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## What Can God do with Failures?



**Part 39** (040111AM)

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"What can God do with me if I have failed Him?" As a pastor I hear that or something like it - so often. Is there and answer to believers who are less than perfect? Yes! Failure for a believer is only a temporary condition; for the lost it is permanent. Have you ever failed, quit, or walked out on an assignment from God? We serve the God of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chance, a Lord so gracious that His strength is made perfect in our weakness. He is the God of new beginnings. And the life we have in Christ is just a series of new beginnings!

Every time you open your Bible and find a book named Mark you are looking at a testimony to the God of Heaven who has mercy on those of us who fail, and know it, and flee to Him - and He lets us have a new beginning!

There are 4 Gospels in our Bibles. Each is a Gospel by Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John. Each is a snapshot of a **Perfect Jesus**.

- Matthew captures the **Perfect King** of Israel - His ancestry, His Birth, His Life, and His Death.
- Mark Captures the **Perfect Servant**, as opposed to all the imperfect ones that have lived.
- Luke captures the only **Perfect Man** that ever lived in a world of imperfection, fallen ness, death, disease, and despair.
- John captures the **Perfect Deity** in a world of false gods, fallen gods, and feeble gods is the real God of Creation.

But back to the Gospel by Mark - Jesus is the Perfect Servant. The only perfect servant God has ever had was His Son - all the rest of the countless men and women, boys and girls He has used have been imperfect!

That is comforting for me. The longer I live the more aware I am of my imperfections, my failures, my shortcomings, and painfully aware of my sins - aren't we all? So this morning we have our first choice to make as believers - wait until we are able to perfectly minister (never) or get started now and serve as we grow and are shaped **by the Lord**.

That is exactly the testimony of the book we turn to this morning. The Gospel by Mark is the second book of the New Testament and the 41<sup>st</sup> book of the Bible. It is the clearest picture I know in all of God's Word of "What can God do with a failure".

As we open to the Book of Mark, we open to the words of Mark capturing the experiences of Peter. So there are actually two different lives reflected by this book. This morning we will examine the human writer of this Gospel. Next week, the man behind this Gospel, a man named Peter.

As we turn to the Gospel by Mark, think with me. One of the greatest honors imaginable is getting to be a part of the Book of Books. God wrote a Book that He says is "forever settled in Heaven". So the special servants He chose to use to communicate that book are quite a select and special group.

God has several groups that He highlights in His revelation to us. There are the pre and post-Flood Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Twelve Apostles, and the 40 or so Scripture Writers.

This morning as we open our Bibles there is a name linked to the book we are studying. We are in the Gospel by what? **RIGHT, Mark!**

For as long as believers live on Earth, that is what we will call these 16 chapters. Whenever we read this account that captures Christ through the eyes of Peter, and under the flawless breath of God's Spirit - we'll always remember its from the pen of Mark. So as the words of the Gospel by Mark lay before us, we are faced this morning with a sobering reminder of our Gracious God. **Look who God used!**

- Part: 5 [John the Baptist: He Must Increase](#)
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Mark was a drop out, a quitter and a failure. Why do I say such a thing about Mark? To best understand the man that the Lord chose to write the Gospel by Mark one of 66 books in this eternally settled in Heaven, Book of the Book of Books, we need to turn to [Acts 12:24-25](#).

Let's stand to read God's Word and then pray.

[Acts 12:24-25](#) But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Wow, the 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey. Can't you see the glow in Mark's eyes?

Here was the epicenter of the mighty work of God. Antioch, that huge Roman city was also the thriving new center of Christianity. God had raised up evangelists, prophets, and now missionaries. This was the new wave of the future – missionaries, sent out from the mother church to far off places, supported by the Body of Christ back home. And John Mark was personally recruited to be on the 1<sup>st</sup> Team!

And this was only another in a great string of great honors for him.

