

Sermon Title: Why is Mark Remarkable?

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Mark 1:1

Date: 12-3-17

I'm quite confident that brother J. Vernon McGee—who, for a couple decades and a half pastored the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles—I'm quite sure he did not know Fernando Ortega, who wrote and sings that song "Give Me Jesus," but in my typical Sunday morning fellowship over breakfast with J. Vernon McGee—who preaches on, despite being with the Lord for almost 30 years now—he was saying just last Sunday in his Sunday sermon something that I think he worded this way to rankle people and get their attention. He said, "You don't need more patience!" *What do you mean, I don't need more patience? Give it to me now!* "You don't need more wisdom!" *What do you mean, I'm an idiot.* He said, "You need Jesus." Give me Jesus. If I just know Jesus and I am filled with His Spirit, I will have those things. That was the point that he was making, and so, what a great idea that we here at Heritage Bible Church are going to spend the coming months getting to know our Lord Jesus Christ better than ever by studying His life as it is recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

Last Lord's Day, we looked very carefully at Mark Chapter One, Verse Zero—that's how I designated one of my favorite studies of all time, which I called, "From Malachi to Mark." It's very important, if we're going to understand the Gospels and get to know Jesus better, that we realize how much the world changed and how much the nation of Israel changed in the 430 years from the close of the Old Testament to the opening of the New Testament. If you missed that sermon or if it didn't stick with you, I highly recommend that you go online or get a CD and listen to it again so that you will be in the best possible position to understand the Gospels. Now today we're going to advance infinitely further into the Gospel of Mark because we made it to verse zero last time; this time infinitely further—we're going to get all the way to the end of Verse 1. And then brace yourself for next week—we're going to take on, Lord willing, an entire paragraph! Your head will be spinning by the time we finish that.

Mark doesn't leave us guessing what was on his mind when he wrote this. He summarized it in the first verse, Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). This is the beginning of the gospel—Jesus coming to Earth, living a perfect life, then dying a sinner's death in order that sinners can be credited with His perfect righteousness—that's what's recorded in the book, and the other three books that record His life: Matthew and Luke and John. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus—that's the beginning of the gospel. That's the beginning of what is still going on worldwide as the gospel is being preached to all nations (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Acts 1:8). So this is the beginning of the gospel—there's the key word in this verse: "gospel." I don't mean to demean "the Son of God," that's a pretty important phrase as well. We're going to be studying that a lot as we work our way through Mark.

But, what is the gospel that we preach? Well, it better be the very same gospel that the apostles preached, and the apostle Paul tells us clearly what that was: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, he says this: "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received"—Now, he said, I'm going to tell you the gospel...here's what it is: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." That's the gospel.

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Galatians Chapter 1 makes it very clear that any other gospel is not the true gospel, and anyone who preaches any other so-called gospel as a message that claims to provide salvation—if it's not *that* gospel, the person preaching it is accursed. That is a *damning* thing, to misrepresent God's way of salvation. So that key word in this first sentence I want to focus on this morning is "gospel."

We're going to come to "the Son of God" as I said, but right away we have to answer a question. Paul says "the gospel" is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, so a question we have to answer is, What does the word "gospel" mean when it's used *before* Jesus died and was buried and rose again? The word is used 100 times in the Bible, all of them in the New Testament, but 18 of those times that it's used are in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—all of them *before* Jesus died. They were preaching the gospel before what Paul says the gospel is! What's that about? Soon we're going to come to this: Mark 1:14-15 says, "Now after John"—referring to John the Baptist—"had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" Was Jesus saying, "Repent and believe in the fact that I already died for you?" That's difficult, isn't it?

Matthew describes that same period in Jesus's ministry. Summarizing it in Matthew 4:23, he says, "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." So is there "the gospel" and "the gospel of God" and "the gospel of the kingdom"? What do we mean by that? Three days before He went to the cross, we read this of Jesus in Luke 20:1: "On one of the days"—this is when He's in Jerusalem in what we call Passion Week—"while He was teaching the people in the temple and *preaching the gospel*, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him." Now there's a legitimate difficulty here. Are there different gospels before and after Jesus died?

