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Annie: Hi friends, and welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be with you here today. Man, I'm loving these Monday episodes.

But before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). It's important to me that any supplements I take are of the highest quality, and that's why, for so many years, I've been drinking AG1. Quality really is their commitment, and it's backed by their expert-led scientific research, high-quality ingredients, industry-leading manufacturing, and lots of testing.

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Intro: Okay, today we are jumping into the book of Mark with Dr. Esau McCaulley as we continue our Let's Read the Gospels series. So, if you missed last Monday with Bethany Allen talking about Luke, or you missed our first episode of the series with Dr. Nijay Gupta talking about John, go back and listen to those. We will link them in the show notes below.

Dr. Esau McCaulley is an award-winning author and associate professor of New Testament at Wheaton College. He also joined us back on Episode 485, if you want to hear that. So when we were thinking about who we wanted to talk about the Book of Mark with, well, I didn't know Luke was his favorite, but I am thrilled at all he knows about the Book of Mark.

So as we've been doing in every episode, before we dive in, I want to give you an overview of the Book of Mark so you can kind of wrap your head around the context of this book. Again, I'm using my personal Quest study Bible that asks

some important questions at the beginning, and I'll just read those to you and the answers.

Why read this book? All news radio stations give you highlights of all the news in the world in 30 minutes or less. The Gospel of Mark follows a similar fast-paced approach while introducing Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Readers see highlights of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Coming out of obscurity, this unique God-man preaches, performs miracles, and encounters both great popularity and deadly opposition. It's the greatest news story of all time.

Who wrote this book? John Mark, the son of a Jerusalem widow, whose home was a meeting place for early believers. We know that from Acts 12:12. Mark most likely recorded the events as he heard them firsthand from the disciple Peter.

When was it written? Possibly as early as AD 50. Others place it around AD 65, closer to the time Peter was executed, but before Jerusalem was destroyed by Roman armies in AD 70.

To whom was it written? This book's distinctly non-Jewish flavor suggests it may have been written to believers in Rome.

Why was it written? The Roman Empire, the dominant world power, had begun to persecute Christians. Mark wanted to encourage suffering believers. He showed Jesus as the suffering servant who came to die. He also portrayed Him as the savior of the entire world, including Romans as well as Jews.

What to look for in Mark? The humanity of Jesus, who was both the Son of God and the Son of Man. Watch for the emotional impact of this action-packed gospel. More than 40% of Mark focuses on the suffering and sacrifice of Christ's final week on earth.

So here is my conversation where we deep dive about the Book of Mark with my friend and one of my favorite theologians and professors Dr. Esau McCaulley.

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Annie: Esau McCaulley, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Esau: Thank you so much for having me.

Annie: Well, listen, we're going to tell everybody the whole truth. You are being the most generous because you're on sabbatical and you're in England and you still are cutting out some time for us to chop it up about the Book of Mark. I'm so grateful.

- Esau:** And I just got off a train from Scotland all the way back to Oxford. It was a long day, so if I forget half of Mark today, I'm sorry.
- Annie:** Mark's too short. You can't forget half of it. It's too short of a book to start from the get-go.
- Esau:** I know how it ends, though. I know how it ends.
- Annie:** That's how I feel when I watch *The Chosen*. I'm like, Well, at least I know how this thing's going to end, because this is stressful right now.
- Esau:** I think I'm the only person in America who hasn't seen *The Chosen*. Don't judge me, internet.
- Annie:** I'm only slightly judging you. Are you choosing not to watch it because of your profession, or have you just not gotten to it?
- Esau:** You know, in my old age, I just don't watch very much. I'm lame. I'm watched.
- Annie:** No, you read books, don't you?
- Esau:** I watch very little television. I listen to audiobooks when I don't want to read. Maybe I need to jump into it at some point. I think I've seen like 15 minutes of the first episode. Jesus hadn't showed up yet. So that's where I'm at.
- Annie:** You're like, I'm out.
- Esau:** I didn't say I was out. I'm just saying I haven't picked it back up yet.
- Annie:** Okay, whatever you want to tell, will you tell us what you and your family are doing in England?
- Esau:** Yeah. I'm on sabbatical. I am living in a place called Yarnton Manor. That's going to be kind of a research library area. So that's where we are now. I'm a visiting scholar at Wycliffe College. It's a college or hall of Oxford. So I'm here, I'm doing research. I'm working on a commentary on Colossians and Philemon. God willing, I'll finish that by the end of 2024.
- I'm also at the beginning stages of a book on the Bible and slavery. I'm not supposed to talk about that yet. But maybe by the time the podcast comes out, people will know about it. But yeah, I'm working on a book. My next book is going to be about the Bible and slavery. So I've been working on that as well.

Annie: I don't know if you know this, but I'm in one movie in my whole life called *Surprised by Oxford* that is set at Oxford University.

Esau: There we go.

Annie: So my only IMDB is Oxford University.

Esau: You got more IMDBs than I got, because I haven't been in anything. If any directors are out listening to the podcast, I got some acting skills.

Annie: That's right. You're ready.

Esau: I'm ready. If you stay ready, you don't got to get ready.

Annie: That's exactly right. Okay, so as we gave you the heads up, we are doing a whole series this month on the Gospels. And just kind of as we're going through the Let's Read the Gospels Guided Journal, as we're doing our actual last round of Let's Read the Gospels on the podcast, and then we're doing the Book of Acts, and then we're retiring it for a season, we are doing each book. And I was like, can we please get Esau to come and talk to us about the Book of Mark?

Esau: Oh.

Annie: Will you just start? I'm dying to hear you talk about Mark. You are exactly who I want to talk about Mark with.

Esau: This is interesting to think about, because to keep it in 100, my favorite gospel is actually Luke, which is why my oldest son is named Luke. But I love Mark, too. They're like all four of your kids, but the gospel of Luke is my favorite. I teach Mark and the Gospels in my Introduction to the New Testament class.

I want to talk about that part at least, because Each gospel approaches the story of Jesus differently. And one of the things that I say to my students is that shows you that you can be faithful and come at the story from different ways. That means that it teaches us how to have different tools in our toolkit.

