

Christ the Servant of All

Text: Mark 1:1; 10:42-45

Introduction:

1. Mark's Gospel the shortest of the four Gospel writers.
2. Mark is the most translated Book of the N.T. Often translators start with Mark as it gives a concise and powerful overview of the life, ministry and sacrifice of Christ.
3. In this introductory lesson, we will endeavor to acquaint ourselves with the background and theme of the Book under four headings.

I. The Authorship of Mark's Gospel

A. The Human Instrument – Mark

1. New Testament Biography
 - a. His name
 - i. John = Jewish name meaning "grace of God"
 - ii. Mark = Roman name meaning "a hammer". "The use of such a Latin (or Greek) second name was quite common among Greek-speaking Jews." (Edmond Hiebert)
 - b. His family background
 - i. His Mother – her name was Mary, a dedicated and sacrificial woman in the Jerusalem church. She was obviously a woman of some means as she owned a home that could accommodate church prayer meetings (Acts 12:5, 12)
 - ii. His Uncle – Barnabas was Mary's brother and thus Mark's uncle. Scripture indicates that he was also a man of some wealth (Acts 4:36-37).
 - c. His ministry development
 - i. Accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to deliver the love offering from the church at Antioch to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 12:25)
 - ii. Accompanied Paul and Barnabas partway on Paul's first missionary journey then turned back (Acts 13:5, 13). Reason not stated but possibly fear. Cyprus was familiar territory (Uncle Barnabas was from Cyprus) but Perga was the gateway to the unknown and dangerous. Mark's desertion of the missionary team lead to a division between Paul and Barnabas at the commencement of the second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas fades permanently from the Inspired Record and Mark does not reappear on the scene until some 10 years later.

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- iii. Influenced by Peter the Apostle. Peter, writing from Rome, sends greetings from “Marcus my son” (1 Peter 5:13). From this it would appear that Peter was instrumental in Mark’s salvation and also had a mentoring role in his life. Peter was to Mark what Paul was to Timothy. Peter’s association with this family clear from Acts 12:12. Peter was in a good position to help Mark as he personally knew what it was to fail the Lord and be restored to a place of fruitful service.
 - iv. Reconciled to Paul after a time of growth and maturing. Paul sends greetings from Mark during his first imprisonment in Rome in Col. 4:10 and Philemon 1:24. From these references it is clear that Mark ministered to Paul in prison and acted as his special envoy to the church at Colosse. He is described in Philemon 1:24 as a ‘fellowlabourer’. Paul’s last reference to Mark is in his final Epistle where he refers to Mark as being “profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11)
 - v. Used by God to author the second Gospel. What a testament to the grace of God bringing usefulness out of failure!
 - vi. Challenge: Mark’s failure and recovery should serve as an encouragement to us that God is the God of the second chance and that defeat in service does not have to remain permanent. God can grow us and restore us to a place of fruitful service for His glory.
2. Testimony of church history (Extracts from Hiebert’s commentary)
- a. **Papias**, bishop of Hierapolis, who wrote about A.D. 140 is the first direct witness to the Gospel of Mark in church history. Eusebius (A.D. 326) quoted his testimony as follows: “And the elder (John the Apostle) used to say this: Mark, having become Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately as many things as he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things spoken and done by the Lord. For he neither heard the Lord nor did he follow Him, but afterwards, as I said, he followed Peter, who used to give his teachings according to the needs...”
 - b. **Justin Martyr**, about A.D. 150, quoted Mark 3:17 as found in the “Memoirs of Peter”.
 - c. **Irenaeus** bishop of Lyons in Gaul, in his famous work Against Heresies, written about A.D. 185 said, “Now after the death of these (i.e. Peter and Paul), Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter.”

B. The Divine Inspiration – the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21)

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II. The Audience of Mark's Gospel

A. The Place - Rome

1. Early church testimony mentions 'Italy'. From Peter's reference in 1 Peter 5:13 it is clear that Mark spent time in Rome.
2. A.D. 60 or 68. More than one early church testimony mentions that Mark wrote after the death of Peter. This would make a date of around A.D. 68 probable but it may have been earlier.

