



## THE KING'S CROSS

# The gospel according to Mark

## Introduction

The author of Mark's gospel is almost certainly Paul's helper Mark (Acts 15:37-38, Col. 4:10, 2 Tim. 4:11) and Peter's 'son' [=apprentice] (1 Peter 5:13).<sup>1</sup> The Church Fathers (the first leaders and theologians of the Christian church) record that Mark wrote his gospel under Peter's direction.<sup>2</sup>

This means his account comes from a close first-hand witness (Peter), and his understanding has been shaped by the first great Christian theologian (Paul). These two men had staked their lives on Jesus and had suffered deeply for their faith in him. You can bet Mark wants us to understand who Jesus is and why this matters so much.

His gospel is a breathless chain of stories without much theological comment. But the stories, and way they're structured suggest a clear and powerful theological message.<sup>3</sup> It addresses 3 questions:

- Who Jesus is
- What the Kingdom of God is
- How to respond to the good news Jesus brings

Mark answers all 3 questions with the Cross. The Cross is the answer to Jesus' identity, the Kingdom of Heaven & how to respond to Jesus. This means that the 3 answers are 'welded together'.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Eerdmans, 1974)

<sup>2</sup> L.F. Church (ed), *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1960), p.162 (NT)

<sup>3</sup> N.T. Wright, *How God became King: getting to the heart of the gospels* (SPCK, 2012)

<sup>4</sup> Wright (2012) p.228

# Main themes

## 1. Who Jesus is (Christology) is woven throughout the book.

Statements calling him Messiah and Son of God, shape the whole book.

- at the opening – by Mark (1:1) & by Father himself (1:11),
- in the centre of the gospel – by Peter (8:29),
- and the close – by Caiphas the high priest (14:61) & by a Roman soldier (15:39).

The stories show him to be *both God and God's* promised King (Messiah). And his kingship is always connected to his Cross. For example, the minute Peter recognises him Jesus immediately teaches about the Cross (8:31). And it is the Cross which triggers the Roman soldier's recognition. When he is crucified with thieves on his right and left (15:27) he is fulfilling his words to James and John 'These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared', and that makes the Cross the seat of his kingly coronation (10:25-40).

## 2. What the kingdom of God is (eschatology) is also woven throughout.

- The gospel opens with Jesus announcing the kingdom of God (1:15). This announcement is connected in the text to God's promise, through Isaiah, that he himself will come to earth to put things right (1:2-4), and to the heavenly voice identifying Jesus as God's son (1:11).
- The centre of the gospel includes a collection of parables about the kingdom (see especially Ch. 4) and extensive teaching about the kingdom (see especially Ch. 10).
- The whole closing half of the gospel opens with Jesus saying, '...some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the Kingdom of God has come with power' (9:1) and finishes with his crucifixion and resurrection.

But the kingdom of God presented is not what any 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew would have expected.

- It is liberation, renewal and healing (1:16-34).
- It is new & surprising (2:18-22).
- It is overwhelmingly fruitful (Ch.4).
- It is stronger than death (Ch. 5).
- It crosses national and cultural boundaries (7:24-30).
- It reverses the worldly order (Ch. 10).
- It is knowable now (9:1) and unavoidable later (Ch. 13). (This is called inaugurated eschatology).

How is all this possible? Because it centres on the Cross (8:31-37). This is what enables Jesus, the King, to bring liberation and renewal from sin, to welcome

sinners and non-Jews, to bring about personal transformation that is powerfully fruitful, and even to beat the final enemy – death.

### 3. How to respond to the good news (soteriology) is the third main theme.

Yet again there are bracketing statements:

- At the opening by Mark (1:1) then by Jesus (1:15) who says, 'Repent and believe the good news'.
- In the middle where Peter responds wrongly and Jesus corrects him (8:31-37).
- And at the end where Caiphas gets it wrong (14:61) & the Roman soldier gets it right (15:39).

In the stories, almost every action & teaching of Jesus divides opinion.

From the very start his ministry is opposed by the Pharisees and Herodians (3:6), teachers of the law (3:22), his own family (3:31-34), and his home town (6:1-6). This resistance is violent and extreme.

Furthermore, even those following him are slow to understand. Peter's confession is compromised (8:32-33) and bracketed by stories of blindness. And his own disciples desert and deny him at his crucifixion.

