

Mark, the Restored Deserter

Scripture: Mark 1:1

Code: 41-1

Well this morning, for the first time in the history of my ministry at this church, we open to the book of Mark. A new era in our church life, and a somewhat monumental experience for me, since 40 years ago when I came it was my objective to teach through the entire New Testament, verse by verse. I have done that in these 40 years and arrived, finally, at the last book, the book of Mark. And with the completion of this book, the whole of the New Testament will have been taught here in our church and what an immense incalculable privilege it has been for me.

I think you are going to enjoy, I think you're going to love, you're going to cherish your experience in the gospel of Mark. Let's open to the first verse and read that verse with the understanding that this is the title of the book, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus wrote no autobiography. It might be a somewhat of a curiosity to note that Jesus never wrote any book. All the books of the Old Testament were written by men, inspired, to be sure, by the Holy Spirit. All the books of the New Testament were written by men, also inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself as a man wrote no book, not even His own history. There is no autobiography. But the Spirit of God selected four men to write histories of the life of Jesus, His work, His death, and His resurrection. They are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Since the Holy Spirit inspired each writer, each of the gospels is without error. It is God-breathed. To borrow the language of Paul, or in Peter's words, 2 Peter 1:20 and 21, no Scripture has come by any human origination, but "holy men were moved by the Spirit of God," and thus they wrote.

So we're not surprised then that though Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote their histories independently of each other at different times and in different places, the four are in perfect harmony because the divine author, the Holy Spirit, superintended each writer. But here you have in these four gospels, as they are called, historical accounts that are perfectly compatible; the story of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God as Mark puts it, from four perspectives. Now, this is Mark's history. And it is unique from the others, and we'll see its uniqueness a little bit this morning, and a lot as we go through.

By the time the gospels were written, there were already other New Testament books in existence. The book of James, from which I read this morning was already in existence. The book of Galatians had already been written by the apostle Paul. They were the two earliest New Testament books and they were written before any of the gospels was written. There certainly is reason for that in one sense. The people needed direction as given in Galatians, so that they could be protected from the false gospel that the Judaizers were preaching. The suffering persecuted believers needed comfort and encouragement, and that's why the book of James was written.

But it wasn't as crucial early on that the gospels were written because eyewitnesses who had been with Christ and seen Christ and heard Christ were still alive. And so there were plenty of folks who could give testimony to the story of Jesus Christ. The last apostle, John, died after 90 A.D. The

gospels then begin to appear about midway through that first century. The first one that was written was Matthew. The next one that was written was Mark. And then came Luke. And about 30 years later, around 90 A.D., the gospel of John.

But before the gospels were written, there were many eyewitness accounts, there were many living eyewitnesses of the life of Christ. And there were some written fragments that Luke refers to in Luke chapter 1 verses 1 and 2. So those written testimonies to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as the verbal story of eyewitnesses, constituted the source of the truth about Christ before the gospels were written. By the middle of the first century, the eyewitnesses begin to die off. And it is really imperative that the record be written down. And so the Holy Spirit selects the men to do that, Matthew, then Mark, then Luke and then John.

After the four gospels were written, no other writings about Jesus Christ were ever accepted by the believers as authoritative and inspired Scripture. It is these four gospels and no more. The universal affirmation of the early church was that these were the true gospels. Yes, later on spurious gospels appeared with false identification, like the gospel of Peter, the gospel of Thomas, etc., etc. They were Gnostic, anti-God, Satanic forgeries intended to confuse people and undermine the truth.

But the universal testimony of the church was that these are the four gospels. They have withstood the scrutiny of scholastic effort through the two thousand years since they were written. Their harmony is magnificent. It is unequivocal. It is true that they had one single divine author because they are in perfect harmony with each other. Somewhere between 50 and 60, Matthew writes. Somewhere around 60, 61, Luke writes. In 90 John writes. And you can slip Mark in there between Matthew and Luke, perhaps in the late 50s.

