and foremost, the good news is the Person of Jesus Christ.

In the era of the New Covenant the explicit reason men are saved by grace is because of Christ who came and died for His people. Those who are His are lost in their sin and cannot find Him. He calls them and they hear His voice. His Spirit changes their hearts so they will repent and believe. These gifts are given by Him. They are sealed by His spirit and are known by His name. They will live for His glory and have an eternal hope in Him because He was born of a virgin, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, He was crucified and shed His blood, He raised Himself from the dead on the third day and He is coming again for His people and to execute His final wrath on the unbelievers. He will reign forever and ever in His eternal kingdom. He will be the light forever and His saints will praise Him forever.

The Gospel is Jesus Christ and all of what He has provided for the salvation of men. The Gospel is not just words about Christ it is the Living Word Christ and the words that tell us about this one whom men can call their savior.

The good news of what He has done is rooted in the good news of the person that He is

And of who we desire to learn more as we study the good news, Jesus Christ as Mark presents Him.