So something like Matthew, I know you don't want to compare all of them, but something like Matthew is pretty didactic, right? This happened to fulfill the scriptures. Matthew has these huge kind of chunks of scripture, and he kind of methodically walks you through, here's why Jesus is the second Moses and the hope of Israel.

Mark is different. And I tell people, in some sense, it's a little bit easier rhetorically to be Matthew. I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do, and then I show you all through the book, and then it ends with proving what I showed you.

Mark is almost the most dangerous kind of preaching, where you have to have the person follow the narrative all the way through, and then the revelation is at the end. Because if you don't, right, if you preach like that, if you preach the way that Mark tells the story, you have to keep the people all the way through. And then at the end, he goes, Truly, this was the Son of God.

So what Mark is, is a narrative rooted in suspense and plot development, rather than something like Matthew. I'm just using Matthew as an example. Or even John. In the beginning was the word and word became flesh, and you kind of go through with the seven signs.

So I think that one thing that makes Mark unique is the narrative tension. And what Mark does in narrative tension kind of becomes paradigmatic for how we understand the story of Jesus. He begins ministry, there is initial popularity, people love him, right? And then after a while, the people turn on him.

And then the question becomes, who do you think the Son of Man is? Then there's the confession. And immediately following the confession, you have the Son of Man will suffer many things and be crucified, and then you kind of have the story leading to the passion.

That narrative that we think of is just the Jesus story, right? Because Mark was the first gospel written. What we think of is the frame of the Jesus narrative, initial success, rising tension, confession, prophecies about death, crucifixion.

It's a narrative that requires you to pay attention. It's a narrative that requires you to go bit by bit versus something like — and this is not to shade Matthew — Here's the genealogy, here's the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus just sits down and teaches for chapters after chapters. There's no Sermon on the Mount in Mark, right? Then Mark just comes, and Jesus is rushing through this whole thing on the way to His appointed task, which is the passion of resurrection.

So I could say a lot more about Mark. I'm going to try to reel myself in, because it's such a rich text, is probably what I would say.

Annie: Listen, you always have permission with us to never reel yourself in. I am having a great time already.

Esau: I'll say one more thing. The other things about Mark is one of the amazing things about the narrative, which I think draws people in, is because there's a real sense in which Jesus' discussion with the disciples periodically breaks the third wall.

In other words, there are often these moments where He's talking to the disciples, but He's also clearly talking to the audience. So you have something like when you read through the first part of Mark, and you come to the question that Jesus poses to the disciples, who do you say the Son of Man is? So you go, wait, hold on. You as the reader are going, Well, hold on, who is he? And then they go through the options.

You know that those answers that are given, one of the prophets, we know that that's not right. And it's hard for us because on one hand, very few people come to the Gospel of Mark not knowing its conclusion. There's passion and resurrection.

But when Peter goes, "You're the Messiah. You're the Son of God." We're like, Yes, this is it. You got it. Good job, Peter. And then immediately, immediately at that moment where he makes the confession, Jesus unsettles him again: "You don't understand what it means for me to be the Messiah". That part of messiahship is not just the ministry of glory, but it's also the ministry of passion and resurrection.

So a narrative that sets you up to confess one thing: you are the King of Israel, the hope of the world. Even when you come to that point, right, you're then upset again. And you have to begin to accept the ministry or the messiahship of Jesus as one that involves suffering and death and on the other side of that, resurrection.

And if you ask me later, when we get to the passion of the resurrection, we'll talk about the women at the empty tomb. But I will at least not give you the whole book now.

Annie: Okay. I'm writing it down. I'm writing it down so I don't miss it.

Esau: Yes. Ask me about the women of the empty tomb.

Annie: Okay. For our friends listening, I've got a piece of paper. I got a pen. I got my Bible open. I am like, I'm here for this Bible study. I am here for it.

Esau: I got to open it up. I got to open it up too. Because when it gets late at night, all of the gospels run together. So I got to make sure I'm talking about Mark. Go ahead.

Annie: No, no, no. You're doing great. I mean, one of the things that is complicated for me, Matthew and John were there. Mark and Luke are not disciples. So who is Mark and how did he get all these up close? Like, how did he overhear Jesus talking?

Esau: So one of the interesting things is we all assume that Mark was the first gospel and that Mark was first, and that Matthew and then Luke were following, depending on the order. But tradition has it that the Mark is John Mark. So I will tell you some stuff that probably isn't true, and then we can talk about what is true. But this might not be true, but it's at least cool, right? This is completely-

Annie: That's our favorite list.

Esau: I think there's like two scholars who still believe it. But it preaches, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Esau: So the first thing is that John Mark is the John Mark who we encounter in the Book of Acts, who travels with Paul and Barnabas, and then there's the breakup. So that guy.

Annie: And the reason they break up. Yeah.

Esau: Yes, the reason they break up. So interestingly enough, his own story is like the best Rags to Riches story in the Bible. I think this is the correct Mark. So I'm going to say this part. So John Mark initially travels in ministry with Paul and Barnabas. And at a certain point, ministry gets difficult, John Mark runs away, or he goes back. Something happens and he leaves.

They get ready to go on the second missionary trip and Paul's like, "I'm not kicking with this dude no more. I'm not going with him." And I could imagine Barnabas being like, "What do you mean you can't forgive this dude? Nobody used to like you, Paul. You used to kill people. And we gave you a second chance."

But anyways, Paul and Barnabas-

Annie: Listen, do you know how I feel about Paul? I roll my eyes about Paul all the time. So I'm like-

Esau: I love Paul, but he's just a tough hang. He's an intense dude. He's a good, intense dude. He directs his intensity towards God, so that was good. So Paul and Silas go one way, and John Mark and Barnabas go the other way.

But the other thing that we encounter, though, is that later on at the end of Paul's life, I think it's in the Pastoral Epistles, he actually speaks about the reconciliation that he has with John Mark. So at some point, even Paul goes, "This John Mark character is someone who can be trustworthy."