Jesus himself anticipates this misunderstanding. He is ambivalent about crowds and quiets those who recognise him (3:7-12), and he teaches about unresponsive soil (4:1-20).

So how can we respond rightly to Jesus? Again, the answer hinges on the Cross. To be saved is to be a disciple, and discipleship is the way of the Cross (8:34-38). The Cross is the place where the Son of Man will ransom his people – and this will be the pattern of discipleship (10:45).

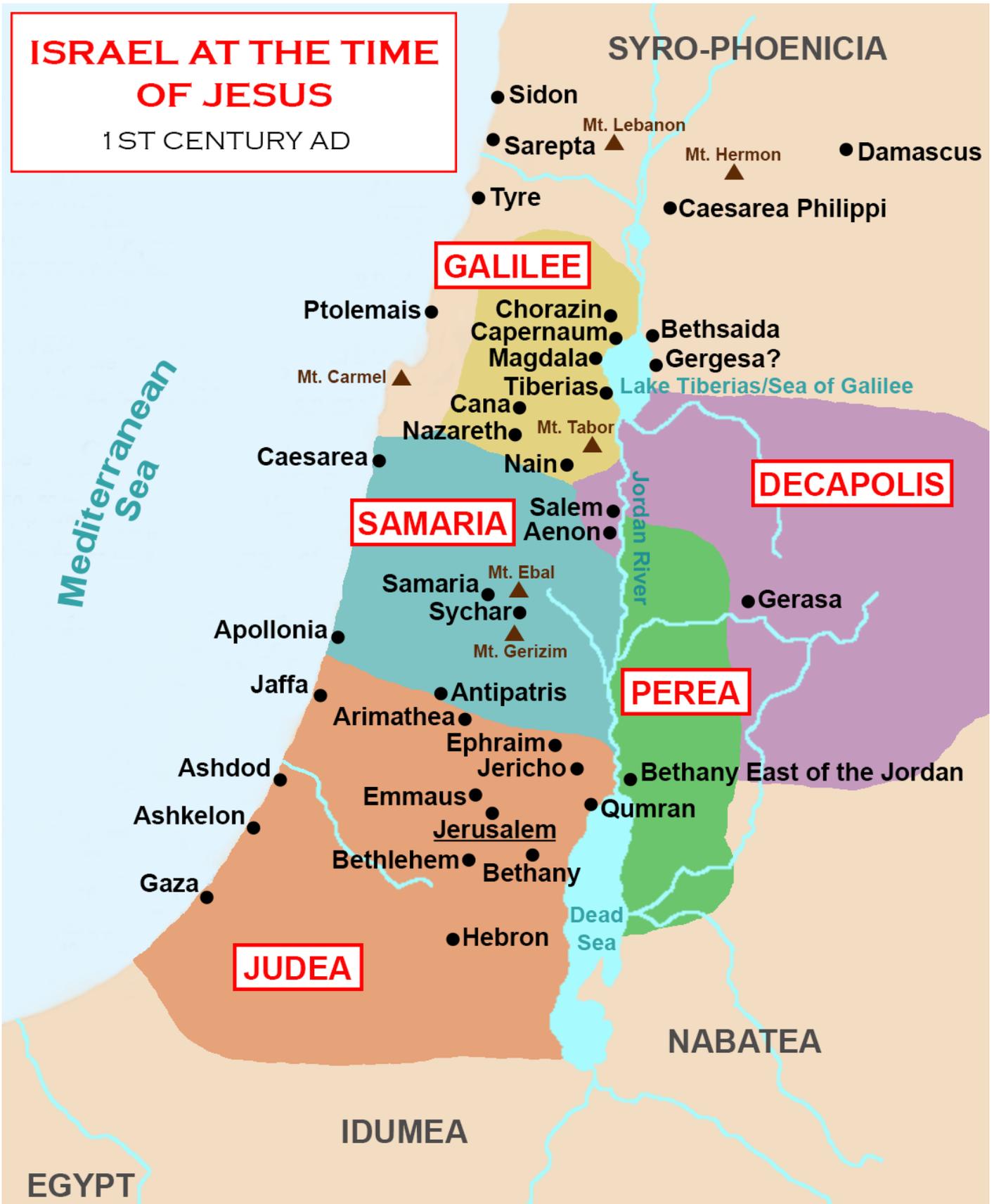
# The structure of the gospel

<b>1. You are my Son, whom I love. (1:1-8:21)</b>	
<b>1.1. The good news of the kingdom (1:1-39)</b>	Mark introduces his gospel (1:1) The Father announces Jesus (2-13) Jesus announces his kingdom and calls disciples (14-20) Jesus performs miracles (21-34) Jesus prays alone about his mission (35-39)
<b>1.2. New wine &amp; new wineskins (1:40-2:22)</b>	Jesus heals the Leper (1:40-45) Jesus forgives the paralytic (2:1-12) Jesus says he's come for the sick and the sinners (13-17) Jesus teaches about new wine & wineskins (18-22)
<b>1.3. Son of Man &amp; Son of God (2:23-3:19)</b>	Jesus says the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (23-27) Jesus heals on the Sabbath (3:1-6) Spirits call Jesus the Son of God (7-12) 12 are chosen – echoes of Israel (13-19)
<b>1.4. The soils (3:20-4:34)</b>	The teachers call Jesus Satan-possessed (20-30) Jesus' family think he's out of his mind (31-34) The parables: sower, lamp & seeds (4:1-34)
<b>1.5. Scattering seed (4:35-5:43)</b>	Jesus calms the storm on the way to the East (35-41) Jesus frees a demon-possessed man to be a witness in the Decapolis (5:1-20) Jesus returns West and heals a sick woman and a dead girl (21-43)
<b>1.6. Poor soil at home (6:1-44)</b>	Jesus is rejected in Nazareth (6:1-5) Jesus sends out the 12 (6-13) John the Baptist is beheaded (14-29) Jesus feeds 5000 (30-44)
<b>1.7. Good soil abroad (6:45-8:21)</b>	Jesus walks on water on the way back East (45-56) Jesus confronts hypocrisy in visiting Pharisees (7:1-23) The foreign woman exhibits saving faith (24-30) A deaf-mute foreigner is healed (31-37) Jesus feeds 4000 (8:1-13) Jesus draws attention to the signs and warns against the Pharisees (14-21)
<b>2. This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him! (8:22-10:52)</b>	