- John Mark had been led to Christ by no less than the Apostle Peter. (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:13b)
- John Mark had been discipled in Christ by another great spiritual giant of the Jerusalem Church, his uncle Barnabas – who is now taking him along. (Colossians 4:10)
- John Mark's mother's home was the great place of meeting and prayer for the early church in Jerusalem. (Acts 12:12) Can you imagine having a home where the greatest of all the early saints frequented? What an awesome start in life to eat and talk with giants.

And now, going on the historic trip with Paul – the greatest man in the entire Roman Empire, even rulers trembled before him. And what a trip it was.

- 1<sup>st</sup> John Mark got to walk, talk, sleep, eat, and share every day with Paul & Barnabas. Just the discussions over each meal must have been amazing – as Paul spoke from his personal mastery of the Old Testament. Then there was cultural commentary of Paul on the cities they saw, the temples that towered over them, the pagan altars that dotted the landscape as they journeyed. Just that was an experience to last a lifetime.
- Then there was the exciting boat ride to Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12) where his uncle Barnabas was from. There on that beautiful island John Mark witnesses first hand the power of God. Paul confronts a satanic medium named Elymas, blinds him, and leads to faith the Roman Proconsul[1].
- Then it was time to set off on a walk up the mighty Roman road to the heights of Pisidia. There the first recorded sermon of Paul stirs hearts and multitudes would respond...but something happens in Acts 13:13. It is so short you may have missed it. John Mark goes home. It was too tough, or too uncomfortable, or too dangerous – we don't know what made him quit. We just know that he quit. He left and went literally back to his mama, back to safety, back to comfort – **back to home!**

The Team went on. The results were staggering. Probably the most crucial event since Pentecost as the Gospel cuts a path across the Roman Roads to dark pagan cities – and scores are born again and churches are formed. It is the greatest chapter in Church History. But it was not just John Mark that quit – it was his uncle Barnabas's nephew, his own relative that had left.

Then it happens, John Mark's choice splits the greatest evangelistic team in history [Acts 15:36-40](#).

[Acts 15:36-40](#) Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." 37 **Now Barnabas was determined** to take with them John called Mark. 38 **But Paul insisted** that they should not take with them **the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia**, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. **And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus**; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.

When word of this got around it wasn't Paul or Barnabas that got the heat – it surely was him. Branded by all who may have known him, Mark the Quitter, the Fearful, and the Failure.

Fast forward with me. Twenty years have passed. According to the nearly unanimous voice of scholarship over the centuries it was John Mark who became the personal helper to Peter. Much like Luke to Paul, John Mark helps the aged Peter.

As Mark sat to capture the words of Peter, inspired by God' Spirit – they probably sat in the dark torch lit passageways of over 600 miles of catacombs under the city of Rome had been found by Christians facing persecution. John Mark is no longer a failure; he is restored, renewed, and vital.

The world that Mark served the Lord in was a terrible time in history. Some of the most memorable pages of the History of Christ's Church are the years from AD 60 and 70. For half those years the hatred and evils of Nero had led to the random acts of fierce persecution upon Christians. Across the city of Rome believers were killed from the arenas to the prisons. For his evening dinner guests Nero would have the followers of Jesus dipped in tar and burned alive in sticks as torches in the Imperial Gardens. For the bloodthirsty masses at the games, Christians were wrapped in animal skins and chased to death by wild beasts.

Have you pondered how hard it must have been to be a Christian in those ten years? Yet in that dangerous time to even be a believer, Mark boldly wrote to the

Romans of Jesus, the Servant Savior. And he did so seated next to Peter who had become the "Most Wanted" man of the day. Mark demonstrated the holy boldness Christ can bring into the lives of His children.

Ten generations of Christians, starting with Mark's generation, built and inhabited the Catacombs over a period of 300 years. In the early centuries of the church, the catacombs served as meeting and burial places for perhaps as many as four million Christians. A common inscription found on walls there is "The Word of God is not bound." This hope shared by all believers was captured in the famous hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," as Martin Luther declared, "The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still."