I've taught you many times—if you've been around here very long, you've heard me say this umpteen times and I'm going to keep saying it as long as I have breath: understand that the meaning of a passage, or even the meaning of a word like "gospel," is not what it seems to mean to you. It's not what you think it ought to mean. The meaning of a passage is what the original writer meant—when he was inspired by the Holy Spirit—what he meant for the original readers to understand in their language, in their culture, in their world, in their time. That's the meaning of a passage.

So, what is the gospel as it's used before Jesus died and rose again? Well, there's a very good answer to that. We've already seen, it is referred to as "the gospel," "the gospel of God," and "the gospel of the kingdom." In the New Testament, the word "gospel" never refers to any of the four books that we call "the Gospels." There's nothing wrong with us calling them that, but "the gospel" doesn't refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. It always refers to a message—the message of salvation. That's what was being preached before Jesus died. "Come and, by the mercy of God, you can be saved." The Greek word translated "gospel" is *euangelion*—prefix *eu*, which means "good," and *angelion*, the word "angel" is in there. An

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angel is a "messenger." The *euangelion* is the "good message" or the "good news." You've often heard it translated "good news." In English, as it's been translated into our alphabet, you might have heard it called the "evangel." There's a verb form of it that becomes "evangelize." There's an adjective form of it: "evangelical." We use that word pretty often today, and that is a really good word. "Evangelical" describes a person who is totally committed to the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ: that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. The word "evangelical" has been hijacked, poisoned, and liquidated—pureed into meaning almost nothing. To most people today, if you say, "He's an evangelical," they think, "Well, that's a person who's part of a voting block of conservative right-wing religious nutcases." "Evangelical" is a great word, it means committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but now it takes a paragraph and a half to explain what we mean by that.

So, "the gospel" literally means "good news" or "good announcement" or "good message." So when Mark uses this word, and he doesn't give you a paragraph to explain it, that means that he had a frame of reference of what he meant by that word and what he knew his original readers—who were Roman believers and unbelievers—he knew that they would know what he meant by that word. What was that frame of reference? It was the way that that word is used—and are you ready? Do you remember seven days ago? Do you remember the word "Septuagint"? That's the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and the word "gospel"—*euangelion*—shows up there. Now, you won't see it in your English Old Testament because it's translated instead of transliterated, but in the Septuagint the word "gospel" is used in various places to describe good announcements. It can be an announcement of a military victory. It can be an announcement of a political triumph. It can be an announcement even of a physical rescue.

But Mark is using the word of the good announcement—the good news—"the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He knew exactly what message he was talking about. He is connecting it to the Messianic uses of "gospel" in the Septuagint. For example—and I'm not going to make you read the Septuagint, because it is in Greek, but if you were to look at the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 40:9-10, you would find that word there. "Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news"—good message coming from the temple. "Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news"—and that's where the word *euangelion* shows up in the translation. "Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him." It's good news, God is coming! The kingdom is coming! That's great news! And by the way, in Isaiah Chapter 40, that is immediately preceding the portion of Isaiah where he gives detailed descriptions of the "suffering Servant," the One who is to come. That's the most Christological portion of Isaiah, and in that portion you find things like this: Isaiah 52:7—Did you know that Isaiah listened to worship choruses, and he made them into Bible verses? This one: "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' " That's great news! The Servant is coming. He's going to bring salvation. He's going to announce salvation.

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Now, let me give you a little more to bolster this. Here is an inscription—I'm going to read a translation of an inscription from the Roman world in 9 B.C. It's announcing the coming of the emperor Caesar Augustus. He's the Caesar Augustus that you read about in Luke Chapter 2 regarding the birth of Christ. Here's what it says about Caesar: "The providence which has ordered the whole of our life, showing concern and zeal, has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving it to Augustus, by filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men, and by sending him, as it were, a savior for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease and to create order everywhere. The birthday of the god Augustus is the beginning for the world of the *euangelion*"—of the "gospel"—"that has come to men through him." So you see from that inscription that in the Roman world—the Roman secular world, the people that didn't give a rip about the Septuagint—they still understood the word *euangelion* as a good announcement of great news. Now, remember the fact that in the first century, Caesar worship, emperor worship, was a great big deal. They called Caesar Augustus a savior—one who would make war cease and create order everywhere. His coming was, to them, the arrival of a god.