<b>2.1. Partial sight (8:22-9:13)</b>	Jesus heals a blind man in two stages (22-26) Peter confesses Christ (27-30) Jesus speaks of his Cross and Peter doesn't understand (31-33) Whoever loses his life for me will save it (24-38) The transfiguration (9:1-13)
<b>2.2. Overcoming unbelief (9:14-32)</b>	Boy afflicted from birth but now healed (14-29) Second prediction of the cross (30-32)

<p><b>2.3. Have salt and be at peace (9:33-10:52)</b></p>	<p>The first must be last (33-37)  Whoever isn't against us is for us (38-41)  Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other (42-50)  What God has joined together let man not separate (10:1-12)  Anyone who will not receive the kingdom like a little child won't enter (13-16)  How hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (17-31)  Third prediction of the cross (32-34)  You will drink the cup I drink (35-45)  Blind Bartimaeus healed (46-52)</p>
<p><b>3. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (11:1-16:8)</b></p>	
<p><b>3.1. The King rides into Jerusalem (11:1-33)</b></p>	<p>The Triumphal entry (11:1-11)  Jesus clears the temple (12-19)  Jesus curses a fig tree (20-25)  The authority of Jesus questioned (27-33)</p>
<p><b>3.2. The temple is doomed (12:1-13:32)</b></p>	<p>The parable of the tenants (12:1-12)  Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (13-17)  When the dead rise, they will not marry (18-27)  The greatest commandment (28-34)  How can the Christ be David's son? (35-37)  Watch out for the teachers (38-40)  The widow's offering (41-44)  Not one stone will be left on another (13:1-31)  No one knows the day or hour (32-37)</p>
<p><b>3.3. A new Passover (14:1-52)</b></p>	<p>Anointing for burial at Bethany (14:1-11)  The last supper (12-26)  Jesus predicts Peter's denial (27-31)  Not what I will, but what you will (32-42)  Jesus' arrest (43-52)</p>
<p><b>3.4. Two trials (14:53-15:15)</b></p>	<p>Sanhedrin trial 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' (53-65   )  Peter disowns Jesus (66-72)  Pilate's trial 'Are you the king of the Jews?' (15:1-15)</p>
<p><b>3.5. The crucifixion (15:16-39)</b></p>	<p>The mocking soldiers (16-20)  Psalm 22 fulfilled (21-32)  Jesus' death opens the centurion's eyes (33-39)</p>
<p><b>3.6. Burial and resurrection (15:40-16:8)</b></p>	<p>Jesus is definitely dead and buried (40-47)  He is not here, he has risen (16:1-8)</p>