You would think then that Mark being the second gospel written would be viewed as elevated in its rank. But it always ends up last. And I'm living testimony to that fact. But I started with – with John and then I did Matthew, and then I did Luke, and finally I get around to Mark. Why? Because Mark does not contain the discourses and the theology that the other gospels contain. John is the great Christological masterpiece that presents the person of Christ as evidenced by His claims and His miracles.

Matthew and Luke are replete with discourses in which we get the instruction of Christ. Mark doesn't have those great discourses anywhere near to the degree that the other gospels do. In fact, there are only two chapters in Mark that are really discourse chapters – would be chapter 4 in which Mark gives us the parables of Jesus, and chapter 13 which is Mark's presentation of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus teaching on His Second Coming. Here and there scattered through Mark there are some segments of teaching, of course, but it is primarily an action gospel.

And it is kind of a newspaper edition. It is fast paced, the Word immediately appears over 40 times, it moves, it moves, it moves, it moves. It's an action gospel. In the ancient world, most of the people were illiterate, particularly in the Roman world. And this gospel of Mark was written by Mark in Rome to Roman Christians. So they were, for the most part, illiterate; it, therefore, had to be read to them. It is like a fast-paced story that can be grasped and it can hold your interest when it is read. It does have some charm that is different than the others, as we will see.

But let's get to know the author. If you look at the first verse, you will not find his name. But then

again, no author of any of the four gospels identifies himself as the author. While the story of Matthew's conversion and Matthew's inclusion among the apostles appears in Matthew, Matthew never says he's the author. Luke never appears in his gospel at all, nor does he claim to be the author of it.

John, while appearing in his gospel necessarily because he's an intimate apostle of Christ, never refers to himself as John, but always by some other descriptive, like "the one whom Jesus loved." So we don't have these gospels beginning with a claim to authorship. It is clearly an indication of the fact that these authors wanted to give all the glory to Christ. They wanted the story to be about Him and they hid themselves, as it were, behind the history of the One who should receive the preeminence.

However, we still know unequivocally that Mark wrote this, that Matthew wrote his, that Luke wrote his, and that John wrote his. That is the universal testimony of the early church going all the way back to the first century. But let's meet the author. Since he doesn't appear in Mark and he doesn't appear in Matthew, or Luke or John, we have to find the first place where he shows up and that's in the book of Acts, Acts 12. Let's go to Acts 12, get to know Mark.

Now when you come to the twelfth chapter of Acts, just to give you a little bit of historical settings so you know where we are. You're at a point of very significant transition. The gospels end with the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ brings the story of Christ on earth to an end. The book of Acts then, which picks up the history and is written by Luke, begins with Jesus spending 40 days after His resurrection, teaching His disciples things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, getting them ready to fulfill the commission that comes in chapter 1 verse 8, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, you'll be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth."

So He equips them for world ministry, if you will, by 40 days of teaching things concerning the Kingdom of God. And then the Spirit of God comes. The Spirit comes upon them, empowers them for that ministry and the gospel is launched. In the first twelve chapters, the story is told of the gospel in Judea and Samaria. Starting in chapter 13, it's the gospel in the uttermost part of the earth. In the first twelve chapters, the gospel in Judea and Samaria, the primary preacher, the dominant preacher is Peter.

In the second half, the gospel "to the uttermost part of the earth," the dominant preacher is Paul. So the book of Acts splits into the first half being Peter, the second half being Paul. The first half, Judea/Samaria, the second half the uttermost part of the earth, fulfilling the mandate of chapter 1 of verse 8. So when we come to chapter 12, we are at the end of the ministry of the apostle Peter. Peter has dominated the apostolic preaching of the gospel, and dominated the growth of the church in Judea and Samaria.

And he is about to fade and the apostle Paul is to ascend to the stage or the expansion of the gospel to the uttermost part of the earth. The first half of the book of Acts is closing as we come to verse 1, chapter 12. "Now about that time." What time? Well if you go back, go back to verse 27.