Now, the church tradition is that this John... So like, you can have a failure in your ministry—I'm going to preach the historical background—you can have a failure in your ministry where that's not the end of your story. So even though John Mark, at one point, runs away as a coward, tradition has that he kind of returns.

Now, how does this John Mark end up being the Mark who writes the gospel? Well, the idea was that he ended up being a traveling companion with Peter. He was a translator for Peter when Peter went around because he knew the language and Peter didn't. So the idea is that Mark's gospel has actually been known as the Memoirs of Peter. This is Peter's account of the gospel narrative.

Annie: And is that still what you think is true? That is what you think is true?

Esau: Here's the reason. This is the reason why I think there's a strong historical case for it. One is, why would Matthew and Luke shape their gospel around Mark unless it has significant cachet in early Christianity? Why might they do that? I think a reason why they might do that is they kind of go, well, this is Peter's version. And so that means the narrative shape of the gospel is strongly influenced by how Peter tells his story through John Mark.

Annie: Wow. Okay.

Esau: Then you begin to ask yourself, and this is once again... I like to tell people when this is a complete conjecture, this last part is complete Esau conjecture. I could be wrong. You might want to ask this question, Annie. Who has the cachet in the early church? Who has the sauce, you might say? You say, You know what? I like Peter, but I'm going to tell my own story. And that's actually John, the son of Zebedee. He's the only one who kind of goes... John's old at this point. He's like, "You know what? I'm old. I'm good. I'm going to tell it this way."

So I think that the association of Mark's gospel with Peter early on solidifies that as a central part of the Jesus tradition, which is why Matthew and Luke are then formulated kind of along those same patterns. So I don't think we have a better candidate than John Mark being influenced by Peter. And the idea that someone like Peter would have a way of telling the Jesus story, I think we have pretty strong evidence to suggest that. Of course, Peter went around preaching about Jesus.

Now, the other thing that I want to say as it relates to that is, What do we actually have when we look at these gospel narratives? What we actually have is the story in the shape of Mark's gospel with different variations in Matthew and Luke. We'll talk about the synoptics today.

In Mark, you have people like Jesus. People get mad at Jesus. Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus says, I'm going to die and rise in the resurrection. That historical narrative seems pretty plausible on its face, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Esau: Would you have someone who has an initial positive response from the people because of his miracles and his teachings about the concern for the disinherited and this idea of the kingdom of God is coming in and through my ministry? Of course, people are going to love him. But you know who's not going to love him? The people who are in power who might be threatened by his ascension or by the way they understand how he handles the law. I don't believe that Jesus ever breaks the law. I think Jesus keeps the Torah. He just has His particular way of engaging the Torah.

So the idea that Jesus had a popular ministry, that ran into conflicts with the religious authorities, that He's then handed over to Pilate, that Pilate thinks is politically pragmatic to kill Him, feels like, to me, there's nothing historically implausible about it.

And what you then have is narrating this story in such a way that this general plot line kind of comes to fruition, which is what you then see in Matthew and then in Luke, and in its own way in John. But we'll leave John off to the side.

So I think that there's good evidence to believe that Mark, at an early, early stage, was associated with Peter and that the association between Mark and Peter led to the other gospel writers kind of taking that shape. And maybe the reason that Peter told that story is that's kind of how... Sorry, this is the nerdy part. Okay, this is the nerdy part.

Annie: I could bathe in this. I'm having the best time.

[00:19:46] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [KiwiCo](#). If you're already thinking ahead about fun things to do with your kids this summer, you have got to try KiwiCo.

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Okay, now back to continue this conversation with Dr. Esau McCaulley.

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Esau: Here's another question. Writers think about this. Are all stories basically the same, right? Or is there a universal story, like what we consider a plot? Or is it something that is influenced by the way that we tell stories in the West?

So if you look at certain parts of certain Isaian cultures, the shape of some of the narratives and the plot devices are a little bit different than what we have in the West. So it could be that because Mark is a part of the Greco-Roman Empire, that we're kind of heirs of the Greco-Roman Empire, that we just see this story as a natural way of telling stories.

But the idea of beginning, rising tension, climactic confession, betrayal, fall, and climactic resurrection, so that narrative shape is either just how we tell stories as humans, right? Is Mark telling his story because this is how we tell stories, things are good, there's a complicated part of the narrative, betrayal, death, resurrection or is that actually how it happened?

I think that there's no reason to doubt the structure of Mark's gospel, which is Jesus came, taught some things, did some miracles, got a following, that someone who was close to him became disillusioned within that context, betrayed Him, leading to His death. And then the plot twist on the plot twist is the idea of the resurrection or the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. That would be something that obviously is not in all narratives. It's a uniquely Christian thing.

Annie: Wow.

Esau: Anyways, that's a little bit of an overflow with his historical background in Mark.

Annie: You are blowing my mind right now. I'm in New York, so I don't have my mind-blown emoji button, but I am pushing it in my mind.

Esau: You're at NYC. I love New York. That's become one of my favorite cities. When I first came as a Southerner, I wasn't ready for it. And now I've been there a couple of times and it's slowed down. And now I'm beginning to appreciate it for the wonderful place it is. I think you've got to be in the right part of New York.

Annie: That's right. That is 100% right. Okay, so there are two stories that I've heard scuttle about as far as Mark.

Esau: Okay, scuttle in the streets.

Annie: Yes, scuttle in the streets. Number one, is Mark the rich young ruler he writes about?

Esau: I mean, so this is one of the things that I talked about in Mark's gospel. People have gone and tried to find Mark in the narrative. That's the part I never came back to, the thing that isn't true, that probably isn't true.

Annie: Okay, okay. These were both my questions, yeah.

Esau: Probably isn't true. Some people have said that he's the rich young ruler. Other people have said, and I like this one just because it's funny-

Annie: Me too.

Esau: ...and it creates a narrative arc, is that in the Gospel of Mark, there is the person who when Jesus is betrayed, they kind of grab His cloak, and He runs away naked. And it's like, Look, he's been running... You know, he's a runner, he's a track star. He's been running most of his life, right? So he runs in Mark's gospel. He runs with

Paul. And then eventually at the end of His life, He kind of has courage and He stays and ministers alongside Peter.