Branded by all who may have known him as Mark the Quitter, Mark the Fearful, and Mark the Failure.

This same Mark writes a biography of encouragement to those living through the Roman persecutions and beyond. He weaves together Peter's eyewitness accounts, and the Holy Spirit's revelations into a fabric that portrays Jesus as the One who has suffered and triumphed for us. So we who are His can suffer and triumph through Him.

Is Mark unique? No!

Apart[2] from the brief ministry of His own Son, the history of God's work on earth is the history of His using the unqualified. Even the twelve disciples who became apostles were no exception. From the human standpoint they had few characteristics or abilities that qualified them for leadership and service. Yet God used those men, just as He did Noah, Abraham, and the others, in marvelous ways to do His work. God picks normal people and pours His grace on them. Satan wants our sins and failures to convince us to give up. But one look at the people of the Bible should defeat that temptation. The work of God is performed by weak individuals like us, surrendered to the God whose power is perfected in man's weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). God has always had only weak and sinful humans to work with. Listen to the team God has used to win the championships:

As soon as God delivered Noah and his family through the Flood, Noah became drunk and acted indecently.

God uses a doubting and sometimes disobedient dad named Abraham to be the father of the faithful, he doubted God, lied about his wife, and committed adultery with her maid.

Isaac told a similar lie about his wife when he thought his life was in danger.

Jacob took advantage of his brother Esau's weakness and extorted the birthright from him, so he was a cheat and liar and yet becomes the father of God's people Israel.

Moses was a murderer, and in pride he struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had instructed, dragged his feet in obedience yet led and taught the people knowing God face to face.

His brother, Aaron, the first high priest, led Israel in erecting and worshiping the golden calf at the very time Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God.

Joshua was fooled into disobeying the Lord by making a treaty with the Gibeonites instead of destroying them.

Gideon had trouble trusting God at first, had little confidence in himself and even less in God's plan and power.

Delilah repeatedly beguiled Samson because of his great lust for her.

David was a ladies man, committed adultery and murder, was an almost total failure as a father, and was not allowed to build the Temple because he was a man of blood.

Elijah stood fearlessly before 450 false prophets but cowered before one woman, Jezebel. From the exhilaration of Mt. Carmel's victory he plunged so soon into deep depression. Elijah should encourage us all. James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. NKJV. Why? Because God says he had a nature like ours. "Subject to like passions" homiopathes lit. Of the same experience!

Ezekiel was brash, crusty, and quick to speak his mind.

Jonah defied God's call to preach to the Ninevites and resented His grace when they were converted through his preaching.

All this to say the key is not the person God uses, it is the Lord! We are all unqualified to do what needs to be done so the key is a willing and responsive heart. That is all God is looking for! What happens when we let Him use us? Great things!

**Mark's Gospel is encouraging.**

First we see that **God wants to use ordinary people**. It is ordinary people who fear; it is ordinary people who fail. And that is just the kind of people that the Lord wants to use. The question is do we want to be used? God wants to do extraordinary things with ordinary people so that He - the Lord, will get all the credit for what is

done.

- **1 Corinthians 1:26-31** For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

Secondly, we see **God wants to use those we might call failures**. Before Mark wrote this Gospel he was a drop out from ministry. Paul was so upset that he was willing to lose his partner in ministry than take someone he thought was a quitter along on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey. The grace of God is so wonderful. God gave John Mark a second chance. Peter picks him up after Barnabus, and uses him to give us the greatest of the Four Gospels. And even Paul and John Mark finally reconciled by the time Paul was in prison in Rome.

- **John 21:15-19** So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” 16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. 18 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

Thirdly, **God wants to use young people in ministry**. When the Lord moved on Paul’s heart to invite young John Mark on the great 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey – the Lord knew he would quit. But the Lord wanted him to go to show He is the God of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chance, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and on and on. His mercy endures forever. Even when we fail He loves us!