Some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. You always go down from Jerusalem, even if you go north, because Jerusalem is elevated. They went down from Jerusalem and then headed north to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. This took place in the reign of Claudius Caesar

in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

What we learn here is that there is a famine coming, prophesied by the inspiration of God, and there's going to be a need to relieve the distress of the believers in Jerusalem because of the famine. So the church at Antioch, the believers at Antioch, the brethren, disciples at Antioch determined to collect a contribution and to send it to Jerusalem to be distributed to the believers there who would be in the famine. And they did it, verse 30, and they sent it in charge of Barnabas and Saul, or Paul, to the elders of the Jerusalem church.

So that's the time it is. It's the time of famine and the time of the gifting coming from the Antioch church by the hands of Barnabas and Saul to the elders at the church of Jerusalem. At that time, Herod – this would be Herod Agrippa I. He was educated in Rome. He cultivated favor with the Jews. He was a politician's politician. He didn't really like the Jews but he knew it was to his advantage if he was to be wealthy and prosperous and powerful, to court their favor.

So you have that very statement made, verse 3, "When he saw that it pleased the Jews." That's what drove Herod. He was not a Jew, he was an Idumaeon, but he was kind of a petty king in that part of the world. And he prospered much better if he pleased the Jews. And so that's what he did. And knowing what pleased the Jews, verse 1, "He laid hands on some who belong to the church in order to mistreat them." He launches a persecution against the church. The church now is resented. It is hated by the Jews, as you well know.

And so Herod launches a persecution, verse 2. He had James, the brother of John, one of the apostles, put to death with a sword. This is the first apostle martyred. Stephen, not an apostle, has been martyred. This is the first of the apostles to be martyred, none other than James, the brother of John. And when he saw that pleased the Jews. which predominantly refers to the Jewish leaders and all who were under their influence, he proceeded then to arrest Peter. If they liked the death of one apostle, let's kill another one. So he arrests Peter.

It was during the days of unleavened bread, which meant the city was full of pilgrims, seized him, put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him. What does that mean? It simply means twenty-four hours a day each of those squads had a six-hour turn, and so for 24 hours they guarded him. They had him chained as well.

Did they think he could somehow manipulate the chains? No, but they were well aware of his power and influence in the growing church which is numbering in the thousands and thousands and thousands by now, if not the tens of thousands. And they knew that there could be some who would come and release him. And so they put him in the care of soldiers twenty-four hours a day, not just inside a cell, not just chained but guarded, intending to wait till the Passover was over to minimize the trauma to the people and then bring him out and bring about his death.

So Peter was kept in prison, verse 5. But prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. So the church is praying. That's their strategy, not to break into the prison and get him out, but to pray. The very night that Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping. This would be the last time that this could happen because the next day he would be brought out and executed like James was. He's sleeping between two soldiers. How close are they guarding him! They've got him

sleeping between two of them and he is bound with two chains; guards in front of the door watching over the prison.

“And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell, struck Peter’s side, woke him up, said, ‘Get up quickly,’ his chains fell off his hands. The angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself, put on your sandals. Get your inner tunic, get your sash, tie it up, put on your sandals.’ And he did so and he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak, that’s your outer garment, around you and follow me.’ He went out, continued to follow, didn’t know that what was being done by the angel was real but thought he was seeing a vision.”

He had had a vision back in chapter 10. So he knew that – that a vision could happen and he wasn’t sure. I mean, it’s in the middle of the night and he’s not sure exactly what’s going on. “And they passed the first and second guard. They came to the iron gate that leads into the city which opened for them by itself. They went out, went along one street.

Immediately the angel departed from him. The angel took him where he needed to go. Now he’s in the street alone. Came to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for sure the Lord has sent forth His angel, rescued me from the hand of Herod, from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’” So this affirms again that Herod was trying to please the Jews and the Jews were expecting to do away with Peter.

“When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark.” Here’s the first time we meet John Mark. John was a Jewish name, Mark was a Gentile name. Now it doesn’t tell us anything about him. It just says Peter went to the house of Mary. The fact that the house is identified with a woman rather than a man, probably means it’s a widow.

