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## **“Mark, Jesus and You”**

### **Mark 1:1**

#### **Introduction**

Pastor Kent Hughes tells this story:

Some years ago one of the world's renowned scholars of the classics, Dr. E. V. Rieu, completed a great translation of Homer into modern English for the Penguin Classics series. He was sixty years old, and he had been an agnostic all his life. The publisher soon approached him again and asked him to translate the Gospels. When Rieu's son heard this he said, "It will be interesting to see what Father will make of the four Gospels. *It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels make of Father.*" He did not have to wonder very long. Within a year's time E. V. Rieu, the lifelong agnostic, responded to the Gospels he was translating and became a committed Christian. His story is a marvelous testimony to the transforming power of God's Word. Experiences like this have been repeated time and time again.

Whenever I begin a fresh study of one of the Bible's books, I keep this story in mind, and especially the inviting questions: What will it make of me? What will it make of the people I influence? Throughout the years we have had the privilege of studying Colossians with its exalted Christology, the Acts of the Apostles of the Holy Spirit which has shaped my understanding of God's power, the teaching from 1 Thessalonians which was a model church, the writings of Zechariah which exalts Christ and His coming kingdom, the book of Philippians which exemplifies joy, and the book of Proverbs that has trust has made me wiser.

Well, this morning we start a new chapter in our life together as a church as we turn to the book of Mark. Once again I read this book (it takes about 1.5 hours for the average reader or about 2 hours for a slower reader) and it just left me amazed at the power and the compassion of Jesus Christ as he is portrayed as a Servant and a Suffering Savior on my behalf.

I trust this will be my first time of preaching through an entire gospel and I believe this is going to be a rich time in the life of our church as we focus in on the life, the words, the actions of our precious Savior Jesus Christ. I find myself as I am getting older just wanting to focus more and more on Christ. I find myself wanting to know more of His character, His power, His presence. So I think we are going to love, enjoy, and I trust cherish this gospel.

Now this morning I want to introduce you to Mark and his gospel about Jesus Christ And then I want you to see how Mark and Jesus intersect with our lives and can transform your life and mine.

## **Mark and Jesus**

### **● The man**

First, let's explore Mark and Jesus—that is how did their paths cross and what are some unique characteristics of Mark's gospel. If you want to know about this author, you won't find much of anything out about him from his own book. The first time this man's name appears in Scripture is actually in Luke's book called Acts. In Acts 12, we read the account of Peter being imprisoned for a second time but this time the ruling King Herod Agrippa is planning on killing him the next day. Herod Agrippa had already put to death James, the brother of John who wrote the fourth gospel. This action pleased the Jews so much, the Jews that Herod on the one hand hated and yet on the other hand needed their support for political reasons, that he seized Peter who is viewed pretty much as the leader of the apostles of Jesus. *“And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”* (Acts 12:4–5). Peter is chained 24/7 to these guards and then there are sentries throughout the prison as well. But God has other plans and he sends an angel that night while the church is praying and the angels wakes Peter up and guides him out of the prison into the city. *“When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”* ” (Acts 12:11). Peter knows exactly where to go. He knows where the Christians will be gathered. And watch 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.”* (Acts 12:12). This is the guy who wrote the gospel of Mark. His Roman name is Mark and his Jewish name is John. And he is identified only by his relationship to his mother whose name is Mary, sort of an odd way to describe a grown man—but apparently his mom is a widow but she must have opened up her house often enough to the other Christians and Peter must have been a frequent guest in her house because that is where he knows everyone is going to be. Some, in fact, speculate that the upper room where the disciples had observed the Last Supper with Jesus, where they probably were hiding on the Sunday night immediately after the resurrection, and where they were praying for the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:13-14) was located in Mary's house. But I read these verses to introduce to Mark who is also known as John who wrote the second gospel. So he knows Peter pretty well at this point. But he also then has the privilege of working with two other prominent men in the early church—Paul who becomes the main figure after Acts 12 and Barnabas, who is both Mark's cousin and Paul's right hand man for the first few years of his public ministry.

Around this same time, there was a natural disaster happening that was affecting the church. We read about in Acts 11:27,

*“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. ” (Acts 11:27–30)*

Well in Acts 12:25, the goods are delivered and notice what happens on the return trip. *“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. ” (Acts 12:25).* So, now Mark is hanging out with Paul and Barnabas and I am sure learning a lot. Then, God decides in Acts 13 that the gospel which has already gone into Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, needs to go out into the rest of the world.