So Mark begins his book using this word that describes the true good news, or the real gospel as opposed to the Roman use of the word, and he wants to make sure that we understand his intended meaning: this is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." That is in direct opposition to those in Rome who were followers of Caesar. So if you're pinching a pinch of incense and burning it on the altar and declaring "Caesar is Lord," Mark's Gospel is a between-the-eyes confrontation. No, there's a *real* gospel—of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Another commentator wrote this: "The parallel between the gospel in the imperial cult"—worshipping the emperor—"and the Bible is Caesar and Christ"—those are the parallels. "The emperor on the throne and the despised Rabbi on the cross confront each other. Both are gospel to men. They have much in common, but they belong to two different worlds."

Put it all together and we know that the gospel had a specific meaning in the minds of those to whom Mark addressed himself. He was writing to Roman Christians to bolster their faith, and to Roman Non-Christians. So Mark begins his account of the life of Jesus with very specific language that would make his Roman readers know there's something far better than worshipping that emperor. This is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

The gospel in the Old Testament was good news of God making salvation available. So when John the Baptist came along, he calls it "the gospel of God." What did John the Baptist preach? Well, we're going to study it soon in Mark 1, but his was a message about sin and repentance or, turning to God for mercy (Is. 45:22; Hos. 14:2). During His ministry, Jesus and His disciples went around preaching good news as well, and in their case, it's called "the gospel of the kingdom." Why? Because the hope of the Jews was all centered on the coming King and the kingdom of God coming to Earth at the hands of the Messiah.

So always in the Bible, "the gospel" is the message of salvation provided by God to every person who will repent and turn to Him (Is. 55:7). Now that Jesus came and died and rose again, the message of the gospel hasn't changed, but now it is in its fullest expression. It includes what He accomplished. It's still the gospel of God. It's still the gospel of the kingdom.

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It's still the announcement of peace with God and happiness and salvation because our God reigns. It's still the message of good news of eternal reward in the presence of God, but now we have the fullness of the message—there is salvation in no one else except Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Acts 4:12; cf. Jn. 14:6). And that's not what I came to talk about this morning, but it's a very important word, right smack-dab at the beginning of this Gospel.

But I want you to understand one more thing, and the reason I'm only doing one verse. I want you to be ready for the fullest impact of the Gospel of Mark. The story of Mark himself is tied to what he calls "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." I want you to take a brief look with me, if you will, at the biography of the biographer. Who is this "Mark" guy? And you can arrange this into three parts: Mark and Peter, Mark and Paul, and then I'm going to make up a category—Mark and the Lord, as you see what the Lord did in his life.

Who is Mark of the Gospel According to Mark? Well, Mark was not one of Jesus's 12 disciples. Mark was not an apostle. Mark was not one of the first deacons appointed in Acts Chapter 6. He was not an evangelist. He was not a priest. He was not a rabbi. He was not a public official of any kind. He was quite unremarkable, if you will—pun intended—yet he was one of just nine men God used to write the New Testament. I want to show you where he appears several times on the pages of the New Testament.

You're familiar with King Herod the Great. If you know anything about him, he was a thoroughly despicable, murderous genius. He's the one who wanted to kill all the babies in and around Bethlehem when Jesus was born, because he didn't want any competing king of the Jews. Well, he was the head of a family tree of people of various forms of the kind of evil that they inherited from grandpa Herod. One of the heinous acts of his grandson, Herod Agrippa the First leads us to our discovery of Mark, who wrote this Gospel. Look at the beginning of Acts Chapter 12. Now, in the book of Acts, we've got Peter on the forefront in the beginning, and then Paul gets saved in Chapter 9 and there's a little overlap and a transition, and then the emphasis is on the ministry of Paul as the gospel goes to the Gentiles. But here in Acts Chapter 12, we read this at the beginning of that chapter: "Now about that time Herod the king"—that's Herod Agrippa the First, grandson of Herod the Great—"laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword"—remember Peter, James, and John are the three of the inner circle of the disciples (Mk. 5:37; 9:2); James and John are brothers, the sons of Zebedee, the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17). He puts James to death, and get a load of this: "When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."