So even what I said about the relationship between Peter and Mark, you can't prove it. But I think that the historical plausibility of the influence of Mark's gospel. Because like, why do I got to listen to you? Why don't I just listen to somebody else? So I do think that those stories and the way he told those stories were in some sense definitive in early Christianity.

Annie: I like the idea of him writing himself into the book only because, you know, as he's sitting and talking to Peter, he's scribing down what Peter said. And then Peter says, "Well, what about when you and Jesus had that conversation?"

Esau: You're laughing at me because what about when you ran off naked?

Annie: When you ran off naked, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Esau: I wish we had some evidence of it.

Annie: I know.

Esau: When I communicate things to people about the Bible and scripture, I do think there's some requirement that we had to have some discipline. And so I will say to you, just like I said earlier, I can't prove this. I find it interesting. so I think that it's okay to get at the limits of what we can say.

What we can say is that early on, Christians saw in the Gospel of Mark something that was true about the story of Jesus. This might be wild to you, Annie. But some people don't read their Bibles, right? And we're not going to judge them. They don't read their Bibles. But they actually go to church a lot, right?

So if they just go to church a lot, they've heard their pastors preach. So they kind of have a basic idea of what's in the Bible, right? So if someone pulls up in their church and say, "And then Jesus flew across the Sea of Galilee instead of walked on water," people are like, "No, no, no, no. That's not in the Bible." So in other words, there's kind of an implicit basic understanding of the structure of the Christian narrative just by being in church week in and week out.

So what you have then, if you can imagine traveling apostles who told stories about Jesus and evangelists over and over and over again, even without a Bible, even without a written text, you had a basic understanding of the elements of the Jesus story. So when someone came into your community talking wild, like, this doesn't

seem like what Jesus would do, the old apostolic tradition, in some sense, was a check on the written tradition.

And so when the churches received Mark's gospel, and they open it, that was a story that they knew. There was a sense of kinship and recognition. I think that that recognition seems to be immediate and it seems to be formative.

Now, is it possible or even likely that one of the things that was pushing along that early acceptance of it was its association with Peter? I think there's a reason for it.

Annie: Right.

Esau: We talk about non-canonical Gospels, and there's Gospels that were written that were not originally included in what became of the canon. But you don't actually see, unless you want to say the record was totally erased, even though it wasn't like the Christian police, they were just floating around arguing about stuff, sending letters.

It seems that the fourfold Gospel pretty early on became these were the Gospels and that these stories had an early impact. And it seems pretty clear to me that if you read what becomes the non-canonical Gospels, that they're clearly in dialogue. They're kind of remixes of what become the four Gospels, right? So if you read them, you can kind of tell that they're engaging and reinterpreting what becomes the Gospel they had.

I think it's in the Gospel of the Mary Magdalene where it'll be parts of what looks like a retelling of what's in the Gospels. And then Jesus will turn over the Gospel to somebody else on this mar... And He'll whisper something secret, like, oh, this wasn't in the Gospels because Jesus whispered it to this person. And that's how they managed to expand upon what is the core tradition.

So it seems to me that Mark is a part of the apostolic deposit in this association with John, Mark, and Peter is as good an explanation as any.

Annie: Woo, okay, this is so good. So do you recommend us reading the non-canonical pieces like the Gospel of Mary Magdalene or are those like... is it like stay away or read them?

Esau: I mean, I don't know if we read enough of the regular Bible to be getting the extra Bible. I mean, like not extra Bible, extra text.

Annie: Hey.

Esau: I'm saying I've been keeping it 100, right?

Annie: You're like, "Annie, till you're done with the real one, when you're done with the real one, Annie, call me.

Esau: I think if I was going to recommend... by the way, it's not because I'm a... I think that if you read them, you will clearly see the difference between the texts. It's not like, Oh, you will be exposed to ideas. I don't think that, you know, the angels tell the Christians do not be afraid for a reason. Like we're not afraid that... You know, truth is his own advocate. So I'm not afraid of it.

But if I was trying to enrich my understanding of early Christianity, because most of the non-canonical Gospels are later, I would actually go before and read something like the Pseudepigrapha. In other words, I think you're better off understanding how early Christians thought and moved, and behaved by looking at the Jewish people of the time period from which early Christianity arose.

Annie: Oh.

Esau: So you might be better served if you only have a... and you kind of... I know the Gospels, I would go and read some of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I would go and read something like 1 and 2 Maccabees. And so you begin to understand. So one of them, for example, would be something like the Psalms of Solomon where you see an account of a guy who's called the Davidic Messiah. You see him. They talk about a guy who's going to be the coming king of Israel.

That Messiah judges the nations and he kills the Gentiles and kicks them out of Jerusalem and Judea. The Gentiles are blessed through being subservient to the reigning Davidic king who establishes his kingdom through the sword. So that's only one account, right?

But reading about the description of that kind of Messiah at least gives you a dialogue to say, oh, that's the kind of God who might be recognizable. Then when you see the gospel accounts, right? So, for example, John is like, hey, man, you're the Messiah. But then John gets arrested, and John is like, well, are you the one who's to come, or should we look for another?

Well, why is John disappointed in the ministry of Jesus? Because John had a different understanding of what a Messiah might look like. And how much you're getting understanding what a Messiah might look like by looking at Messianic accounts of the first century. So it's not that I'm saying you shouldn't read these gospel accounts. But what you see in some of the later Gospels, you see it's just this

Christian debate around how to make sense of Jesus and like other kinds of accounts of it.

So I'm not saying that they're not useful. I'm saying that as a scholar, first of all, I would love it if people just read the Bible. But for the five of y'all who say, I got the New Testament down, I got the Old Testament down, and I just need more sauce, then you can go run into the pseudepigrapha and the Apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus and Philo, okay?

Annie: I do own the Josephus book. I mean, I'm not done reading the Bible, but I do own the Josephus book. Because I do like that he was parallel timing-wise. I just think that's real. I thought that was really interesting.

