

Introduction to Mark and His Gospel of Jesus!



If you have your bibles, go ahead and open to the gospel according to Mark. We are beginning a new series this morning, which will be covering several months. Before we begin this though, I want to thank you again. I know I did last week, but some of you weren't here. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to go back to the Amazon River and teach one hundred and seventeen pastors and church leaders. Celisa went with me and it was absolutely amazing. Thank you! I tell those guys every time I go that they're my second most precious people to preach to in all of the world behind you. There's no greater privilege I have than to get to teach you week to week. You know when I go to Brazil I just basically teach to those pastors and church leaders on the banks of the Amazon River what I've already taught you, so thank you for the opportunity that you give me to be your pastor on a weekly basis and get to feed you with the Word of God. I love going to Brazil. I want to share one of my traditions when I go to Brazil. When I get to the Miami Airport, I have about an eight and a half hour layover before I actually get to fly on to the Amazon River. So when I'm in the Miami Airport, I go to a little bookstore and buy a book. I don't look at the book or read the book until I'm flying home because when the RBBI is over, it's going to take me almost two days to get home. It is not continuous flying, not continuing travel, but because there's only one flight out of Parintins, one flight out of Manaus. By the time I get to Miami about

4:30 in the morning and because my flight to Nashville doesn't leave until about 11:00, I've just got a lot of time on my hands. So I've made a tradition that I'm going to read a book, not the Bible, not anything about the Bible, but a secular book. That's just the way I relax, the way I get refreshed, the way I debrief from a mission trip. So I'm standing at the Miami Airport in front of my favorite little bookstore, and this year it's a little different because I've got Celisa with me. but I don't want to break my tradition of buying the book, so I'm standing in front of this little bookstore, they've got nine books that has caught my attention. This is the only time during the year that I literally buy a secular book. So I choose the book based on one of two things, either the author of the book and many times through the years I have favored authors and I buy them because they've put out a new novel, or I buy a book based on the title. This year I bought a book based on the title, not the author. I think you will love this book I bought to read on my flight home, look at this title, The Aging Brain. I admit, I wouldn't have bought this book when I was in my twenties or my thirties, or my forties, probably not even my early fifties, but now that I'm fifty-eight (I celebrated it in Brazil) I just thought it was a cool book. The subtitle is Proven Steps to Prevent Dementia and Sharpen your Mind. Now, once I had settled on that title thinking it was a book I ought to read, I checked out the author, and he was a guy by the name of Timothy R Jennings. At the end of it, it doesn't say farmer, carpenter, or fisherman, and honestly, I probably wouldn't read a book by a farmer, a fisher, or even a carpenter about the aging brain, but this said, M.D. So I thought wow, if here is a guy who has spent his entire practice studying the brain, and he's got some tips on how to prevent dementia and sharpen my mind as my brain ages, I thought it was a book I need to check out.

This morning, we, the staff, have chosen a book to study. The title of the book is the gospel according to Mark, and it's written by a man named Mark. So here's what I want to do this morning. I just want to introduce you to the title, the Gospel According to Mark, and I want to introduce you to the guy who wrote the book and his name is Mark. When you understand about this guy who wrote the book, it's going to make you want to read the book. I have a feeling if you didn't even know the guy

who wrote the book, when you saw the title, the Gospel According to Mark; you would want to read the book based on the title alone. Is everybody ready? It's my sincere privilege to introduce you to the guy who wrote the gospel of Mark.