Herod Agrippa the First was in the moral casting of his grandfather, just as evil as his grandfather. He was playing the same game that Herod the Great played. The game was to try to keep order among the Jews that were under his authority so that Rome would like him and keep him in power. So, killing one of the apostles got great reviews from the unbelieving Jews, so he decided, "If they like me killing one of them, they're going to love me for killing two of them!" So this time, he goes after Peter. He arrests him, puts him under heavy guard, and he's planning to bring him out to be executed. So skip down now to Acts Chapter 12, starting at verse 5: "So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by

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the church to God. On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward"—in other words, Herod Agrippa the First's plan for the next morning was, let's kill Peter and make a display of him—"On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up"—apparently, Peter could sleep pretty well—"saying, 'Get up quickly.' And his chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision"—Peter thought he was seeing a vision of his own miraculous release. Why would Peter think that? Well, two chapters earlier, Peter had had a direction-changing vision. Remember the sheet lowered down with all the unclean animals, and that's when God nullified the dietary regulations of the Old Testament so that Jew and Gentile now could be one together in Christ (Acts 10:10-16, 34-35; cf. 11:1-18). So he thought he was seeing a vision and all of a sudden he realized, hey, I'm really out of jail! "When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself"—that's the kind of jailbreak, just walk up and the door opens—"and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him."

So, Peter's in quite the euphoric situation, and this is where Mark first shows up in the Bible record, chronologically. Acts 12:11-12: "When Peter came to himself, he said, 'Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.' And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying." Remember it said that fervent prayer was going on for him? You can go on and read it, it's kind of humorous. This girl named Rhoda comes and answers the door when Peter's knocking and Peter says, "It's me," and she gets all excited and leaves him locked outside and runs back up and says, "It's Peter!" and they said, "No, no, no, you're seeing his ghost"—it's a cool chapter, but that's not my point for this morning.

You're introduced here "Mary the mother of John who was also called Mark." Now, in that culture there were so many Johns that often when you have a John described, you've got to have "John the brother of" or "the son of" or something like that. Same with Mary, so "Mary" is "the mother of John" who is "also called Mark." Now, since Mark's mother is mentioned, and not a father, and it was her house, it's quite likely that this Mary was a widow. And we know that Peter was familiar enough with them that he went directly to their house. It was likely a house where a house-church met. And reading between the lines, it's not hard at all to surmise that Peter probably had a pretty strong influence on Mark and was likely the one that the Lord used to bring Mark to faith in Christ. Late in his life, Peter wrote this, which we saw when we studied 1 Peter not too long ago. 1 Peter 5:13—at the close of that book, Peter says, "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark." Now, you know from our study of 1 Peter that there are many who think that Babylon was a code word for Rome. I'm not one who thinks that, but that doesn't matter for interpreting the passage. The point that I want you to see is that Mark was part of Peter's team near the

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end of Peter's life. There's no explanation, but the fact that Peter especially sends greetings from Mark tells you that Mark had been involved enough that he was well-known in the first-century church. He doesn't give any explanation of who Mark is, just, Mark sends his greetings. And he calls him "my son Mark." That's where we get the inference that Mark came to faith under the ministry of Peter, and Peter's writing, remember, to the saints that are "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1), so Mark had been pretty well-known.

We'll come back to the relationship between Peter and Mark, but there's an intervening chapter of Mark's life that is very significant in his story. We've seen Mark and Peter. Peter's had an influence on Mark for a long time. Now, what about Mark and Paul? Well, we were in Acts Chapter 12. If you keep reading, you get to the end of Acts Chapter 12 and we're told that Paul and a friend named Barnabas delivered an offering to the Christians in Jerusalem for famine relief. They were in the church in Antioch, a Gentile church, and the Gentiles, in showing good faith and compassion toward their Jewish brethren in Christ, they sent this gift to Jerusalem to help them in that time of famine, and they found it useful to take Mark with them—Acts 12:25: "And Barnabas and Saul"—that's Paul's old name—"returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark." So Mark helped Paul and Barnabas on this trip to Jerusalem and back.

Then you come to Acts 13, and the church at Antioch is sending out the first missionary team specifically to Gentiles. By the way, this is why the ministry in Russia that we've been involved with since the birth of Heritage Bible Church is called "The Antioch Initiative," because it was the church in Antioch that trained, equipped, supported, and sent out missionaries to reach Gentile churches to train, equip, and send out people to reach Gentiles. That was what they did—that's why we chose that name for that ministry. Paul was the leader of this team, and Barnabas was his co-worker. They send them out, and it just says that they sent Paul and Barnabas, but, you read down a few verses and when you get to Acts 13:5, it says, "When they reached Salamis"—that's a city, it's not the word "salamis" (suh-LAH-meess) they didn't get there—"When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John"—that's John Mark—"as their helper." Same guy. Not an apostle, not a preacher, but a trusted helper. And this is now the second trip that he's taken with Barnabas and Paul.