*“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [Now notice that Barnabas is not a teacher, he isn't a prophet, an apostle, or even a leader her] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John [the guy named Mark] to assist them [probably like a steward handling travel, food, transportation, and other mundane, everyday matters]. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ” (Acts 13:1–6)*

Now, things get a little rough starting here and there is all sorts of opposition to the gospel, but eventually they leave the island and notice what happens next: *“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ” (Acts 13:13).* We can only speculate why Mark leaves them here but he leaves them in mid-stream after a brief time with them. Where's he go? He doesn't go back to Antioch—that probably would not have played well. He went back to Jerusalem, may have meet up with Peter who was a mentor in his life and they may have headed somewhere else. All we know is that for about two years, he is off the radar.

But you there are a lot of us who can relate to Mark in this regard. We've had some shaky times in our lives when we stumble and our confidence is gone. His life can encourage us here because he doesn't give up, but eventually he makes a great recovery. As J. Sidlow Baxter reminds us well:

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.

Now fast forward two years. Paul and Barnabas have come back to Antioch and they want to go on a second missionary trip. So far so good until Barnabas says, “And, oh by the way, I've asked Mark to join us as well” and that started a heated exchange between the two. Let's read what happened, “ *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. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus,* ” (Acts 15:38–39).

What happens to Mark after that? Well, again there is silence regarding Mark for the next 10 years or so, but at some point there was reconciliation between Paul and him because when Paul was in Rome (his first imprisonment) he writes that Barnabas is with him and Paul tells the church at Colosse that “if he comes to you, welcome him”(Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). What do you think he is doing for Paul in Rome? I think he is serving him just like on the first missionary journey. He's not a pastor, apostle, or prophet—just a servant!

Now, we fast forward another 10 years or so—we are now almost 25 years out from the first mention of Mark in Acts 12. We are around A. D. 67 or so and Paul is about to be martyred. He is in prison in Rome a second time. He's pretty much by himself (Luke is there) but he needs someone who can assist him and serve him in his final days. And who does he ask Timothy to dispatch? “ *Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.* ” (2 Timothy 4:11). He is a “valued servant who was willingly devoting his energies to serving others. Every time we see Mark he is in the background. He was a true servant to the front-line ministers of the gospel during his earthly life.

The last time we hear about Mark is in 1 Peter 5:13. Peter is in prison. He too is going to die fairly soon. But he still has some time left. He's in Rome and he is writing an inspired letter to other Christians and he “sends his greetings, and so does Mark, my son.” Wow, do you see this. Mark was a servant to Paul and had some pretty close connections there. But he was also a servant to Peter. Peter calls him “his son” which likely means that Peter had led Mark to Christ and it is very obvious that Peter had disciplined this man for some time as well. In fact, Peter is the one who gives Mark most of the first-hand eyewitness reports of what Jesus did and said that end up in Mark's gospel.

You see Mark was not a follower of Jesus Christ while Christ was on this earth. He is never mentioned by name in his own or any other gospel. However, many believe that he appears in his own gospel in a very unflattering way. Look at Mark 14:50-52. Jesus has just been betrayed by Judas and arrested by the Roman guards who were there with the Jewish religious leaders. As soon as they saw

what was happening, “They [his disciples] all left him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.” (Mark 14:50–52). Most Bible teachers think that must have been Mark because no one else would have known about this. Even Peter was running away at this time.

So, that's what we know about Mark the man who wrote this book. Basically, he was a simple believer in Jesus Christ who never had a huge amount of influence in the church but was blessed to be a servant to some of the most influential leaders the church has ever known-- Paul and Peter.

- The **book**
  - **Source**

Now, if Mark wasn't a disciple or maybe not even a Christian when Jesus was alive, then where did he get his information for this gospel. The answer is simple: Peter, who was right there in the thick of this story. A pastor named Papias wrote way back in 120 AD, (and he got it straight from a follower of John, the beloved disciple of Jesus),

“Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For Mark had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them. (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15)<sup>1</sup>

As commentator James Edwards points out:

The salient points of the Papias testimony are that the Second Gospel derives from Mark, who, although not an apostle, was a faithful interpreter of the apostle Peter’s testimony. Papias further testifies that Mark wrote accurately and endeavored to make no false statements; that he wrote fully in setting down all he remembered; but that he did not write in entirely chronological order. <sup>2</sup>

Two other prominent church leaders later confirmed Peter's influence on Mark:

“When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, that those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed [Peter] for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make a record of what was said; and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel among those that asked him <sup>3</sup>--  
Clement of Alexandria

“Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also himself handed on in writing the things

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1 Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament commentary (3–4). Grand Rapids, Mich; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

2 Ibid, (4)

3 Ibid

that had been preached by Peter" (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1).<sup>4</sup>--Irenaeus

This explains why this gospel has such vivid accounts of certain events and why it often shows Peter in his weaker moments but omits some of his more shining moments.