# ISRAEL AT THE TIME OF JESUS

1ST CENTURY AD



## The sermon series

It would take 16-32 weeks to preach through the whole gospel (depending on whether we broke each of the fairly long sections in half). That would take several terms and risk losing the 'overview' which is so important in the gospel.

So, in preference to that, we will select key passages of readable length illustrating the main themes and flow of the gospel. Here are the passages:

<b>Service</b>	<b>Passage</b>	<b>Theme</b>
4.5 AA	1:1-13	You are my son, whom I love
11.5 HC	1:14-39	The kingdom of God is near
18.5 AA	1:40-2:12	Your sins are forgiven
25.5 HC	2:13-22	New wine and new wineskins
1.6 AA	4:1-20	The soils
8.6 HC	7:1-23	A person's heart (Pentecost)
15.6 AA	8:22-30	Partially sighted
22.6 HC	8:31-38	The way of the cross
29.6 Café	10:32-45	Greatest & least (discussions)
6.7 AA	11:1-10	Here comes the King
13.7 HC	14:12-26	A new Passover
20.7 AA	15:33-39	Surely this man was the Son of God
27.7 HC	15:42-16:8	He is not here. He has risen!

# Passage by passage

## 1:1-13 You are my son, whom I love

**Service type** All Age

**Main theme** Jesus is God's son, and he loves him

**Ideas to notice** This seems like a new start for the whole world

- the beginning
- life coming out of the water
- a connection torn between heaven & earth
- the spirit hovering
- God's approval
- Satan coming to tempt God's son

## 1:14-39 The kingdom of God is near

**Service type** Holy Communion (with separate Sunday Club)

**Main theme** Jesus brings the kingdom of God to earth

**Ideas to notice**

- The kingdom of God is stronger than evil and illness.
- Jesus invites people into the kingdom of God; that involves:
  - Good news that can be preached and believed.
  - A change of direction to undergo (repentance).
  - Becoming a disciple of Jesus (follow me).

## 1:40-2:12 Your sins are forgiven

**Service type** All Age

**Main theme** Jesus can remove shame and sin

**Ideas to notice**

- Leprosy caused shame and separation, and Jesus was willing and able to take it away. The sacrifices are connected to being purified.
- Of course, everyone expected Jesus to heal the paralysed man, but Jesus wanted to show everyone (especially the law teachers) that he could forgive sins too.
- What he was starting to do really thrilled people.

## 2:13-22 New wine and new wineskins

<b>Service type</b>	Holy Communion (with separate Sunday Club)
<b>Main theme</b>	Jesus is doing something completely new
<b>Ideas to notice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The religious (disapproving) are contrasted with the people (delighted).</li><li>• The righteous (healthy) are contrasted with the sinners (sick).</li><li>• But the verdict on who Jesus has come for is shocking:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Jesus 'new wine' (biblical metaphor for God's blessing) is for a new kind of people – not the self-righteous or the religious.</li><li>◦ Jesus is bridegroom (biblical metaphor for God himself) to them.</li></ul></li></ul>

## 4:1-20 The soils

<b>Service type</b>	All Age
<b>Main theme</b>	Jesus' good news is incredibly powerful, but some people don't get it
<b>Ideas to notice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the right soil Jesus' message changes everything.</li><li>• But, sadly, not in everyone:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ some people can't hear it at all</li><li>◦ some are thrilled but quickly fizzle out</li><li>◦ others have it squeezed out of them by life</li></ul></li><li>• This message is followed by about 3 chapters demonstrating 'good and bad soil' responses to Jesus.</li></ul>

## 7:1-23 A person's heart (Pentecost)

<b>Service type</b>	Holy Communion (with separate Sunday Club)
<b>Main theme</b>	Sin comes from inside our hearts; we can't clean that away ourselves
<b>Ideas to notice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This episode follows 3 chapters of 'good and bad soil' response to Jesus; He could be helping us understand why people respond as they do.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ The Pharisees think sin is something you can wash off &amp; purity is something you can put on.</li><li>◦ Jesus points out how their morality is tradition-based and misses the point – but he also gives a powerful picture of how sin really operates.</li></ul></li></ul>

- Being Pentecost, it may be appropriate to explain that the primary role of God's Spirit is heart transformation – hard to soft; dead to alive.