But soon, there was a problem. You get down to Verse 13—and you may have to check 67th or 68th book of your bible, the Book of Maps, to look where all these places are. It says, "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem." We are never told why, but Mark turned back. Paul and Barnabas completed their trip. They mostly went to the region of Galatia and God brought a great harvest of Gentiles to faith in Christ. They returned and they reported at Antioch and they wound up having to go to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council to confront and refute the corrupted false gospel of the Judaizers (Acts 15:1-30). And once that was all settled, Paul's batteries were recharged and he was ready to go on another mission to the Gentiles.

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So, skip ahead now to the end of Acts Chapter 15, Verse 36: "After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.'" That's how they did the second and third missionary journey—they went to the same places again, but they extended the circle further and further every time. "Barnabas," it says, "wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also"—they'd already done this twice. "But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus." Now, whatever it was with Mark, on that first trip, that made him turn back, it was so grievous to Paul that he flat refused to take him again, and two pretty strong stalwarts of the faith—Paul and Barnabas—dug in their heels. We don't have anything in here that tells us Mark had to go home because Mary fell ill...no such thing. It just says he "deserted." Maybe he got scared. Maybe he didn't like the food. Maybe...who knows?

We know that Barnabas's name means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36), and that seems to be his character as well. According to Colossians 4:10, we also get the little bit of information that he was the cousin of Mark. So, Barnabas wanted Mark so much, and Paul didn't want him so much, neither one would compromise and they wound up going different directions. It says they had a "sharp disagreement." There's even an English word that is a direct transliteration of the Greek word that's translated "sharp disagreement." I'll bet you've gone all week long and probably haven't used this word, but it's a great one. Go look it up in a big honking dictionary somewhere and you'll want to adopt this word. They had a "paroxysm." It even *sounds* like a "sharp disagreement." What happened? They decided to leave the church? They went on Twitter and slandered each other? No, no, that's how *we* would do it! They both kept on serving the Lord. They both kept on preaching the gospel. They both kept on reaching out to Gentiles. And there's a great lesson there in Christians resolving conflicts about things that don't have to do with doctrine. That's another story, however. Barnabas takes Mark with him. Paul, then, forms a new team—he teams up with Silas, and they're together for the second missionary journey and the third missionary journey.

Now, happily, that's not the end of the story. God was at work through all of these things. Mark and Peter have had this relationship for a long time. Mark and Paul had this relationship that turned very painful, so I'm going to call the third part, "Mark and the Lord"—what the Lord was doing through all of this. There are gaps in the story of Mark's life, but there is enough in the New Testament to show that, through it all, his heart was right. Look what Paul writes about Mark ten, twelve years later maybe, maybe even more than that—in his first Roman imprisonment. I mentioned that a minute ago, Colossians 4:10 where it mentions that Barnabas and Mark were cousins—Colossians is written by Paul from jail in Rome. He says, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)." You see, that "paroxysm" was not exactly a hidden deal between Paul and Barnabas, and now Mark and Paul are back in the saddle together, and Paul is saying, "I told you about this guy. Hang onto him. Welcome him if he comes to you." And he's sending greetings—that means he's there with Paul, serving beside him, while Paul is in prison. Now, what is it that happened that got

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Mark to serve alongside the apostle Paul in Rome? We don't know. But we do know that years after deserting and bitterly disappointing Paul, Mark and Paul were reconciled. And again, the role of Mark isn't flashy, it's just faithful. He's just *there*. He's Mark the Helper.

Now look at what Paul wrote to Timothy during his second Roman imprisonment. He's still in prison in Rome the first time when the book of Acts ends. We can piece together from the other books of the New Testament that he was released, he travelled a little bit more, then he wound up in Rome again in prison, and this time, he was executed. Chapter 4 of 2 Timothy is the last bit that we know from the pen of the apostle Paul, and he mentions in 2 Timothy 4:11: "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service." Paul wanted Mark with him in the very last days of his life. My friends, there's probably nothing better that could ever be written about you than to have somebody who is serving the Lord say, "You're useful to me for service." That's Mark.

