

The Gospel According To Mark

– Introduction

Mark was the son of a well-to-do lady of Jerusalem whose name was Mary and whose house was a rallying point and meeting place of the early Christian Church, [Acts 12:12].

From the very beginning Mark was brought up in the very centre of the Christian Church fellowship.

Mark was also the nephew of Barnabas and when Paul set out on his first missionary journey with Barnabas they took Mark with them to be their secretary and attendant, [Acts 12:25].

When they reached Perga and planned to go inland to the central plateau, for some reason Mark left the expedition and went home to Jerusalem, [Acts 13:13-14].

After this departure Paul refused to allow John Mark to travel with him, calling him a quitter, [Acts 15:37-40].

So serious was the difference between Paul and Barnabas over Mark they split company and as far as we know never worked together again.

For some years Mark vanishes from Church history.

We then hear that when Paul wrote a letter to the Church at Colosse from Rome that Mark was with him, [Colossians 4:10].

In another letter from Paul in prison, Paul lists Mark among his fellow-labourers, [Philemon 24].

Paul also when very near to his execution he wrote to Timothy to commend Mark, [2 Timothy 4:11].

Mark's sources of information –

The value of a person's story will depend on the source of their information.

We have seen that Mark's home was from the beginning a Christian centre of Jerusalem, many times Mark must have heard people tell of their personal memories of Jesus Christ.

Towards the end of the second century there was a man called Papias who liked to obtain and transmit such information as he could about the early days of the Christian Church.

Papias tells us that Mark's gospel is nothing other than a record of the preaching material of the apostle Peter.

Quotation from Papias' writings:-

“Mark, was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said and done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord or a follower of His. He followed Peter [1 Peter 5:13].

“Peter adapted his instruction to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically.

“So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in the way of memory, for his one concern was neither to omit or falsify anything he had heard.”

We may then take it that in Mark's gospel we have what Mark remembered of the preaching material of Peter himself.

We have two great reasons why Mark is a book of supreme importance.

- 1) It is the earliest of all the gospels, [approx. AD65]
- 2) It embodies the record of what Peter preached and taught about Jesus Christ.

Mark is really the nearest to an eye-witness account of the life of Jesus Christ.

Mark tells us the facts of Jesus Christ's life in the simplest and most dramatic way.

Mark never forgot the divine side of Jesus Christ, but at the same time give us a clear picture of the human Jesus Christ.

Mark again and again inserts little vivid details into the narrative which are the hallmark of Peter's personal eye-witness.

Matthew 18:2 [New King James] *"Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,"*

Mark adds to this account making it into a lovely picture of Jesus Christ and children.

Mark 10:16 [New King James] *"And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them."*

All the tenderness of Jesus Christ is shown in this additional description of this event by Mark.

Mark 10:32 [King James] *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him,"*

"... Jesus went before them ..." this one little phrase vividly expresses the loneliness of Jesus Christ as He fulfilled His Father's will.

Mark presents us with a rapid succession of vivid pictures of Jesus Christ in action, His true identity revealed by what He does, not by what He says.

Eighteen miracles are described and only four parables.

Marks favourite adverb is the Greek word "εὐθέως" meaning at once, immediately, straightway, he uses it ten times in the first chapter.

It is a record of Jesus Christ "on the move."

Mark emphasises Jesus Christ's authority, performing His Father's will with authority and power that astonished people, [Mark 1:22, 27-28].

Mark's gospel shows that Jesus Christ tried to keep His identity hidden from the general public until the end of His ministry.

Jesus Christ knew He would be misunderstood.

The Jews were expecting a Messiah to free them from Romans by force.

Jesus Christ silenced the demons who acknowledged Him as God's servant and son, [Mark 1:23-25, 34; Mark 3:11-12].

When Jesus Christ healed people, He asked them to keep quiet about it, [Mark 1:43-45; Mark 5:43; Mark 7:36; Mark 8:26].

Now, as Mark writes his gospel account, Jesus Christ has accomplished His mission, set by God the Father, so there is no need for secrecy.

Mark 1:1 [New King James] *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”*

Mark wastes no time in proclaiming Jesus Christ to be the very Son of God.

Mark 1:11 [New King James] *“Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”*

Mark confirms this by recording the voice from heaven that acknowledged Jesus Christ’s true identity as the Son of God.

Mark 2:5-12 [New King James] *“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, ‘Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins,’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’”*

Mark tells us that Jesus Christ had the authority to forgive sin, a prerogative of God alone.

Mark 1:24 [New King James] *“saying, ‘Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God!’”*

Evil spirits recognised Jesus Christ as the Holy One of God.

Mark 3:11 [New King James] *“And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God.’”*

The Son of God.

Mark 5:7-8 [New King James] *“And he cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.’ For He said to him, ‘Come out of the man, unclean spirit!’”*

The Son of the Most High God.

All the supernatural world acknowledged Jesus Christ’s true identity as the Son of God.

However, Mark also shows that no-one in the human realm fully understood. Even Peter, who had personally been shown Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, [Matthew 16:13-17] failed to realise Jesus Christ’s purpose in life.

Mark 8:31-32 [New King James] *“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.”*

To die and after three days to rise again.

In Mark’s gospel, the first human acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God came from a Roman centurion who sees Jesus Christ die on the cross, [Mark 15:39].

Mark 10:43-45 [New King James] *“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.*

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Mark shows us that Jesus Christ had the mind of a servant. [Greek word translated “servant” is “*dōulōs*” meaning a bond slave with no personal “rights” only responsibilities towards their master.]

Mark does not portray the disciples as “spiritual giants.” Rather, Mark emphasises their lack of understanding.

Even though they forsook everything to follow Jesus Christ, they needed to be reminded about the importance of unselfish service of other human beings, [Mark 9:35].

The original disciples had serious failings, [Acts 4:13], but Jesus Christ loved them and persisted with them.

This should be encouraging to us as we struggle to follow our Lord and Saviour.

Ironically, it is the “minor” characters in Mark who display the trait of unselfish service, giving us a rich legacy to learn from.

Mark 12:41-44 [New King James] *“Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.’”*

The poor widow and her offering.

Mark 14:3-9 [New King James] *“And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.’ And they criticized her sharply. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.’”*

The unnamed woman who used expensive ointment to anoint Jesus Christ ahead of time for His burial.

Mark 15:43-46 [New King James] *“Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marvelled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.”*

Joseph of Arimathea takes courage to approach Pilate for the right to bury Jesus Christ, normally the bodies of “criminals” were dumped and burnt in the local refuse tip.

Mark 16:1-3 [New King James] *“Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’”*

The women who go to anoint Jesus Christ's body at the tomb.

Mark 8:34-38 [New King James] *“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’”*

Jesus Christ told all who would be His disciples must, in order to serve Him and to further the spreading of the gospel message, must do two things.

“Deny their own will” –

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

The Greek word translated “*bodies*” is “*soma*” meaning our whole life, physical body, mind and human spirit, [**Job 32:8; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Proverbs 20:27**].

We do this to show our gratitude for what God has done through His Son Jesus Christ.

“Take up our cross” –

Romans 6:1-6 [New King James] *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”*

We “*crucify*” our old life style and allow the Holy Spirit to re-educate us, [**Romans 12:2**].

This is a great paradox of the gospel message.

By giving up our lives in the service of our Lord, Master and Saviour, we gain eternal life through Him.

As we read and study Mark’s gospel, ask God to show us personally how we can put our trust in Jesus Christ, as our Saviour, and serve Him by serving other human beings, bringing to them the wonderful message of salvation and the gift of eternal life.