For purposes of this lesson, I take Luke 7:1–17 to be a supplement to the miracle stories we read in the material from Mark. So I will make my notes and questions on Mark, assuming that reading and thinking about them will be appropriate to understanding Luke.

Mark’s Gospel

This is the first lesson to use the book of Mark, so some review of what we think we know about the Gospel of Mark may be in order.

Most non-LDS scholars believe that Mark was the Gospel written first and that the other two synoptic writers used his Gospel as a kind of first draft. In contrast, probably most LDS scholars believe that Matthew was written first because Matthew’s version of things is what we find in Christ’s teaching to the Nephites.

We are not certain who Mark was, but a strong and very old Christian tradition says that he was the John Mark mentioned in Acts. There he is Paul’s assistant in missionary work (Acts 12:25; 13:5). He appears to have been a member of a wealthy Jewish-Christian family in Jerusalem and the cousin of a wealthy landowner, Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37; Colossian 4:10). Based on that, some have speculated that
his family owned the Garden of Gethsemane and that he was the young man who escaped capture when Jesus was arrested in the garden, but the evidence for that speculation is not very strong. The fact that he gets Palestinian geography wrong is reason to believe that if he was from a Jerusalem family, he did not live there long himself.

For a reason that we do not know, Paul refused to continue to work with Mark at the end of the first mission, though Barnabas used Mark (Acts 15:37–39). However, Mark and Paul seem to have been reconciled later, for his name appears throughout the letters of Paul (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24).

Mark also seems to be the person to whom Peter refers as “my son” (1 Peter 5:13). Tradition has it that he was Peter’s interpreter, though that can mean “the person who explained Peter’s teaching” rather than “the person who translated what Peter said from one language to another,” and it may be he rather than Peter himself who wrote down 2 Peter after Peter’s death. That letter appears to be a collection of Peter’s sayings comparable to The Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley rather than an original speech by Peter. If this is correct, then Mark might also be a collection of Peter’s recollections recorded by Mark, perhaps after Peter’s death.

According to the early Church historian, Eusebius, Clement (the bishop of Alexandria in the second century AD) said that Mark’s Gospel was written for those being taught in Rome and that, after it was completed, Peter read it and ratified it for use in church. Though that seems to be rea-
sonably possible, some other early writings say that Mark completed his gospel after Peter’s death. If so, he may have been writing down the things he had learned from Peter. The Greek of Mark is much less sophisticated than that of the other Gospels, and he focuses on a series of brief and self-contained stories that prepare the reader for his lengthy treatment of the Garden of Gethsemane, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus. For Mark, events are the focus rather than doctrines. Eusebius also says that Mark did not put the events of his gospel “in order,” but he is unclear as to what he means by “order.”

Outline of Mark 1–5

Mark 1:1–15 Jesus’s mission was divinely ordained and he is in conflict with Satan

Mark 1:1 The title/theme of the work
Mark 1:2–8 John the Baptist
Mark 1:9–11 Jesus’s baptism
Mark 1:12–13 The temptation in the wilderness
Mark 1:14–15 A summary of Jesus’s mission: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel.’”
Mark 1:16–3:35

Jesus has power from God (to which there is opposition, though he is always victorious)

[Mark 1:16–20] Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John

Mark 1:21–28 He heals a man of unclean spirit

Mark 1:29–31 He heals Peter’s mother-in-law

Mark 1:32–34 He heals many others

Mark 1:35–39 He preaches throughout Galilee, healing many

Mark 1:40–45 He heals a leper

Mark 2:1–12 He heals a man of palsy and says specifically that he does so “that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10)

[Mark 2:13–28] Jesus calls Levi (Matthew) and confronts the Pharisees

Mark 3:1–6 Jesus heals the man with the withered hand, drawing the Pharisees’ criticism and enmity

Mark 3:7–12 Because of his healing—recognized by unclean spirits—he withdraws to a private place

[Mark 3:8–19] He teaches and ordains the Twelve
Mark 3:20  The multitudes demand more miracles
Mark 3:21–30  His friends think he is mad and, urged on by scribes from Jerusalem, try to stop him. But he rebukes them
Mark 3:31–35  His family asks him to come out of the synagogue to meet with them. (The context suggests that they may also wish him to discontinue preaching.) He refuses and denies that they are his family

[Mark 4:1–34  The kingdom of God]

Mark 4:35–5:43  Jesus has power from the Father, but his disciples do not understand that power
Mark 4:35–41  Even the elements of the earth must obey him
Mark 5:1–20  He casts evil spirits out of a possessed man and into a herd of swine
Mark 5:21–43  He heals the daughter of Jairus and a woman with a hemorrhage

As you read Mark, you will notice that he concentrates on events, particularly conflict (between Christ and Satan, for
example), more than he does on teachings. What might that say about how to understand his Gospel?