Now it wasn't only Peter and Paul who regarded Mark as useful. How did we get the Gospel of Mark? Well, I want to read you a couple more ancient quotes. Here's a quote from Papias, who was from the city of Hierapolis, which is a twin city of Colossae. He wrote sometime between A.D. 95 and A.D. 140—in other words, he's very, very early in church history, only a generation from the apostle John. Papias refers to the apostle John by what became his nickname. Remember he was called "the Elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1)? Well, he outlived all the other apostles by almost 30 years, or around 30 years. He came to be called "the Elder." Here's what Papias wrote: "The Elder used to say, 'Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ, for he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him'—Mark had not been there during the ministry of Jesus. "But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore, Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took special care: not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements." Now that tells you that the testimony of the early church is that Mark spent so much time with Peter, he remembered all these things that Peter said about the ministry of Jesus.

Other comments from other early church fathers give us a good picture of how, then, we came to have the Gospel of Mark. Obviously Papias is referring to it, but a man named Justin Martyr, who wrote between 100 and 165 A.D., very close to Papias. He calls Mark's Gospel "the Memoirs of Peter." He said Mark composed it in Italy—well, that would make sense, if he went there to spend his days with Paul in Paul's final days on the earth. Several others say the same thing. Then we get to a fourth century historian named Eusebius of Caesarea, and he says Mark wrote this, basically, by popular demand on the part of Peter's hearers. This is from Eusebius: "A great light of religion shone on the minds of the hearers of Peter"—that makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? I mean, what we know of Peter—such a flamboyant guy, such a communicator, such a leader. He had a big impact on people. He says, "—so that they were not satisfied with a single hearing, or with the unwritten teachings of the divine proclamation, but with every kind of exhortation, they entreated Mark, whose Gospel is still in existence—seeing that he was Peter's follower—to leave them a written statement of the teaching given

Sermon Title: Why is Mark Remarkable?

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Mark 1:1

Date: 12-3-17

them verbally. Nor did they cease until they had persuaded him and so became the cause of the Scripture called 'The Gospel According to Mark.' And they say that the apostle, knowing by the revelation of the Spirit to him what had been done, was pleased at their zeal and ratified the Scripture for study in the churches."

Just think about the nexus of all of these things. Jesus and Peter...Peter knew about stumbling and fouling up and being set aside and then being restored. Maybe Peter played a role in restoring Mark and Paul, even though Paul once had to confront Peter. All this is connected. And that's how we got Mark.

I titled this, "Why is Mark Remarkable?" And, yeah, I meant it to be a pun because...that's where I live, it's one of the few things my brain does well. Mark is remarkable for being an unremarkable man who incessantly served the Lord and joyfully was a helper to the likes of no less than the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. He listened carefully. He served tirelessly. He remembered well. And he rebounded strongly from the worst mistake he ever made. And God used him in his generation and for all ensuing ages.

Now he wrote—so say the church fathers—from Rome. Mark's Gospel was mainly written to Gentiles. There's a Gentile flavor to this Gospel, and I'll show you some things as we work our way through it, but when you read Matthew, Matthew is like an extended gospel tract to the Jews. He quotes the Hebrew Scripture. He uses Jewish terminology. He mentions all of those different categories of people among the Jews that I taught you about last week. Mark doesn't do that. Mark has to explain who those are. And by the way, Matthew was the first one written, and Mark was the second one written. The Gospels were written exactly in the order that they are in your Bible. You might hear a lot of people who say that Mark was the first Gospel written, it was the shortest and then the others built on it—and that's a very good theory that has everything except one shred of fact behind it. It's contrary to all of the evidence. It's built upon a really bad theory and some anti-God presuppositions.

But Mark wrote mainly to Gentiles. In other words, Mark's faithfulness is going to help you know Jesus better. It's "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Now come with me next time when we launch into the ministry of John the Baptist. I'm going to try for a *whole paragraph*. John is the forerunner of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the faithful men and women who have gone before us. Thank You for Peter. Thank You for Paul. Thank You for John. Thank You for Mark, and for guiding him to write this record of our glorious Lord. Teach us about Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, as we continue to look into Your Word. Whatever needs to be done in each of our lives that would make us more faithful like Mark, do it, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

END OF AUDIO