Esau: I mean, I've read them, but once again, I'm probably going to have gospel people yell at me, the gospel scholars. I'm a Paul person. The Paul people love that stuff.

Annie: Got it.

Esau: So it could be the fact that I'm influenced by the stuff that I engage most in with Paul. So the extra-canonical gospels, to be honest, hasn't been a strong part of my scholarship. I'm also persuaded, so I'm just going to footnote some people so I can be nerdy in case they ever... There's a guy named Mark Goodacre who argues that most of these gospels are later than the synoptics, even though some of them might have early elements, things to kind of go back to the time of Jesus, most of them are later.

Annie: Are later. Okay, so we'll stick with our four for now.

Esau: I mean, you can do what you want to do. I'm just saying, like-

Annie: You're like, Read the Bible, you guys.

Esau: I would read this to the phagophore. Read the Bible. And get a decent commentary, a dictionary, and go to work that way, a good encyclopedia. Those are the tools that'll get you pretty far.

Annie: So speaking of this category of things, the book of Mark ends, and the end of my Bible says, the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20. Why does that happen sometimes? It happens here, it happens once in another gospel, but why does Mark end differently?

Esau: People get really, really worked up about this. I think in the entirety of the New Testament, this only happens like two or three times where we're pretty clear that

this was not a part of the early tradition. So as it relates to the Gospel of Mark, if you turn to the very end of it... and one of the cool things to do if you have nothing else to do, but it's like... I don't know how you could do this, but you could.

If you had a Bible from 40 years ago, and then a Bible from 20 years ago, and a Bible from 10 years ago, the distance between Mark 16:8 and 9 to 20 just grows over time. At first, there's a little bit of a gap, and then there's a big gap, and now there's usually brackets. It's like over time, we're becoming more and more clear about explaining this to you.

So the simple issue is that the earliest manuscripts of Mark's gospel ends with verse 8. Now, the interesting thing about verse 8 is in the Greek, so if you look at... I'm going to turn to Mark.

Annie: And these are the women in the empty tomb, which is what you wanted to talk about.

Esau: Yes. This is how Mark's gospel ends in the manuscripts that we have. "Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." Now, the tricky part is, if you have the Greek text, the final word... in English it seems much smoother than it does in Greek. In Greek, the final word is "gar", a preposition, which is normally the beginning of a second part of the sentence. So, I was sleepy because... and then it would go on.

So what's called the gar is how the thing ends. So normally when you have a gar, you'd expect extra explanation. So some people think that that is evidence that the bottom half of Mark that would have initially contained an account of the resurrection was ripped away, that we kind of lost it.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Esau: So the other thing, if you can imagine like a scroll and the very edge of it is where the gospel ends or something and the early manuscript gets ripped off and then it's just lost. Now that's led to the fact that it seems like... and also the women are just terrified. That has led to what we have in verses 9 to 20, which are like the greatest hits of the other gospels, right?

Annie: Yes. Yes .

Esau: That someone wrote endings to Mark to give it a proper ending. And so later manuscripts have this ending, early manuscripts don't. And we say no early manuscripts have these endings. And so what we are pretty confident of saying is

that at some point later on, significantly later, people started adding an ending to Mark.

Annie: Wow.

Esau: Now, I don't think that there's actually a missing ending of Mark.

Annie: You think he just leaves us hanging with "because" with-

Esau: I mean, I think that sometimes... I'm sorry, like sometimes you just break grammatical rules. Like you end sentences on prepositions. So like, I think that that's interesting, but I don't think that that's probative.

Annie: Me too.

Esau: I think that Mark's gospel is actually a very powerful ending. Because here's the thing. Let's be smart for a second. We're reading the Gospel of Mark. We're reading the accounts of the women. So we know that the women aren't silent, right? Because if they were silent, then they would not be able to tell the story. And we're reading this story.

But the story ends with the women being terrified and being terrified in the silence. I think that is actually how the gospel wanted it to end for the reader. In other words, we're very comfortable with this idea that, oh, Jesus is risen from the dead. That's really good news. And now we can go and spread the gospel. But nobody who actually becomes Christian from... we forget what it's actually like when we start to think that this stuff might be true.

I don't know how you became a Christian, so I'm not going to get into your business. But when you're sitting in church, you can't even be a Christian when this happens, right? You're sitting in church, and the pastor's preaching to you, and you start feeling the Spirit of God, and the first thing you're thinking is, Oh no, God is talking to me right now. I don't like this feeling.

Why do you think when there's an invitation people don't want to go up? There's a fear, because there's a kind of comfort. And this is not me preaching it. This is what's going on in Mark's gospel, because Mark's gospel is a mystery, right? There's kind of, who is this guy? Who is this guy? The resurrection. So it ends with the resurrection as unsettling.

And the resurrection is initially unsettling, because the idea that dead people don't stay dead is a terrifying idea. We want to know that the resurrection is true, but we don't want an angel showing up at our house. If an angel came to your house and

said, "Annie, I want you to quit the podcast, and I want you to become a traveling evangelist..."

Annie: So scary.

Esau: It's scary. And so this idea that the women encounter a being who tells them that the good news of Jesus is the resurrection, and the first experience is abject terror.

Annie: Yes. Alarmed is what my version says.

Esau: Alarmed. Alarmed. They said nothing because they are alarmed. Some of us have become Christian and didn't tell anybody for a long time because we were afraid.

Annie: Wow.

Esau: So when Mark ends his gospel there, the resurrection happens and they're terrified because the women understand the implications of this reality. The whole world is different. You, as the reader, are called to be unsettled by the resurrection. You're called to allow the resurrection to terrify us.

And what I mean by that is... and I want to make sure, I feel like I can't do it better than Mark did it because he did it the first time. But once we live in a world where we know for a fact that God intervenes, and dead things don't stay dead, the entire plausibility structure of the universe is turned upside down. Listen, I think people know me well enough to know that I think that doctrine is important, right? And the differences that we have between Christians are like, these are real differences.