Mark 1

Verse 1: The first verse of Mark is ambiguous. It could mean that he is going to start with the beginning of Jesus’s ministry: “This is how Jesus Christ’s preaching began.” Or it could mean “Here are the basic principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The phrase can also mean “the beginning of this book, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.” The phrase is ambiguous because the Greek word archē can mean either “beginning” (as it does in John 1:1)—and there are two ways to understand what is beginning here—or “basic principles,” as it does in the Greek version of Psalm 110:10 (the Septuagint). Which reading do you think most fruitful?

Does Mark’s focus on events, and especially conflict, suggest anything about how to understand verse 1?

Mark is the only evangelist to speak of “the gospel” without a qualifying adjective or pronoun. On that basis, however, we have come to describe the first four books of the Bible as gospels. Clearly Mark isn’t merely telling the story of Christ’s life. However we understand verse 1, Mark is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When Mark tells us that he is writing the gospel, the “good news” or the proclamation, how is he telling us to read what follows?

To get a better feel for how Mark’s audience would have heard verse 1, substitute “Jesus Messiah” or “Anointed Jesus” for “Jesus Christ.” Does that substitution shed a different light on what we are to listen for as we read the Gospel of Mark?
Verse 8: John the Baptist tells us that he has baptized with water, a cleansing agent, but here he says that “the greater one” will baptize with the Holy Ghost. Does he intend us to see a parallel here: I baptize you with water, which cleanses in one way; he will baptize with the Holy Ghost, which cleanses in another way? (Does the use of fire as a metaphor for the Holy Ghost, as in Matthew 3:11 and 2 Nephi 31:13–14, suggest that parallel, or is something else going on?) If the baptism of the Holy Ghost is also a cleansing, what kind of cleansing is it?

Verse 9: Why does Mark begin with Jesus’s baptism rather than with his birth?

Verse 15: Paraphrasing, we could say that Jesus’s message is “The appointed time has arrived, the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the gospel.” What is Jesus speaking of when he refers to the appointed time? In what sense or senses is the divine kingdom near?

The Greek word translated repent is metanoein. Robert Guelich argues that metanoein is the equivalent of šub in the Hebrew Bible, usually translated as “return.” To repent is to return to God; it is to return to the covenant he made with Israel. How might that understanding of repentance and Jesus’s message compare and contrast with our usual way of describing repentance and the cessation of particular bad acts?

Verses 17–20: Most of the time disciples choose their teachers/masters. In these verses, however, the master, Jesus, chooses his disciples. What significance does that reversal have?
The outline on pages 81–83 helps us see that Mark interrupts (indicated by brackets) his story of Jesus’s power and the illustrations of that power, his miracles, to tell of the call of the disciples, the teaching and ordination of the Twelve, and the parables of the kingdom of God. So we could say that the primary theme of this section (indeed of Mark as a whole) is Jesus’s power, but the secondary theme is the Church. Why would the theme of the Church be important for Mark? How is that theme related to the theme of power? Where is the power that we see in Christ manifest?

**Verses 21–28:** Mark does not often describe the works that Jesus does as miracles. (See, for example, Mark 6:2, 5, and 14.) When he does speak of miracles, he uses a Greek word that means “power” (*dynamis*), which is not the same word that the other evangelists use when they speak of miracles. They use a word that means “sign” (*semeion*). Does that difference say anything about how Mark sees Jesus’s mission differently than the other writers see it? Why might Mark avoid using the word *sign* and instead use a word meaning “power” or “works” to describe Jesus’s miracles?

What power has Jesus demonstrated in his works? How does his exhibition of power show who he is? For example, what can we understand his healing power to represent? His power over the wind and waves?

We see several instances where someone or something contests Jesus’s power: in the temptation, when he healed the palsied man, in Levi’s house, when he healed the man with the withered hand, when his friends and—perhaps—even some of his family try to stop him from preaching, and
when he calmed the sea. Why does Mark tell us of these contests? What does he want us to learn from them?

Mark 4

Verses 3–23: N. T. Wright argues that those living at Jesus’s time would have understood the parable of the sower as a description of the judgment of Israel similar to Isaiah 6 (and, therefore, also to Jacob 5). Reading the parable with that in mind, can you reconstruct Wright’s interpretation for yourself? What do you think of that interpretation? Does it teach us anything about our day?

Verses 1–33: Suppose that each of the parables in chapter 4 (the parable of the sower, of the candle under a bushel, of the seed growing secretly, and of the mustard seed) is a parable that teaches us about the Church. Do they all teach the same thing? If so, what is it? If not, what does each teach?

Why are these four parables followed by the story of Jesus stilling the winds and waves? What does the latter event have to do with those parables?

Mark 6

Verses 7–13: Notice that the stories of Jesus’s power in the face of Satan’s opposition lead, eventually, to Jesus sending the Twelve out as missionaries. How is the mission of the Twelve a culmination of the story of Jesus to this point?

Overall

Mark offers a testimony of Jesus. In the chapters we have read so far, who has Mark also shown offering a testimony
of who Jesus is? What do you make of that? What has Mark tried to show us by choosing to tell us of the particular testimonies he chooses to recount?