



"Mark: An Introduction"

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Mark 1:1

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*1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*(Pastor prays)*

There is no time to waste. The world is changing, the church is suffering, and God's people are wondering! Is all of this really worth it? Is being faithful worth it? The economy is tanking, morals are vanishing and good people stand bewildered. If God is real and still working, then why doesn't He do something?

Enter the Gospel according to Mark. This is a work that is not like any other. There are four books called Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All of them were written with a specific purpose in mind. Matthew is the longest, written to the Jews to prove that Jesus was the Messiah and fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies. Luke is written for a Greek audience to prove that Jesus is the perfect son of God. John was written to the world in majestic language to prove that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. But Mark stands by itself. It was written in Rome to the church in Rome that was agonizing under the brutal tyranny of the emperor Nero. Mark is pressing the church to fix their eyes on Jesus, the suffering servant who gives His life as a ransom for many. A full third of this Gospel is dedicated to the crucifixion.

Speaking of the Gospels, Mark is the very first one written. Mark creates the genre—Gospel— as a life story of hope. But his is so different. His is fast-moving and hard-hitting. It is the shortest and the earliest Gospel. His Gospel moves over and over again. You will read the “immediately” like a drumbeat that keeps the song moving forward and on time. The average reader can sit down and read the whole Gospel of Mark in two hours. There is no genealogy like Matthew. There is no birth like Luke; no angels, no shepherds, no childhood visit to the synagogue. There are very few parables and no Sermon on the Mount. There is no mystical prologue like John and no Christmas story like Luke.

It's all action and all motivation to turn your eyes to Jesus who lived perfectly, died in the place of sinners and defeated death by His glorious resurrection. And today, He reigns as the Lord of all and the point of this whole book is...

### The Suffering Savior is Worth Your Life

I want you to believe that. I want you to grasp that and put your faith in Jesus. I want you to put your faith in Jesus to the degree that when you are pressed to the point of losing a career or it's going to cost you financially, that the suffering Savior is worth your life. Let's make this an introduction. What are the lessons we can learn from the Gospel of Mark?

### **God isn't done with you**

No matter what you have done or where you have been, no matter the history you've got or the guilt you are carrying, God is not done with you. Let's find out a little bit about Mark the author.

The first time we meet Mark is in Acts 12. The setting is that Peter has been arrested, he is put in jail and he is in between and chained to two guards. He has gone to sleep and an angel comes to wake him up to deliver Peter. He is so asleep that the angel has to kick him. Peter wakes up and the chains fall off and they walk outside of the jail. Peter doesn't know if he is having a vision or if he is dreaming. Finally he comes to himself outside that jail, in the town

square and he decides to run quickly to the house where he knows everybody will be, a house owned by a woman named Mary. <sup>12</sup> *When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.* Luke tells us in Acts that this is the Mary who is the mother of John Mark. John is his Jewish name and Mark is his Greek name. That is the first time we see the name, Mark. Mark is a young man then. His mother is a wealthy widow who has everyone over to her house where they are praying for Peter. So we get some feeling of the environment that Mark is coming up in. Mark is exposed to the Gospel early, probably from Peter. And Peter was the one who gave Mark all the information for this Gospel. At the end of Chapter 12 we find out that Paul and Barnabas are going out on the very first missionary journey, and they decide to take this young man John Mark with them. Mark goes as a helper, an intern.

And as missionary journeys sometimes do, it was getting rough. And for some reason, in Acts 13:13, John (Mark) leaves the trip. <sup>13</sup> *Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,* Now we don't know what happened. Was he home sick? Was it too hard? Was it not what he thought it would be? We don't know. He goes off and later in Acts 15, Paul says, he deserted us. In Acts 15:37-38, Mark shows back up and Barnabas wants to take him with them on a second missionary journey. <sup>37</sup> *Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.* <sup>38</sup> *But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.* We find out in Colossians 4:10 that Mark is actually Barnabas's cousin. Paul isn't having anything to do with Mark, and he and Barnabas have such an argument in Acts 15:39 that they split. <sup>39</sup> *And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.* We don't hear anything out of Barnabas or Mark for the rest of Acts. Paul and Silas go off on their mission trip and God uses them tremendously. Years pass, 10 to 15. Mark has grown up and has developed and changed so much. And something may have happened in Paul's heart because then in Colossians 4:10 we find that Paul is in Rome and

Mark is with him. <sup>10</sup> *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him)* There has been a reconciliation. Mark has grown up and Paul has forgiven him. Here is grace and growth and maturity. And all that grace that Paul has been preaching, he has decided to extend it to Mark.

