

# THE GOSPEL BY MARK

## MARK: THE GOSPEL OF NEW BEGINNINGS

### MARK SERIES - PART 72

I can't think of anything more wonderful for us this morning than to be—

- starting this brand new year together, and
- celebrating the New Covenant promises of a new heart and a new spirit within us through this communion, and
- worshiping our God of New Beginnings.

You may have had a horrible past year or an incredible 2006—but whichever it was, God declares that we start today brand new in Christ. This reality is emphasized as the calendar starts over; communion also is a constant reminder of this promise—but as we will see this morning, the Gospel by Mark is from start to finish the Gospel of New Beginnings!

We are returning in our study of God's Word to the second book in the New Testament, the Gospel by Mark. Before us lays...

## FOUR GOSPELS—ONE THEME

There are four Gospels in our Bibles. Each is a Gospel by Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John. But each has the same theme; each is a snapshot of a **Perfect Jesus**.

- Matthew captures the **Perfect King** of Israel—His ancestry, His Birth, His Life, and His Death. Jesus wants to be our King!
- Mark Captures the **Perfect Servant**; as opposed to all the imperfect ones that have lived. Jesus came to serve and give His Life for us!
- Luke captures the only **Perfect Man** that ever lived in a world of imperfection, falseness, death, disease, and despair. Jesus came to seek and save the lost!
- John captures the **Perfect Deity**; in a world of false gods, fallen gods, and feeble gods--enters the real God of Creation. Jesus came to give us abundant life!

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!

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!

“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 an 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 second chance, a Lord so gracious that His strength is made perfect in our weakness (ii Corinthians 12:9).
- He is the God of new beginnings (Lamentations 3:23).
- And the life we have in Christ is just a series of new beginnings (II Corinthians 5:17)!

That is comforting for me. The longer each of us live the more aware we are of our imperfections, failures, shortcomings, and sins—aren't we?

So this morning as we look at this New Year before us, 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 the good news that God offers to all of us a fresh new start in Him every day. We have...

## TWO MEN—ONE BOOK

There are two lives inseparably bound into this second Gospel. 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 a man named Mark. Next week, the man behind this Gospel, a man named Peter.

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 WHOM? 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 it's 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!** We can learn so much from...

## MARK'S BIO

To understand the man God used to write down this second Gospel, we need to turn to the Spirit inspired biography of Mark contained in the Book of Acts. It is there that we see the wonderful plan that God had for this young man.

In Acts the message we get is that 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 12:24-13:5.

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

*Acts 12:24-13:5 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark. 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.*

These were certainly...

## HISTORIC MOMENTS

Wow, the 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey.

Can't you see the glow in Mark's eyes?

Here Mark was living in the very epicenter of the mighty work of God radiating out from Jerusalem through His apostles and prophets.

Antioch, that huge Roman city was also the thriving new center of Christianity. God raised up evangelists, prophets, and now missionaries.

And now the church recognized their chief nurturing discipler named Barnabus, his greatest pupil and powerfully gifted man of God named Paul—needed to be sent out to obey the great commission of Christ!

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.

- **MARK WAS SAVED THROUGH THE PERSONAL EVANGELISM OF THE APOSTLE PETER:** John Mark had been led to Christ by no less than the Apostle Peter; what a pedigree that would make.

*1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son.*

- **MARK WAS DISCIPLED BY THE GREATEST DISCIPLER OF THE EARLY CHURCH WHO ACTUALLY DISCIPLED PAUL:** John Mark had been disciplined in Christ by another great spiritual giant of the Jerusalem Church, his uncle Barnabus, who is now taking him along.

*Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),*

- **MARK WAS NURTURED AT THE FEET OF THE GIANTS OF THE FAITH:** John Mark's mother's home was the great place of meeting and prayer for the early church in Jerusalem. 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.

*Acts 12:12 So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.*

- **MARK WAS DOING HIS MINISTRY RESIDENCY WITH THE GREATEST OF THE GREAT IN CENTURY ONE:** Just like doctors who have to eat, sleep and live at the hospital to earn their right to practice medicine—Mark was given the awesome privilege of a ministry residency with Paul the Apostle. Just think of what Mark must have felt as his ministry career mushroomed as he departed on the historic, first missionary journey with Paul; who was to become one of the greatest man in the entire Roman Empire, even rulers trembled before him.

And what a trip it was. Follow along in Acts 13 starting back at verse 6 where we left off earlier.

*Acts 13:6-13a Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the*

*proconsul away from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him<sup>10</sup> and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?<sup>11</sup> "And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.<sup>12</sup> Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia..."*

Mark was experiencing what could truly be called...

## THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

Think of what it must have meant that John Mark got to walk, talk, sleep, eat, and share every day with Paul and Barnabus.

- 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<sup>1</sup>.

After all that on the job training, all those special insights and precious fellowship, it was time to set off on a walk up the mighty Roman road to the interior and the mountain heights of Pisidia.

This would be another milestone event as the first recorded sermon of Paul stirs hearts, and multitudes would respond; but something happens in the record God laid down for us in Acts 13. It is so short you may have missed it. Look at the end of verse 13.

*Acts 13:13b "...and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem."*

## MARK BAILS OUT

John Mark goes home. Was it too tough, or too uncomfortable, or too dangerous? We don't know what made him quit. We just know that he quit.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

He left and went literally back to his mom, back to the big house in friendly Jerusalem, back to safety, back to comfort—back to home!

The Team went on. The results were staggering.

Probably the most crucial event since Pentecost was unfolding as the Gospel cuts a path across the Roman Roads to dark pagan cities—and scores are born again and churches are formed.

It was the opening of the greatest chapter in Church History.

But it was not just John Mark that quit—it was Barnabas's nephew, his own relative that had left the missionary journey. Let that sink in for a moment.

Paul and Barnabus could have taken anyone; and everyone would have envied the opportunity. But Barnabus had chosen his nephew and Paul had no room for faintheartedness in his team. So that makes for...

## THE TRAGIC SPLIT

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 Barnabus 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.

## DANGEROUS TIMES

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—we now see the God of New Beginnings at work. He takes the least likely person and uses them in an extraordinary way! We now have...

## THE GOSPEL BY MARK

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<sup>2</sup> 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*

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 10*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983  
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*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:*

Just after God allowed Noah to be the only dad on earth to survive the Global Flood and save his family--Noah goes on to become the first drunkard in the new world to shame himself and his family.

*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.*

Lot the righteous (as Peter calls him in ) sees God in his uncle Abraham, yet chooses to live life so closely conformed to the lust filled people of Sodom, that he loses everything important in his life—his wife, his children, his honor, and his future reputation.

*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 disobeyed 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 LIFE IS ENCOURAGING

First we see that **God wants to use ordinary people to serve Him**. 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 to serve Him**. 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 to Him.** 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 as we serve Him.** 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.*