So here’s a widow with a name that just about every other woman in the New Testament gospel account has, Mary. So in order to distinguish this Mary from all the other Marys, it is the Mary who is the mother of John, who is also called Mark. That’s the only reason his name is even mentioned here. At this point, he’s a nondescript guy. He’s only a way to identify his mother. Peter went to this house because no doubt the church met in this house, which meant that Peter had probably many times been to that house. Nobody needed to take him there which meant that Peter knew John Mark and John Mark knew Peter, though John Mark was very young.

The year the best we can discern is 44, 14 years after the death of Christ. Peter’s been powerful preacher of the gospel since the Day of Pentecost for those 14 years, essentially. So he’s well known. And he goes to a familiar place, meets with a dear widow who is the mother of John Mark. People are in her house praying. He knocks on the door, servant girl named Rhoda comes to the door to answer.

She recognizes Peter’s voice and she’s so joyful, she doesn’t even open the gate. She just turns around, ran in, announced, “Peter is standing in front of the gate.” And they said to her, “You are out of your mind.” Great faith, huh? Let’s have a prayer meeting but let’s not believe it could ever happen. She kept insisting, “It is so, it is so.” And they kept saying, “Nah, it’s his angel.” That’s probably sarcasm.

Peter continues knocking. “When they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had let him out of

the prison and he said, 'Report these things to James.'" This is not James the brother of John. He's been martyred. This is James the half-brother of our Lord who is the author of the epistle of James and was the leader of the Jerusalem church. So Peter says, "Tell James" – because he's the leader of the church – "and the brethren. He left and went to another place."

So here, for the first time, we meet John Mark, incidentally. And the first time we meet him, he has a connection to Peter, even if it's a very loose connection. But we know he knows Peter. We know Peter's been to his house because he went there, a familiar place. And that plays out very importantly in the future of his life.

James, as I said, the brother of John, had been already martyred. This James, our Lord's half-brother, was also martyred. Tradition says 62 A.D. they threw him off the pinnacle of the temple and he was smashed on the ground below. And they took clubs and beat any remaining life out of him.

Why do I tell you this story? Because it is the first mention of John Mark. No writer of any gospel gives us his name, so this is where we meet him. And we meet him in connection with Peter. File that in your mind. It tells – tells us nothing about him, character, nothing. We just know his name. Now, let's follow history a little bit. Go to the end of chapter 12. Barnabas and Saul have come from Antioch, right? They've come with a gift to – to bring relief to the Jews, to the believers in Judea, Jerusalem because of the famine. They deliver their relief and then they go back to Antioch.

Remember now, Saul is in the church in Antioch. He's returning with Barnabas. They serve as pastors of the church at Antioch. So they were sent with the gifts. They go back. However, "Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission to bring the gift, taking along with them John who is also called Mark."

Well this is very interesting. They return to Antioch to their responsibility and the only person they take with them is this young man named John Mark. This is a first indication of his usefulness, the first indication of his character. Was he a preacher? No. Was he a pastor? No. An evangelist? No. Was he an apostle? No. Was he a prophet? No. Was he a leader? No. He was none of those things. He is really a nondescript guy.

You say, "Well why out of all the options would they take him?" Colossians 4:10 says that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas, the cousin of Barnabas. So Barnabas knew him, trusted him, knew something about his talents and his gifts and suggested to Paul to – to bring him along because he could help them not only in the journey but he could help them in the ministry in Antioch. And, by the way, Barnabas was a Levite, and if you were a Levite, you served the priests in the temple. All the way through Jewish history, those from Levi who made up the Levites, served in the temple and assisted the priests. Barnabas was a Levite.

If this man is his cousin, then perhaps he too was in the Levitical family descent. Therefore, he had perhaps served in the temple, was used to serving, had experience in temple service and temple worship, and had the attitude of one who serves. John Mark then goes back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. He remained there. He stayed there. He was faithful there until Paul and Barnabas were ready to leave.