He was reared, not like me, in the city. He's a city boy. We know, according to Acts 12:12, when Peter had been arrested by Herod and placed in prison, the church is meeting in Mark's mother's house. Mark's mother's name is Mary. The whole church is gathered together in that house to pray for Peter's release. While Peter's in prison and the church is praying in John Mark's mother's house, an angel of the Lord appears in prison and releases Peter from his shackles. Peter thinks he's dreaming that he's being released. The angel escorts him out of the prison, and it's not until he's standing outside the door of the prison that he actually wakes up and realizes he's not dreaming; he's really free. The first thing he does is to go to the house, Mary's house. Luke, telling the story in the book of Acts, says she is the mother of John, whose other name is Mark. Then Luke tells us that the church has been meeting in her house to pray specifically for the release of Peter. The next thing we know in the story that Luke tells is that Paul and Barnabas come from Jerusalem to Antioch. At Antioch, they will be sent out on the first mission trip, Acts chapter 13. Acts 12:25 tells us that John Mark comes with them from Jerusalem to Antioch, meaning he's going to go on the first mission trip. Acts chapter 13 opens and they get ready to go, the church commissions them to go, and they head out on the first mission trip spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. The Bible says in Acts 13:13 that Mark leaves them, Barnabas and Paul, and he returns to Jerusalem. Luke doesn't tell us why he left, but just about every pastor and scholar I read believes John Mark goes home because he got homesick. He was a momma's boy. Now he's been out from under momma's wing, he's on a mission trip, and they're gone longer than he can stand it, so he rushes home to see momma. We don't know that to be true. Some people want to bail Mark out and say well now hold it; that probably didn't happen. Probably what really happened was he got bit by a mosquito that had malaria and so he had to go home to receive medical treatment. We don't know exactly what happened, but here's what we know; he failed Paul and he didn't stay on the journey.

We're going to study a book about a guy, I mean; no, we're studying a book about the guy who died on the cross. But the guy who wrote the book abandoned his first mission trip. Just think about that for a second. He failed. He quit. He didn't last. He didn't make it. He went back home.

Now, if you store that on one side of your brain, when we read this gospel by Mark, Mark never says I wrote the book. But there is a little sentence in chapter 14:51-52 where after Jesus has been arrested and all of the apostles flee and leave Jesus all alone, Mark tells this story. Many people believe he's writing about himself. He said and a young man who followed him had only on his linen cloth, and when they laid hands on him, he ran also, but his linen cloth was still in the hands of those who laid hold of him, so he ran away naked. If we put these two things together and Mark is giving us a glimpse of him in the gospel, it means while he was being raised in the city of Jerusalem and the apostles were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, he heard about it, and not as an adult man, but as a young man. In his pajamas, he goes to check out Jesus in the garden, and while there, Jesus gets arrested. When the officers lay their hands on Jesus and all of the apostles flee, the brave men flee, he's the only one left. They lay hands on him and he flees too. But they've got a hold of his pajamas, so when he runs, his pajamas come off and he returns home naked. Wow! Did you know this about the guy we're going to study about?

If I can be honest with you, the guy who wrote this book is kind of like you and me. How many times did you get in a situation and it got really, really tough, and you failed the Lord? You didn't do what you were supposed to do; you blew it. Then you grew up a little bit, got a little older, and thought I can handle this now! So you took your big step for God, and you didn't last very long. You quit. You failed. This book gives me hope. This book should give you hope. This book should give all of us hope who has blown it because here's what I really believe. I believe there are many of us sitting here this morning and the reason we won't serve, the reason we don't do for God now is because of how we've failed Him in the past, and we're just trying to be anonymous. We just really want to slip into church, slip into a chair, listen, go home, and we want to live our life. No, no, this book is written by a man just like you and me! This book is telling us that

no matter what we've done in our past, God can so redeem us that we can still be used of Him to paint the picture of Jesus in somebody else's life, amen. Isn't it awesome to know that no matter what you've done in your past, as a Christian there's still hope. God still has a plan for you. That plan for you and me is for us to paint the picture of Jesus for somebody else who may be struggling to know who He really is.

Now, Barnabas is John Mark's cousin. We know that from Colossians 4:10. Some Bible scholars believe that word, cousin, literally means that Barnabas is his uncle. But here's what we know. It gets worse. After he failed Paul and Barnabas, they get ready to go on the second missionary trip, and Barnabas, family member of Mark, wants to take Mark with them on the next missionary journey and Paul puts his foot down. He says no, we're not taking him with us, which means, he probably didn't get sick, or Paul would have been understanding. Paul felt like he bailed on him, so Paul puts his foot down and says you are not taking him with us. He's not going; he's going to stay here. The contention gets so sharp that the first missionary couple, Paul and Barnabas, split. And Barnabas says I'm taking Mark with me, Paul says I'm taking Silas, and they go in different directions. This guy split a church, and he's used to write a gospel! Please tell me this gives you hope, because aren't some of us still running from our past? We just can't get over what we've done, and we don't believe others will ever get over what we've done. But what's most important is that God gets over what we've done, amen!