Mark has changed so much that when we get to the end of Paul's life, Paul writes to his protégé Timothy giving him instructions of things that are going to help him, and one of them is to send Mark to him. 2 Timothy 4:11 says, <sup>11</sup> *Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.* What has happened to Mark? We know the story of Paul: he dies in Rome. Mark is in Rome and Peter is in Rome. Peter writes a letter from Rome, 1 Peter. He writes from Rome in 1 Peter 5:13 but he does it in code. He calls it Babylon. <sup>13</sup> *She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.* And here he calls Mark his son.

Now think with me about the miraculous transformation. Mark was a coward and a quitter, but now his life is turned around. Something happened in his life. Maybe he just grew up. He has spent all that time with Peter, and you know how Peter is, talking a lot and mannish and preaching. So Mark has been watching Peter so much and spends the time with him in Rome, and church tradition that reaches all the way back to the beginning tells us that Mark got all his information from Peter. And the grace of God that it takes for the young man who was a deserter to be transformed to the degree that he becomes the one who puts pen to paper and tells us God's word and writes the sentence, *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* Brothers and sisters, God is not done with you. There is redemption, there is grace, there is usefulness.

Let me give you a second thing we can learn.

### **God uses suffering and hard times**

You might be under stress; God will handle that. So we have talked about who has written this: Mark. He wrote it to the church in Rome. Let's talk about

when. Mark was written somewhere in between 60-70AD. In 70AD the temple was destroyed and that's not mentioned in the Gospel of Mark so it is believed to be written before that. It is a terrible time. In 64, 65 & 66AD, Nero is the emperor in Rome. Now he isn't any worse than most emperors in Rome except something happens in Rome. There is a fire that sweeps across three-quarters of the city and burns it down to the ground. And when something like that happens, you need somebody to blame. So the people of Rome start blaming Nero BUT he has heard of this group of people called Christians that have weird practices. Some say they are cannibals and they call themselves "brothers and sisters." So Nero blames the Christians.

That rumor takes off to such a degree that persecution hits Rome for Christians. Nero has them arrested and often they are carried to the Colosseum. They are sometimes covered in animal skins and attacked by lions. But mostly he brought them to his garden. There he dips them in pitch oil and lights them on fire. His garden would be illuminated by burning Christians. Mark knows that is going on. That's probably what happened to Peter. The church is suffering. They are meeting down in the catacombs, the cemetery. That's the only place they can get together. So Mark writes this to strengthen them. God has used suffering throughout the centuries to bring good. Peter is gone. Paul is gone. And Mark writes in the midst of Nero's persecution, "Be faithful to the suffering servant Jesus." God uses suffering and hard times.

### **God uses your influence**

Don't ever underestimate the impact of your life on someone else's for the Gospel. Mark didn't happen by himself. He didn't show much promise and proved to be a quitter. Somebody had to be close. Let's start with his mother Mary. She is probably a widow, but she has enough money to have this home big enough to show hospitality. As a matter of a fact, the night Peter got out of jail, everybody was at her house praying for him. Mark is there watching his mother who is willing to sacrifice and make sure her child has this Christian influence. But not just his mother, you have Barnabas. Barnabas is the son of

encouragement. That's from Acts Chapters 5 and 6. We find out he is the kind of man who likes to build, give, and pour into people. He is going to make sure that you feel good about yourself. He defends Mark to Paul. He props him up. Mark has his mother named Mary and a cousin named Barnabas. But not only that, he has Peter showing up at his house. Some believe that Peter led him to faith but at the least he disciplined him. Peter will be the model but you know Peter, loud and brash and manly and sometimes full of himself. He was always full of the Gospel and Mark was watching that.

Most would believe that what Mark has given us came from Peter. Peter had poured into his life to the degree that Peter would call him "my son" in 1 Peter 5. So he's got his mom Mary and Barnabas and Peter. And then there is his relationship with Paul. Paul is prickly and sometimes mean. He's black and white. He is real clear on doctrine and preaching grace but not always giving it. But somehow he comes back around and he reconciles with Mark. Paul shows him the straight lines to walk in. Mark didn't just happen. He had all these people pouring into his life. Who are you influencing for the gospel? I'm not talking about who you take care of or are being nice to. Who are you pressing toward the Lord Jesus? Who are you teaching or leading or investing in? Even using the word "invest" shows it costs to do that. We learn that God will use your influence in the book of Mark.

Let me give you another thing to consider.