But do you understand the worldview shift that you undergo when you shift from "I don't believe in resurrections" to resurrections? That is a tremendous difference. So this idea that you need to be unsettled by it, you need to ask yourself, do I believe in the resurrection? Because, I mean, when we say something like, that's impossible about anything, then it's a function of denial of the resurrection, because the resurrection shows that God can do anything.

Now, God may choose not to do it, right? So I'm not saying, like, God may not do it, but there's nothing in our lives that God cannot do. So the women, the women are terrified.

Annie: And to leave it there would have been to leave us in tension, and nobody wants that.

Esau: And I think because it ends with forcing you to deal with the resurrection. Let me give you an example that's a little bit less controversial. The Great Commission,

right? So Matthew's gospel ends with going to the world, baptizing everyone, you know, the father, son, you know, I'm with you to the end of the age, right? And Matthew just stops his gospel right there. But do you think that was the last thing Jesus actually said?

In other words, Matthew does not say, and Jesus stopped talking. Matthew just stops his gospel. So the last thing that you hear from the lips of Jesus is the Great Commission. So in other words, He kind of ends His gospel on a close-up on Jesus. Then, once again, Jesus is not just talking to the disciples. He's talking to you, the reader, and you're commissioned to go. And He's thinking, that's a good way to end the book.

And you've been this way. You might have had one conclusion of whatever book you had written, and then you might get to the point where you say, "You know what? I think the book is done." You get to this point where you say, "You know what? This is the thought I want to end the book on."

And I think in Mark's gospel, the idea that we need to let the resurrection unsettle us. And once we process the full reality of what the resurrection means, then, like the women, we're ready to go and spread the good news.

[00:45:04] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation again to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Factor](#). Okay, if you want to cut out the stress of grocery shopping and meal prepping this spring, Factor's ready-to-eat meals are delicious and have got you covered.

Their meals are fresh and never frozen, and they are chef-crafted, dietician-approved, and ready to eat in just two minutes. Y'all, two minutes. This means less time prepping and more time outside.

You can choose from a weekly menu of 35 options, including popular options like calorie smart, keto, protein plus, or vegan and veggie. And I have loved those vegan ones. Plus, there's 60 add-ons every week like breakfast, on the go lunch, snacks, and beverages. So fun. You can completely tailor it to your schedule to customize your weekly meals with flexibility to get as much or as little as you need, and then pause or reschedule your deliveries to suit your schedule.

They're celebrating Earth Day all month long, so look out for the Earth Month Eats badge on the menu for our lowest carbon footprint meals. Head to factormeals.com/TSF50 and then use that same code TSF50 and you're gonna get 50% off your first box plus 20% off your next box. Let's go. That code is TSF50 at

factormeals.com/TSF50 to get 50% off your first box and 20% off your next box while your subscription is active.

That link and pretty much every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes or in Friday's AFD Week in Review. So be sure to check those out. You can also sign up to get that AFD Week in Review in the show notes below.

Sponsor: So I know candles are cute and smell good, but have you ever thought about where they go when we throw them away? You guys, apparently almost 2 billion candles are sold globally each year, and almost all of them are likely to end up in landfills for the next 1 million years. Crazy.

That's why I think [NOTES Candles](#) are so cool. They're working to eliminate single-use candle vessels and give home fragrance lovers a more earth-friendly option. NOTES has created a refillable candle system that allows you to use your candle vessel over and over again. It is super easy.

The candles are made with fragranced wax beads, so all you do is place the wick in your reusable NOTES jar, fill it up with the wax beads, and enjoy your fragrance for up to 36 hours. They have some really fun fragrances too: vanilla and pepperwood, pistachio and rosewater, and 11 other really great ones to choose from.

Be a responsible consumer while not giving up high-quality home fragrance by making the switch to NOTES. You can build your custom starter kit right now at notescandle.com/thatsoundsfun.

Right now NOTES is giving our friends 15% off and free shipping when you buy a NOTES starter kit using the code THATSOUNDSFUN. Again, the code is THATSOUNDSFUN when you're placing your order. That's THATSOUNDSFUN at notescandle.com/thatsoundsfun.

Sponsor: I've gotten to talk to a lot of amazing people on this podcast. And if you're like me, once I learn a little something new from one of our friends, then I want to go deeper. I mean, that is so true in these podcasts, right?

So where can you go to learn from the most remarkable people besides, you know, right here? [Masterclass!](#) Masterclass is such an easy way to help you learn more about something you're interested in. You can seriously find classes on everything from comedy with Steve Martin to the art of performing with Usher. I mean, from the Super Bowl halftime show to your teacher, that is cool.

Masterclass offers over 180 world-class instructors. So whether you want to master gardening or running a business or to learn a new instrument, Masterclass has you covered. You get unlimited access to intimate one-on-one classes with the world's best.

There are over 200 classes to choose from and they're adding new ones every month. I did a cooking class with Gordon Ramsey and I loved it. Seriously, private classes from these kinds of leaders would cost thousands of dollars, but with a Masterclass annual membership, it is just \$10 a month.

And right now our friends will get an additional 15% off an annual membership at [masterclass.com/soundsfun](https://www.masterclass.com/soundsfun). Get 15% off right now at [masterclass.com/soundsfun](https://www.masterclass.com/soundsfun).
[Masterclass.com/soundsfun](https://www.masterclass.com/soundsfun).

And now back to finish up our conversation about the Book of Mark with Dr. Esau McCaulley.

[00:49:31] <music>

Esau: I would love to be a preacher in the early church, and I end it, and the women were terrified. And I would stand up and go, "Hey, are you scared? You ought to be scared. Because you've just entered a different world. What are you going to do?"

So in other words, the opportunity that Mark's gospel could have been an extended conversation on behalf of the performer even begin to evangelize.

Annie: So cool.

Esau: So I think that there is a good enough theological sense to be made from the ending that we have that I don't think we need to posit another ending. But I also think that what Matthew does is good, too. Matthew kind of goes, You guys go. Or even John's addendum. They're all fishing at the end of John's gospel. And he's handling some business there. And Luke's gospel... Well, Luke ends in Rome, basically, because that's a two-part one, but this idea that the Ascension and Pentecost.