We know from 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon verse 23 that Paul and Mark make up in the end and Mark becomes useful to Paul. But in 1 Peter 5:13, Peter is ending his letter and he talks about Mark being his son in the ministry. What we understand from that statement and what the early church fathers wrote is that Mark's ministry was influenced by Peter. The early church fathers believed that as Peter got older and closer to his death, John Mark actually interpreted and wrote down some of his writings and themes. In 2 Peter 1:15-16, Paul is writing to the church and he says I have a desire before I die, (the Lord has already told me how I'm going to die and it will be soon) to leave you a little reminder. He doesn't mention a gospel, but most scholars believe Peter is sharing that he wants to leave

them a gospel, stories about Jesus so they will never forget them. Here's what we believe about Mark. Mark wrote those stories. So in a real sense, the gospel according to Mark is the gospel according to Peter, but Mark is the one who writes the story, but it's really his story. So when you read the gospel of Mark, be ready. It's going to remind you of Peter. It's almost going to read like one of Peter's sermons. If you'll get home and read Acts 10:34-43, we have a sermon where Peter goes into the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and preaches the gospel to him. The Bible says he began the gospel with, not the birth of Jesus, but with the baptism of John. Look at the gospel of Mark, chapter 1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God..." then he quotes Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 40:3. He quotes Malachi 3:1 where it talks about a messenger who will come and prepare the way of the Lord. Then it says John appeared, and it talks about the ministry of John the Baptist. Many people wonder why Mark began his gospel with the baptism of John. The reason is because that's where Peter started the gospel. Peter did not believe the gospel started with the good news of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Peter and Mark thought the gospel started with John the Baptist because the Old Testament prophets talked about a voice that would come crying in the wilderness, and that voice was John. Mark says John appeared to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies, and it talks about John the Baptist and how he was a figure like the Old Testament prophet, Elijah. He just dressed in camel's hair, he had a leather belt around him, he had some sandals, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He was a very humble man, but he preached with this voice that prepared people for the coming of the Lord because he told them don't step into the water of baptism unless you've repented and confessed your sins. Now, we have this picture in Mark's gospel of all of Judea, all of Jerusalem, not everybody, but a great many people, coming to John's baptism. Here's what's going to happen. Once we start with the baptism of John the Baptist, which will introduce us to the gospel, you better hang on because Mark is going to try to get us to the cross as fast as he can. So when we read these verses, I promise if you try to read two or three chapters at a time, you're going to be panting! You're going to be totally out of breath. This is an action packed, sprinters pace run to the cross.

My friend, my son in the ministry, Chris Moore, texted me this morning like he does a lot of Sunday mornings, and he said, "Brother, I'm praying for you." I texted him back, "Thank you. I start to introduce Mark this morning." He texted back, "Wow, I'm starting John this morning." I said, "I'll be praying for you." I got another text back, "I told a buddy the other day that the gospel of Mark was written for all of those people who suffer from ADHD." Amen! I love that. If there's ever a gospel that meets the needs of society today, this generation that tweets, this generation that gets its messages from Instagram, you're going to love the gospel of Mark. It's action packed. As a matter of fact, in the first thirteen verses of Mark's gospel, it takes Matthew and Luke four chapters to cover the same material that Mark does in thirteen verses. When we start reading this gospel, you're going to see the word, 'and,' over and over again. You will see the word, 'immediately,' fifty-two times. About the time Jesus quits doing something, He immediately starts to do something else. You and I know as grammarians that when you're writing sentences, sometimes we use the connecting word, 'and,' to connect two thoughts together in a sentence, but we all know you never start a sentence in English with 'and.' I'll not remind you what school I went to, but when I was in elementary school, if I ever turned in a paper with a sentence starting with ~~'and,'~~ I got a paper back with a red mark through 'And.' I was told why you don't start sentences with 'and.' When you're reading the gospel of Mark, it is 'and,' 'and,' 'and.' He starts sentences with 'and,' he starts chapters with 'and.' It's as if Jesus never stops, never pauses, He just goes and goes, and 'immediately,' 'immediately,' 'immediately,' 'immediately.' So finally, you're just wore out from reading this book. I want to let you in on a secret.