### **God can redeem a bad argument**

It often can happen especially if it is raining, you have a bad argument on the way to church. Maybe you don't fight but you act ugly and just don't talk. There is an argument. What we are seeing among Paul, Mark and Barnabas is a terrible argument that is so bad in Chapter 15 of Acts that friendships broke up. Luke doesn't even tell us the rest of the story. We have to piece it together from the rest of the Bible. But when we read the Bible, we find out that somewhere along the way, there was forgiveness and reconciliation and humility. There was an affection. Paul wanted Mark close to him when he was

dying. Peter would call him a son. They didn't just stop arguing. They pressed to find resolution and forgiveness and wholeness. There is Christianity. Don't just leave it, go and reconcile it. This lesson teaches us that God can redeem a bad argument.

Let's go to our Bibles and get the rest of our lessons from verse 1.

## **God is the God of new beginnings**

*1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

When you read that, you ought to be reminded of Genesis Chapter 1, the Old Covenant, the Old Testament. In the beginning, God. Maybe he is giving us this new covenant saying that Jesus Christ is giving us a new beginning. That's what John did in John Chapter 1. He mimicked what we found in Genesis Chapter 1. *In the beginning was the Word.* Paul talks about "he, who began a good work in you." God is the God of new beginnings.

Listen now, today can be the day of absolute, genuine, real change. There are many people here who are somewhat like Mark. They are already Christian but not quite walking the walk. Maybe today you grasp it for the first time and you realize once again the what the Gospel teaches is that our God is the God of new beginnings. Keep looking at the text.

## **God has come to us**

Verse 1 is a lot like a title. Let's take it apart. In the beginning of the gospel. We can trace that word "gospel" in the English language to mean "good news." It is a good representation of the word in Greek that even before it was a Christian word, it was used as a herald that talked about the coming day that was going to change the direction of history. Good News. It's good for us to talk about the Gospel and have it spoken to as the angels did, with great joy.

Because what does the Gospel tell us? It tells us that God is the holy creator who created all of us in His image. But the image of God in us is disfigured by

our own sin. God is just and punishes crime. But also God is the justifier. So the Gospel comes in and tells us that God loved us to the degree that He gave us Jesus, the perfect man. He was fully man and fully God and He lived perfectly. He died on the cross taking the wrath of God that every sinner deserves. But that's not all He did. When you become a Christian it's not just that you are forgiven of your sins and you are wiped clean. That does happen, yes, but you're not left blank. Our sins are taken away— that's one part of salvation—wrath is taken away. But there's another part we don't talk about very much. And that is on your mind and body and intentions. The righteousness of Christ has been placed on you so that when God looks at you, what He sees is His perfect son Jesus. God has come to us. That's the hope of the Gospel. Not that you are just forgiven but you are made absolutely *right* before God. That is what Mark is pointing his people to. God comes to us.

### **God saves sinners**

That is the hope that we have. That makes sense to us in church but it really isn't logical. God should save good people, but that's not what he says. God saves the sinners. The promise here in verse one is *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. The name Jesus. The name Jesus is really a translation of "YHWH saves." This man Jesus is named Jesus on purpose. The angel comes to Joseph and says, "you give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." In the gospels, Jesus is described as the friend of sinners. Are you a sinner? Jesus came to save you. Jesus himself said, "I didn't come to save the righteous who think they are good. I came to save sinners who understand what they deserve." God saves sinners.

### **God is sovereign**

When you read the book of Mark, you find out that God is sovereign. That means that God is in complete and direct control. I hope that you love the doctrine of God's sovereignty. I hope you can study sovereignty. Pick it up



and read and think about it. I hope it gives you comfort and joy that God is in complete, actual, direct control. Where do I get that? *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* Jesus, that is His name. “Christ” means “anointed one.” You reach back through Greek into Hebrew to point to the Messiah. That’s not a name as much as it is a title. You might even say, Jesus – the Christ. Jesus – the anointed one. This is really what Jesus taught Mark. Remember what happened at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked the disciples, “What are the people saying about me?” And after they describe what the people say, Jesus asks, “Who do you say I am?” And Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” Jesus is the one who rules, the one who is in charge. He keeps His promises. He is the one who will walk you through all you are walking through. Mark will teach us, God is sovereign. We are going to learn from Mark that ...

### **God has not forgotten us**

You find that promise in verse 1. *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* He is the one who is one in nature with God. He is co-eternal. He is co-equal with God, the son of God. And that God loved you so that He sent His son. He has not forgotten us. God has come for us to save us. The hope of the Gospel is not that you are going to try to “be better.” That kind of talk gets you nowhere. The hope of the Gospel is that God has come for you in Christ, that you can be made whole by the grace of God that comes to us through the cross of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus Christ, the son of God, is the hope of our lives. He is the strength for another day.

And in our study this year, maybe next, I hope you will see Jesus as the suffering Savior who is worth your life.

*(Pastor prays)*