- **Style**

I will only give some quick bullet points as to Mark's writing style. These aren't too hard to see if you just read his gospel thoughtfully.

- Jesus is definitely **the hero of Mark**. There are only two stories in the whole book that don't include Jesus.
- Mark is by far the **briefest and simplest of the gospels**. It is about 3/5 the length of Luke. Although it contains fewer stories than the others, it contains fuller versions often of the stories
- Its language is **simple, unvarnished, and unadorned**. It's simple enough for a child to understand and enjoy yet deep enough for a seasoned believer to explore for months and years. As one man has said, "Like a pool of pure water, it is far deeper than it looks. Therefore one ought to approach the study of this book humbly and with due recognition of the need for wisdom from almighty God and enlightenment from the Holy Spirit."
- **Full of action!**
  - Its pace is brisk and vigorous. It's tempo is *allegro*! It is the "Go" gospel. Mark's favorite word is "immediately" and he uses a lot of "and's" to connect his sentence. You can hardly come up for air. He tells one story after another with very little editorial comment.
  - Use of the historical present
  - Moving toward the goal; and. . . and. . . and. . . so busy sometimes he couldn't even eat (3:20; 6:31). To read the gospel in one sitting is to "feel hemmed in by the crowds, wearied by their demands, besieged by the attacks of demons."; the camera man gospel! On the scene reporting-. . . Mark wants his readers to be participants, not mere observers. He wants them to respond to what he tells them about Jesus by saying of him, "He is the Christ, the Son of God."
  - One thing right after another with little or no editorializing
- **Significant themes**
  - **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**. This is a book with a high view of Christ. A robust defense of the doctrine of Christ in his person

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament commentary (5). Grand Rapids, Mich; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

and his work is clearly behind many of the stories, acts, and teachings of Jesus. (see Jesus in Mark below).

- **Discipleship:** Discipleship is repeatedly defined in Mark by **simple proximity to Jesus: being with** him (3:13), **sitting around** him (3:34; 4:10), **hearing** him (4:1–20), and **following him** “on the way” (1:16–20; 10:52); What Jesus has to teach can only be taught in an **apprentice relationship**, which necessitates the disciples’ being with him even more than their full understanding of him. (**Mark 8:27-38**)
- **Encouraging** believers who are either in or will shortly enter a time of intense crisis as Nero unleashes a furious persecution on the church in Rome. Jesus encounters persecution and ultimately dies. He shows us how to live and die in the face of opposition for the gospel.
- **Evangelistic:** story after story about how people came to faith—some very quickly, others much more deliberately and slowly, and some who refused and rejected the clear teaching of Christ the only way

Well that is how we see Jesus meeting Mark and how Mark's book then goes giving us “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God” (1:1).

### **Jesus in Mark**

So now that we have considered “Mark and Jesus” let's think together and apply the truth of Jesus in Mark. Who does Mark say that Jesus is? Well, look at the first verse.

#### ● **Son of God**

He is “Jesus Christ the Son of God!” Jesus Christ is what the good news is all about. Good news is not about a book to be studied; it is about a message to be proclaimed and a person to believe! It is about a victory that has been procured. The Good News is that God's Son has come into the world and died for our sins. It is the Good News that our sins can be forgiven, that we can belong to the family of God and one day go to live with God in heaven. It is the announcement of victory over sin, death, and hell (1 Cor. 15:1–8, 51–52; Gal. 1:1–9).