B. The People – Romans (Gentiles)

There is strong internal evidence for this in Mark's Gospel. For example:

1. Mark translates Aramaic expressions for the benefit of his readers
 - a. Mark 5:41 "And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; **which is, being interpreted**, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise."
 - b. Mark 7:34 "And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."
 - c. Mark 15:34 "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? **which is, being interpreted**, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
2. Mark explains geographical details and customs of Palestine unfamiliar to his readers. E.g. Jordan was a river (1:5); the Pharisees used to fast (2:18) and the Mount of Olives overlooked the temple area (13:3)
3. Mark uses a number of Latin words such as 'centurio' for "centurion" (15:39, 44-45) and 'census' for "tribute" (12:14)

III. The Attributes of Mark's Gospel

A. The Style

1. Action – Mark focus is on the work of Christ.
 - a. 'and' appears over 1,300 times in Mark's 678 verses. Events unfold in rapid succession.
 - b. 'straightway', 'immediately' and related words occur 42 times in this short Gospel.
 - c. Mark's Gospel is "brief, abrupt, forceful, vivid and straight to the point." (Hester)
 - d. Mark generally omits the lengthy discourses of Christ (except chapter 13) and focuses more on what Christ did.
2. Emotion – Mark touchingly highlights the humanity of Christ in a number of areas
 - a. His anger and grief (3:5)
 - b. His weariness (4:38)
 - c. His wonder (6:6)
 - d. His sighs (7:34; 8:12)
 - e. His affection (10:21)
 - f. His eyes (3:5; 10:21; 11:11)
 - g. His hands (1:31; 5:41; 7:32; 8:23-25)
 - h. "Mark's Gospel gives prominence to the human reactions and emotions of Jesus. It mentions His compassion (1:41; 6:34; 8:2),

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His sighing (7:34; 8:12), His indignation (3:5; 10:14), His distress and sorrow (14:33-34). It takes notice of His sweeping gaze (3:5, 34; 5:32; 10:23), the touch of His hand (1:31, 41; 7:33; 9:27), His warm interest in little children (9:36; 10:14-16).” (Hiebert)

- i. “...men may look into human eyes, capable of human tears, the gleams of human laughter, and the tragedy of human sorrow; and yet see shining through them the light of essential Deity. Jesus, the anointed One, Son of God.” (G. Campbell Morgan)

B. The Structure

1. Historical quotes above indicate Peter’s influence in the content of this Gospel. This would account for the vivid language of Mark’s Gospel, the language of an eye witness.
2. Gospel seems to follow the general outline of Peter’s sermon to Cornelius in Acts 10:34-43.
 - a. The ministry of John the Baptist
 - b. The empowerment of Christ by the Spirit at his baptism
 - c. The ministry of Christ (e.g. healing)
 - d. The crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Christ

IV. The Aim of Mark’s Gospel

A. To present Christ as Servant (10:45a)

1. This verse contains Mark’s statement of purpose. It is the key verse of the Book.
2. This would captivate the Romans who typically had many slaves. To think that the Son of God would come and serve man was an amazing truth!
3. References in O.T. prophecy to the servanthood of Christ
 - a. Isaiah 42:1 “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.”
 - b. Zech. 3:8 “...*behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.*”
4. Christ’s attitude of a servant was a rebuke to the pride and quest for position of the disciples.
5. Phil. 2:5-8 – Christ took upon him the form of a servant

B. To present Christ as Saviour (10:45b; 1:1)

1. His death on the cross would be the highest point, the supreme act of service.
2. ‘ransom’ = the price paid to effect the release of prisoners and captives
3. We are bound by sin and Satan but Christ died to set us free! Christ did not leave the glories of heaven and suffer the cruel, humiliating death on the cross to support your sinful lifestyle. He died to rescue and change you!

Conclusion:

1. Are you saved?
2. Are you serving?