This aggravates me almost as much as people who say, "The man upstairs." After my sermon last Sunday on the holiness of God, you understand why I do not refer to God as the man upstairs, because God is holy, holy, holy. I read all the time where people say the second gospel when they talk about Mark. Mark is not the second gospel. Don't ever let somebody call Mark the second gospel. I know what you're thinking...in our New Testament, Mark is the second gospel. I know, but he's not; he's the first gospel. Mark's gospel was written first, not Matthew. Why is Matthew first in our New Testament? It is first because, of the four gospel writers,

Matthew is the one who says Jesus said I will build my church upon this rock and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. Then he gives the apostles the keys of the kingdom of heaven. When the church saw the four gospels and saw that Matthew talked about the church, they put Matthew first. Here's what I'm suggesting and what I believe with all of my heart, Mark is not appreciated in the church today for this reason. We read Matthew, then we read Mark and you think you've already read the gospel. What Matthew gives full detail in on four chapters, Mark seems to summarize in thirteen verses. So many people do not see the need to study the gospel of Mark. That's wrong. Mark's the first gospel written. The gospel of Mark is like your first car, your first motorcycle, your first home. I'll always remember my first car. I'll always remember Celisa's and my 14x70 mobile home, three bedroom, two bath on wheels! There's just something special about firsts. Please hear me! There was no written story of Jesus until Mark. This is the first gospel. The reason Matthew and Luke mirror Mark is because when they wrote their gospel, they already had Mark; but Matthew is writing to Jews and Luke is writing to a Gentile named Theophilus, so they expand the story. If you read Mark, through Matthew or Luke, you'll miss Mark's gospel. Mark is not giving us much detail. He's not wanting you to see the life of Christ. He's not wanting you to see the teachings of Christ. He's wanting you to see the person of Christ. He fully understands that it's possible for someone to so be enamored by the teaching of someone, and not know the someone. That's what's happening in the church today. We have too many people who know all about the teachings of Christ, but they don't know the person of Christ. That's why Mark is writing his gospel. He's writing the gospel and he's trying to get to the cross as fast as he can.

Let's read beginning in Mark 1:9, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him." Did you catch that? You don't read this account

calmly, mechanically, dully. No, no, no! This is Bro Ricky on steroid, amen!! Celisa tells that when we go on vacation and get to the beach and she gets everything spread out, I ask the question, "What are we going to do now?" this is Mark! He's trying to get to the cross because he knows the only way you can really know who Jesus is, is if you view Him from the cross, hanging on the cross, dying for our sins!

That's why when you study this book you're going to see Jesus in the first 11 chapters do a miracle in each chapter, sometimes more than one miracle, but there won't be much said about His teaching. Every time He does a miracle and casts out a demon, the demons say we know who You are; You are the Son of God, and Jesus says in the ESV, "Hush," the KJV says, "Be silent." That misses it...Mark said Jesus said this, "Be muzzled like a dog," and the word he uses for "be silent, hush," is a word that's a picture of someone having a God that's wanting to bite and you wrap a muzzle on the mouth of that dog. That dog is still trying to bite, but he can't because of the muzzle. That's what Jesus does to the demons. He muzzles them because he doesn't want them saying who He is. Jesus heals people, and He says don't say anything to anybody. Then the Bible says they go and tell! By the time we get to chapter 7, He has healed again and this time it says He says don't tell anybody who I am! Mark tells us the more He told people not to tell, the more they went and told. Maybe the church needs to change its message. Maybe instead of telling you to go tell, we need to say, shhh, don't tell anybody what we talked about this morning, and then maybe we would go tell! No, that's not what's going on here. What's going on is Mark is writing this gospel right before Nero is going to start persecuting the Christians. Josephus and Tacitus, the early Jewish and Roman historians tell us that when Nero was on the throne, they took Christians and to light up his courtyard, they placed them on poles, dipped them in pitch, and set them on fire. Nero, at his drunken parties, partied with Christians on fire giving light to the courtyard.