## 8:22-30 Partially sighted

**Service type** All Age

**Main theme** Many people only half-get who Jesus is

- Ideas to notice**
- The miracle sign helps us understand the conversation that follows.
    - The man got partial sight first and only clear sight later.
    - The disciples have got Jesus' title, but they won't get his mission until later.
  - This episode is followed by many chapters of Jesus trying to help his disciples understand his mission and calling.

## 8:31-38 The way of the cross

**Service type** Holy Communion (with separate Sunday Club)

**Main theme** The Son has come to give up his life; Jesus tells his disciples they must follow his way to gain life.

- Ideas to notice**
- It's no co-incidence that this teaching comes at the centre of Mark's gospel; it's the turning point where we begin to see that all the questions about Jesus, his kingdom, and following him are answered at the cross.
    - The cross is Jesus' destiny.
    - The cross is the Father's plan.
    - The cross offends mankind as mankind's ways offend God.
    - The cross is the pattern of discipleship.
    - The cross is the way to life.
    - The cross brings shame on earth but glory in heaven.
  - This teaching is followed by many chapters of Jesus trying to help his disciples understand how the cross lies at the centre of everything.

## 10:32-45 Greatest & least (discussions)

**Service type** Café service

**Main theme** In the kingdom of God, the least and the last are most honoured

**Ideas to notice**

- This teaching is part of a long section on the kingdom of God.
- It's woven together with Jesus' predictions of his own death – the greatest act of service of all.
- The message seems to be – don't live what the world calls a great life; live a life like mine which the world despises.
- He has to teach the same thing many times over so it's clearly something we struggle to get!

## 11:1-10 Here comes the King

**Service type** All Age

**Main theme** Jesus is God's king – he comes in the name of the Lord

**Ideas to notice**

- This starts the section of the gospel where Jesus is crucified – so his crucifixion is like his coronation.
- There are loads of prophecies in this passage:
  - God's king will come to the Mount of Olives on a Colt (Zechariah)
  - God's king is the LORD (God himself) and will open the gates of righteousness – the way to his kingdom (Ps 118)
- It's hard to grasp just how significant this moment is in the history of the kingdom of God.

## 14:12-26 A new Passover

**Service type** Holy Communion (with separate Sunday Club)

**Main theme** Jesus is like the Passover lamb; his body and blood are for the salvation of many in the judgement

**Ideas to notice**

- The exodus was the great rescue story from Israel's history.
- Blood sacrifices atoned for sin in Israel's religious life.
- The Passover brought these two together and brought them 'close' into the life and home of every Jewish family.
- Jesus is deliberately showing how he is like the Passover lamb – a rescue and an atonement for sin.

## 15:33-39 Surely this man was the Son of God

**Service type** All Age

**Main theme** When Jesus died, the world changed

- Ideas to notice**
- Things happened when Jesus died that showed Jesus was no ordinary man.
    - The sky turned from dark back to light.
    - The barrier keeping God away from people was torn apart.
  - These 'pictures' of what Jesus' death achieved helped a Roman soldier get it; perhaps they can help us too.

## 15:42-16:8 He is not here. He has risen!

**Service type** Holy Communion (with separate Sunday Club)

**Main theme** Death could not hold Jesus because what he did has beaten death's power

- Ideas to notice**
- There is lots of evidence that Jesus was really dead.
  - It's clear that Jesus' friends were expecting him to stay in the grave (even though the scriptures and Jesus himself had been telling them that he would rise).
  - But he did rise.
  - This isn't a return to mortal life in the kingdom of the earth; it's a passing through to immortal life in the kingdom of God.
  - This proves that what he did on the cross has beaten death and that the way into the kingdom of God is now open.