So I think that each gospel writer had an ending that each in their own way makes theological sense. And I think that Mark's gospel makes complete theological sense in its context.

Annie: You're making Mark become my favorite gospel. I think this is going to happen with every episode. That day, that's going to become my favorite gospel. I love the idea of him leaving us in that tension and saying, like, what are you going to do

with that? "So yeah, they were afraid. They left. What are you going to do with that?"

Esau: That's what I mean when I say it's a tightrope preaching. It depends on his rhetorical effect on his climax. And I think that he does it. In other words, I think that Mark lands the plane. And we've all had sermons that do that to us, right? We're going, we're going, we're going, we're going. Then he gets us at the end but that's it. But that's not easy to do.

And that's why I think, as a literary work, Mark is a beautiful piece of literary rhetoric, because it captures you, and it brings you all the way to the end and then it leaves you with this feeling, right? That something has happened to me in the reading of it.

Mark is actually... It's funny because I do the same thing I teach them. Currently, believe it or not, my current ranking is Luke, John, Mark, Matthew. That's my current ranking.

Annie: Really?

Esau: But it switches.

Annie: How often does it change?

Esau: Well, Luke stays number one.

Annie: Luke's the guy, yeah.

Esau: You're not coming for Luke. But I just taught John. I taught a full semester on John last semester. And I was just with him. So anytime you spend time with John, you love him. It's actually 1A and 1B. So Luke and John are currently tied, and then it's Mark.

Annie: It's Mark. We maybe should have asked you which book you wanted to talk about versus me going like, I love the-

Esau: Yeah, y'all didn't ask me this. You just said, "Come on the podcast."

Annie: "I said, come on and please talk about Mark," because I was like, I love... To me, the speed of Mark is so fun. Where he's just like, "And then suddenly, and then suddenly, and then suddenly." So I was like, "Ooh, me and Esau will chop it up about that." But I am going to get you to talk about Luke in just a second.

But first, one of the questions that came in is, as we're reading Mark, give us one or two things to be thinking about. Like, what are the glasses we put on when we're reading Mark?

Esau: What I want you to do is to try to be present in the story. And that may seem to be a silly thing to say-

Annie: No.

Esau: ...but we know what we think is going on. I want to talk about this that I ain't going to talk about. I'll say it this way. Mark 1 begins with Jesus and John the Baptist, and there's a quotation of Isaiah. And I'll say this, you can do this. This might be something you can do. When you go and you see an allusion to a text, go back and read the Old Testament text. Because in Isaiah, the one that's quoted to describe John's ministry, the person who the prophet is preparing the way for is not the Messiah, it's actually the advent of God. "Prepare the way of the Lord. Every valley will be lifted up and every mountain will be made low and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and we should all see it," however the passage goes.

Actually, Mark 1 gives you a huge, huge kind of "maybe there's more here going on that you might expect", such that John is preparing the way for God. So the idea that God might come amongst Israel is such an unimaginable thing that you probably couldn't necessarily just come out and say it. But what would it look like if God were to visit His people and what God might be like?

Annie: Wow.

Esau: One of the things that's really interesting when you look at the Old Testament, you see things that the God is gonna do:: rescue the oppressed, care for the widow and the orphan, that God's gonna be the champion, He's gonna come and save His people. That is one thread that goes through the Old Testament. I myself will come and shepherd them.

But there's also another thread that goes through the Old Testament, that the King's gonna come and do those things, right? That the King or the son of David is gonna come and he's gonna rescue his people. So what happens if God comes in the form of the king to rescue His people? As you see the narrative of Mark's unveiling, are you asking, is this simply the king? Or there's something more to this person?

Annie: Wow.

Esau: And allow that reality to develop as the plot develops, such that when Jesus asks the question of Peter, we're asking, who is he? And then when the centurion says,

truly... And the centurion doesn't know what he's saying, right? But when the centurion goes, "Truly, this is the Son of God," what are we supposed to think?

So to allow Jesus to shape our understanding of what it might look like for God to come amongst us, and what it might look like for a king to come and save us. And the hard thing to do after all of that, right, is to kind of ingest this story. This is what I'm writing my book about. To ingest that story, and then to live in that reality.

In other words, especially in Mark's gospel, Matthew, you have these extended teaching points, right? I'm not saying that Mark doesn't teach, but Matthew has these, but Mark doesn't. But what does it mean to follow someone who lived the kind of life that Jesus lived? And how might I imbibe His way of being in my life?

So Jesus thinks that sacrifice and love of enemies is the means by which we transform the world. What does that mean for us? I think that Christians, we're constantly afraid, we're constantly worried as if we need power or influence to accomplish God's purposes. But what if, like Jesus, when we're weak is when we're most dangerous?

So I want to say something like, read the Gospels, not simply as a revelation of who Jesus is — That's true. It's a revelation of who God is — and a pattern of life that we have to follow after. And I ask myself, does my life at all look like someone who believes in that guy as savior of the world?

I think that Jesus is always challenging us and He's always challenging me. Every time I read the gospels I'm constantly surprised. It may seem hard to say this, but allow the gospel to surprise us again.

Annie: Yes. Man, that's beautiful. That makes me excited to read Mark. That is really fun.

Esau: I'm going to go back and read Mark, too. I done got myself worked up.

Annie: Well, I can't let you go without you telling us a little bit about Luke. Luke's my favorite guy, too. Why do you love Luke so much?

Esau: Luke is what I like to call Old Testament saturated. Okay, actually, I'm gonna go tell you one scene from Luke that's just on my heart right now and I'll give you like... This is what I mean when Luke... Luke knows what he's doing, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Esau: So in Luke's gospel, in Luke's 1 and 2, Jesus is born and then He comes into the temple, right? He comes into the temple and He sees Simeon. And Simeon lifts up

the baby and he goes, "This one is due for the rising and the falling men in Israel. And then he has, after that, Anna, who also takes the babies, people of the constellation of Israel. You have a man and a woman at the beginning of Luke's gospel proclaiming this person is the king of the world.