#### ● **Son of Man**

But then turn to Mark 10:45, probably the key verse in all of Mark. It really sets the theme of what Christ does in Mark. Here we find Jesus called by another title: “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10:45). This term “Son of Man” appears 14 times in Mark's gospel. It emphasizes that Jesus' humanity-- Jesus' compassion, sighs, hunger, weary, distress, sorrow, notes his sweeping gaze, touch of his hand, warm interest in children, anger and displeasure, apprehension (10:32), ministering to the common man (Hiebert, p. 99). He was the carpenter, withdraws to prayer, to escape his enemies and to refresh his soul (1:35, 45, 3:7; 6:30-32; 7:24; 8:27; 9:2; 11:11,19); humanness of Jesus, including his sorrow (14:34), disappointment (8:12), displeasure (10:14), anger (11:15–17), amazement (6:6),

fatigue (4:38), and even ignorance (13:32). Aaron Copland's classic "Fanfare for the Common Man" could be the signature musical piece for Mark's gospel.

- **Servant**

Notice, Mark 10:45 says this Son of Man came not "to be served but to serve." Mark portrays Jesus as servant!

- **Suffering Savior**

And finally, the Son of Man came. . . "to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus came to die—to suffer, to give us His life as a ransom, a redemption, for many!" He is the suffering Servant, the suffering Savior.

We have already seen Christ predicting this in Mark 8:31. Look also at two other predictions of the Savior:

*"for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." "* (Mark 9:31)

*"saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." "* (Mark 10:33–34)

And just hours before his arrest, trial and crucifixion, he hosted a supper and took some wine, "And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. " (Mark 14:24). The rest of chapter 14 and all of chapter 15 record His suffering for our sins! The suffering predicted of the Servant of Isaiah 53:

*"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. " (Isaiah 53:4–6)*

*"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. " (Isaiah 53:10–11)*

## **Mark, Jesus and You**

- **Christ's story and you?**

So, we have looked at how Mark related to Jesus in his life and how Mark teaches us about Jesus in his gospel message. But this book isn't just about Mark and Jesus or Jesus in Mark. This book was designed to bring change in your life and

in mine. We will explore Christ's story in much more detail in the coming weeks, but where do you see yourself today in relation to Christ's story? In this account, we will see one of three reactions to Christ: immediate belief, confused faith, and hostile resistance. Those reactions continue today.

- **Believe?**

Some believed immediately. Now when we talk about faith, we aren't talking about some magical formula or feeling; we are talking about people hearing the good news that Jesus, the Son God, came to serve sinners and to save them from their sin and from the wrath of God, by taking their sin upon Him and by offering His righteousness to them. Faith then is hearing the word of Christ and following Him in his mission.

Some did this immediately: our unnamed companions to the paralytic (2:5), as are a leper (1:40–42), an unclean, hemorrhaging woman (5:34), a Syrophenician woman (7:24–30), the father of an epileptic son (9:24), a blind man (10:52), a penniless widow (12:41–44), a woman who anoints Jesus at Bethany (14:3–9), and, above all, the centurion at the cross (15:39).

- **Confused?**

Others journey in faith was much more complicated, confused and was a growing process. Certainly this was true of the twelve to whom Christ said,

*“Do you not understand?”* (Mark 4:13)

*“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”* ” (Mark 4:40)

Almost up until the very end of this book, the disciples struggled with a complete trust in God. Their journey in faith had its' twist and turns, though they were truly His believers.

- **Hostile?**

And then some were actually hostile either at some points (like even some of his own family at first –3:21) or the more they heard the more they hated Jesus (like the Pharisees (3:22, 30; 7:5) so that at the end of the day “they were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him” (Mark 14:2), which they did.

Some may be here this day somewhat hostile to the gospel. You are skeptical, wary, or utterly convinced that Jesus is not the Son of God! I invite you to read Mark's gospel. Hear His words, watch His life! See His compassion! Consider His power! See if it is not true that He speaks with authority and He exercises the powers of God Himself.

**What will this gospel about Jesus Christ make of you?**

- Christ's **servanthood** and you?
- Christ's **suffering** and you?

And finally let us meditate right now and in the week to come on Christ's suffering and us! He was and still is Christ in the crises of life. Great power attended Him in crisis and He brings that same power to life today. The study of Mark can bring more and more insight into the power of Christ that rules over all. He indeed suffered, leaving us an example to follow. His suffering is what we celebrate this morning at the Table.

What will Mark make of you this week? Thank God for what we can learn from this author? And praise God for what we can learn from His subject: the gospel of Jesus Christ. And be eager and ready to experience how God will use the gospel of Jesus Christ according to Mark to change your life open! Believe in Christ, Serve like Christ, and suffer if necessary, following Christ's example!