Peter is writing to a Gentile audience. That's why you're going to see Mark tell us that Jesus said certain things in Aramaic, then he translates it because the audience didn't speak Aramaic, they spoke Greek. The early Jewish people didn't speak biblical Hebrew; they spoke Aramaic, so this is

not written to a Jewish audience. It's written to a Gentile audience who is getting ready to suffer, and here's what Mark is saying. He knows what he suffered early; he quit. Now, as he's matured in the faith and he fully understands what Christianity is, it's about a man dying in our place on a cross, it's about Him being the suffering servant of Isaiah, it's about Him taking on the sin of the whole world, and he didn't quit. He stayed true to God. It's about you and I when we find out our wife has cancer, about when our child may not live to be three, about when our spouse leaves us, about when we start a business and have to file for bankruptcy, about when life gets tough, we don't quit! It's about the essence of Christianity. It's not about being wealthy. It's not about being healthy. It's about taking up our cross, denying ourselves, and following Him. In that hour of not quitting, we picture Christ to a world that doesn't know Him.

That's why in Mark's gospel, there's what's called the Messianic secret. I happened to study under James Blevins at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was one of the foremost authorities of the Messianic secret. Please know the reason Jesus said, shhh, don't tell anybody who I am, even when Peter gets it right and says You are the Christ, Jesus says don't tell anybody is because the only person in the gospel who really gets to declare who Jesus is, the last person who knows who Jesus is and gets to tell it is a Roman centurion standing at the foot of the cross. When he sees Jesus breathe His last breath, that Roman centurion says, "Truly this was the Son of God." Don't follow Him so He will save your marriage. Don't follow Him so He will make you a wealthy businessman. Don't follow Him thinking He will bless you. Follow Him because He suffered for you on a cross, to free you from self-centeredness, to be a servant who serves the King of kings and Lord of lords!

When we read this gospel, you're going to love it. You're going to be reading a story and Jesus stops a story, inserts another story and finishes that story in completion, and then goes and finishes the story He was telling. Some of you are thinking you're not supposed to do that! This is a technique. I've been teaching you for years; don't read the gospels like a diary. Don't read the gospels as a biography of Jesus. There's a theological purpose, a plan. Here's what Mark does; it's called a Markan sandwich.

Eu gasto o café da manhã. Eu, Abacaxi, frito ovos, suco laranja, bacon.

What I just said was I love breakfast on the Amazon River; they serve me pineapple, crispy bacon, fried eggs, and *pondequejo*. But when it comes to me, it comes in a roll. I like bacon sandwiches for breakfast, so on the Amazon River, they don't have loaf bread. They just make this homemade bread every morning. So here I am, the only guy that does this, but I take my *pao*, my *faca*, and I *corte*, but my bread, and split it apart. I'm the only one in the *hotéis* who gets crispy bacon. They do that for me because of you letting me teach them the gospel. The last morning, my little cook in the hotel came to me after I was finishing breakfast, and she said and she said, "*Desculpe, Pastor Hickey.*" Then she said I've been all over the city and I can't find you bacon for your last morning. She had tears in her eyes because she couldn't serve me bacon. Wow. Celisa said those people love you almost as much as your people at Hardin love you. But here's what I do; I cut my bread open, put my bacon on the inside, and then I close it and have a bacon sandwich.

Mark serves the teaching of Jesus in sandwiches. He starts telling a story, cuts it open, inserts a story, then finishes the story. Now, you're supposed to take the bread, (the first story) and know that story is just holding together the main story in the middle. For example, in Mark 11, Jesus curses a fig tree. That looks unjust. Then He goes into the temple and cleanses it. He leaves and comes back the next day. The disciples go, hey, the fig tree you cursed is dead. Do you know what that story means? Just as that fig tree was cursed because it wasn't bearing fruit and Jesus knew it wasn't the season of fruit so it wasn't going to give it, that temple looked just like that fig tree. It was leafy and it was pretty, but it wasn't bearing fruit. Jesus is telling the disciples the temple is cursed just like the fig tree is, and it will be no more. Then he told them in Mark 13 that the temple is going to be destroyed, and in AD 70, it was. So don't get on to Mark when he interrupts a story with a story. He's trying to feed you the Word of God. This is going to be a great, great study. I hope you're ready. What I hope you're really ready for is to reveal to somebody else the gospel according to you. In spite of your failures, I hope you get them to the cross as quickly as you can because you've been to the cross. As you now write this story, you aren't the same person you were who made those mistakes in

years past. Many people in Marshall and Calloway Counties will never read the gospel of Mark, but they'll read the gospel according to each of you.