You go through the entirety of Luke's gospel, and then you go into the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, in the first part of Acts, he makes a point to say the men are in the upper room, the apostles. Then he says that Mary and the women are there with them too. So it kind of goes men and women together, right?

And then Pentecost happens, right? Pentecost happens, the Holy Spirit comes down. And then they go out, everyone who was in the room of Pentecost goes out and the men and women are out there proclaiming the gospel, the good news of God is in Christ. Luke makes this clear by how he structures the narratives and he foreshadows it all the way in chapter one, right?

And then they ask him, what does this mean? What does this mean? They ask Peter, what does all of this mean? And in case you can't get what Luke is up to, He then quotes Joel. "In the last days I'll pour my spirit upon all flesh, your sons and your daughters will prophesy."

So what began at the birth of the baby Jesus, men and women predicting that Jesus is the hope of the world, climaxes at Pentecost where the spirit comes down, men and women together proclaiming the gospel, and they ask him, what does it mean? He says, just like the Old Testament... the whole narrative comes together. Just like Joel prophesied that one day everyone's going to do it. It says you're made ser... like economic.

So listen, men and women, the rich and the poor, all are going to preach the gospel, right? And who's there at Pentecost? All of the nations represented through the different languages. So Luke's gospel, right, tells the story of how God accomplishes purposes through men and women, climaxing in a community of people united across race, gender, and economic status. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, Black and White... not Black and White, you know, ethnic groups in the ancient world. They were together proclaiming Jesus, and they lived together as a community.

And that vision of life together under the sovereign rule of the king, trying to embody his compassion through how they treated one another is the most powerful telling of the Christian story that still caps in my imagination. That's not even meant to talk about the ways in which... I don't want to steal whoever's going to do Luke. The way that in Luke's gospel God does the kind of stuff that God does.

So for example, that you're going to go say... so Elizabeth, right? Well, Elizabeth is barren. Well, anybody who knows the Old Testament knows, oh, we know what God does with barren women. He kind of rescues them. Or He not rescues them. He opens wombs.

What you see then in Luke's gospel is not proof-texting, right? That here's the fulfillment of scripture. Here's God's consistency and character through time. He's the kind of God who does these kinds of things. He's the kind of God who brings people together and those kinds of things.

I just think that Luke's form of storytelling is cute, right? Because you can read Luke's gospel a thousand times and not recognize that there's men and women at the beginning talking about Jesus, and then many women at the end talking about Jesus. But if you do get it, it enriches the narrative. So he does cute stuff like that all of the time.

Sorry, this is my last cute one. This is my last cute one.

Annie: I love it.

Esau: If you listen to Mary's song, you go back and you read what's called the Magnificat, Mary extensively cites Isaiah in the Magnificat. You get to the ministry of Jesus, even his first sermon, what is Jesus quoting? Isaiah. So you have his mom being rooted in the Asiatic tradition, and then her baby boy grows up, and His ministry is the embodiment of the Isaianic tradition.

So there's all kinds of cute little connections like that if you're paying attention. And so I just find Luke like a great puzzle that I can never get all the pieces together. But every time I discover another one, it gives me real joy.

Annie: I always picture Luke is the one who interviewed Mary, because he has so much from Mary. Like, that line in Luke where it says after the shepherds told her who Jesus was, it says she treasured all this up in her heart. And I'm like, She had to have told Luke. Who else knows all that?

Esau: I think that Luke definitely interviewed the people.

Annie: Okay, great.

Esau: I think there is something about a distance from the narrative that allows him to weigh sources and to say, oh, man, I've heard all of this stuff. I think he's fundamentally like, "Okay, Mark, you did a good job," because he keeps the basic

structure of Mark with different elements. But he says, you know, there's more to this story.

And I think that all of us as writers, there's something in us that compels us to put pen to paper. And I think that he had lived amongst Christians and heard enough stories of Jesus that he thought that he had something important to contribute, and he did so too. But I don't want to cook. I don't want to steal all of the person who has to do Luke.

Annie: You're not stealing. You're increasing. No, no, no. It's not stealing. It's giving us more. It is giving us more.

Esau: Luke and... I mean, all of them are good. I need to up my Matthew game, because as you can see, I talk to Luke a lot, I talk about Mark, John.

Annie: Well, listen, we got Dr. Scot McKnight for Matthew, so we're going to be fine.

Esau: Scot will get it. Scot will get it.

Annie: Yeah, he loves Matthew. I mean, one of his little treats he gave us when he was on the first time is that the reason Matthew is the link that is, is that Matthew would fill a page and that would be it of that story. And then you just read it so different when you look at it like, Oh, she's the best.

Esau, thank you for doing this today. Will you close us out by just praying for us as we read Mark, as we spend time in Mark? It would just mean a lot.

Esau: I'll be happy to do so. God, please bless us to be surprised by the story of Jesus, enchanted by the story of Jesus, encouraged by the story of Jesus. Give us the courage of the women to see in Your Son the hope of the world and to have the courage to share that news with the world. So bless us to make us missionaries in our own communities like these women became.

We pray for You to keep us through whatever joys and sorrows you might be experiencing until all of our sorrows come to the conclusion of Your second advent. Amen.

Annie: Amen. Thank you, my friends.

[01:04:42] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't he brilliant? Oh my gosh, so much mind-blown emoji. I am loving these conversations. Hey, come join us over on Let's Read the Gospels

podcast. We are using the Let's Read the Gospels Guided Journal as we go. And you can join the Guided Journal book club over on Facebook. The link to that and the journal, of course, you know they are in the show notes.

And make sure you're following Dr. Esau McCaulley, tell him thank you so much for being on the show, how much you enjoyed learning from him today.

If you have any follow-up questions from the episode, you can drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app if that's where you're listening like me or send them to us on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast. We love answering those for you as best we can.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. Anywhere you may need me, that is where you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is going to the For King & Country premiere tonight of their movie *Unsung Hero*. Y'all, I cannot wait. And you know I'm wearing my pink suit from Easter.

So y'all have a great week. We'll actually see you back here on Thursday with Joel and Luke from For King & Country. We'll see y'all then.