- **Ecclesiastes 12:1-2** Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them”;

Finally, **God wants to use the weaknesses in our lives to show His Grace**. Yes, the Book of Acts tells us John Mark was a quitter, a drop out. He was not useful at one time in ministry. But have you thought about how gracious our God is? Every time we read this book we are experiencing the result of God’s transforming grace. History records the path of Mark.

- Mark the failed follower of Christ, becomes
- Mark the forgiven follower, becomes
- Mark the devoted disciple, becomes the
- Mark who writes what may be called the premier biography of Jesus Christ, and finally becomes
- Mark the honored martyr.

Mark’s Book should remind us of Mark’s God who can encourage all of us to keep going. Listen to the poet who said:

*They on the heights are not the souls*

*Who never erred or went astray,*

*Or reached those high rewarding goals*

*Along a smooth, flower-bordered way.*

*Nay, they who stand where first comes dawn*

*Are those who stumbled but went on.*

- **Hebrews 2:17-18** Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.
- **Hebrews 4:15-16** For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
- **Hebrews 6:19-20** This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
- **Hebrews 12:1-3** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

**Mark’s gospel is exciting**. Why? Because it is the apostle Peter recounting the greatest story ever told. If you will let him, Mark will let you see, feel and experience what it was like to walk around Israel watching God in a body, right here on earth.

This gospel is Peter's dramatic, vivid, full of color action packed video that takes us on an eye witness journey with none other than the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ.

In a gospel written from Peter's words to the fast paced Roman Empire, Jesus is constantly in action! Mark, perhaps the first gospel account written, opens with: The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." God Himself ratifies the declaration in 1:11: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Mark joins the other three Evangelists who record Christ's ministry to the four groups of people then and now in the world.

1. The Jews, who loved the Scriptures and the prophecies of God, would only listen to one of their own. So **Matthew** speaks to the deeply religious Jews and the deeply religious of our day.
2. **Mark** spoke to the Romans. These were the leaders and leadership and action impressed them. They knew nothing of Scriptures but everything of power. So to this group comes the action packed Gospel of the powerful ministry of Christ. Mark uses the word "and" 1,375 times to tie together the endless actions of Christ. Like our modern successful businessman and woman, they want a God who can powerfully meet their deepest needs.
3. **Luke** was a Greek speaking to the Greeks. The Greeks loved culture, beauty and ideas. Happiness could be found in the pursuit of truth. Luke fills his book with insights, interviews, songs and details that fascinate the inquiring mind. So today the truth seekers find Jesus in Luke!
4. **John** wrote to everyone, because everyone needs to meet God and only Jesus can reveal Him. In this book we meet an absolutely powerful God in human flesh who controls and rules the Universe He created. So the best known verse is the best of all offer that God loves all and offers all – **His Son as their only hope!**

Mark uses a simple three-part outline:

1. The Birth and Preparation of Servant [Jesus 1:1 - 13](#);
2. Servant Jesus Speaks and [Serves 1:14 - 13:37](#);
3. Servant Jesus Suffers and Triumphs in Passion [Week 14:1 - 16:20](#).

But every time we open to the Gospel by Mark we remember that in one way or another, all of us too have stumbled. And for each of us, John Mark's triumph by God's grace is an incredible source of encouragement.

If we were to sum up the entire Gospel by Mark in a verse it would be

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." ([Mark 10:45](#))

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[1] In controlling the Empire, it was agreed that Augustus should govern those areas where there was unrest among the local people or a threat of invasion from outside. In provinces where there was no such danger, the senate appointed a proconsul (formerly a consul) each year as governor. There were also peaceful provinces within the Empire. These were ruled by two magistrates with the rank of proconsul from the main centre in the province. They were responsible directly to the Senate.

[2] Adapted from MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 10*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983

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