You remember the story. Look at chapter 13 verse 1. "Now there were in Antioch in the church that

was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul.” Please notice Mark’s name isn’t there, he wasn’t a pastor, he wasn’t a teacher. And they were ministering to the Lord and they were fasting and the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart from me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I’ve called them. They fasted and prayed. Laid hands on them. Sent them away.” That’s the first missionary journey.

Now Paul and Barnabas go on the first missionary journey to the world. They go down to Seleucia, verse 4, sail to Cyprus. “When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews and they also had” – guess who? – “John Mark as their” – What? – “helper.” That’s the operative word to understand this man. He is a helper.

He had proven to be helpful to them in the time that they had used him in Antioch. I don’t know – we don’t know exactly how much time had gone on, but he had proved to be so helpful to them there that they decided to take him with them on the first missionary journey. That, by the way, friends, is the only description of him that tells us anything about the kind of ministry that he had. He was a helper. So they took him along. It wasn’t easy. Tough ministry.

They ran into Elymas, the magician in verse 8, who was opposing them. It was tough. He was identified as one full of deceit, son of the devil, verse 10, “enemy of righteousness.” And there was a miraculous handling of him in verse 11. So, right from the very beginning, it was tough going, tough travel and opposition. Come down to verse 13. “Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos. Came to Perga in Pamphylia. John left them, returned to Jerusalem.”

This is a sad moment. A deserter, he left them. He disappeared. He disappears from the New Testament record, by the way, for a few years. He left. And he didn’t go back to Antioch. That wouldn’t sit well with the Antiochian church had sent him out trusting he would serve the two preachers. So he went to Jerusalem. He disappears for a few years. The next time he’s on the scene is in chapter 15. Turn to chapter 15 verse 36. A few years have passed. John Mark hasn’t been an issue because he’s not around. But Paul has not forgotten his defection, his desertion, his cowardiceness – his cowardice, I should say, his weakness.

They have a conversation in verse 36. They have come back from the first journey. They’ve given the full report of what God did on their first missionary journey. Time has gone by. Paul finally says to Barnabas after some time has passed, “Let’s return, visit the brethren in every city.” Let’s go on the second missionary journey, go back to the places where we founded the church, planted the church, proclaimed the Word of the Lord and see how they are doing.

Barnabas wanted to take John called Mark along with them also. But Paul kept insisting, which means Barnabas kept insisting. They both kept insisting. “Barnabas said I want to take John Mark. I want to take John Mark. Paul kept insisting I’m not taking John Mark. I am not taking John Mark. He insisted that “they should not take him along who had” – and here’s the operative word – “deserted.” That’s the only way to define what had happened.

There’s no reason given for his leaving in chapter 13. There’s no rhyme or reason for it in that context, but here we learn he was a deserter. He deserted them in Pamphylia and hadn’t gone with them to the work. The discussion got so heated, it became what verse 39 calls “a sharp disagreement,” so sharp that not only did John Mark’s cowardice cause him to have a relationship

severed with Paul, but it caused Paul to have a severed relationship with his companion Barnabas.

So Barnabas took Mark with him and went on a trip to Cyprus where he was from, to – to proclaim the gospel there. Paul chose Silas to take Barnabas' place and "traveled through" – verse 41 says – "Syria and Seleucia, strengthening the churches." Paul's refusal to take John Mark was legitimate. He didn't trust him. He had showed he lacked courage, strength, commitment. He was a defector. He was a deserter. Barnabas, by the way, takes John Mark and Barnabas disappears for two years in the history. We don't know where he is for two years. John Mark disappears for ten years, ten years.

Ten years later he shows up again. Turn to Colossians 4. His name shows up in a letter written from Paul to the church at Colossae. By the way, Paul is in Rome when he writes this letter. When he was in Rome the first time as a prisoner – and he had two imprisonments. The first time and then he was released, and then he had ministry and then he was imprisoned again in Rome a second time and he was martyred. This is the first imprisonment. He is in his first imprisonment in Rome and he writes three letters; Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Chapter 4 verse 10, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner." He's a prisoner in Rome. From prison he writes these letters, including this one. "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner" – another believer in prison – "sends you his greeting and also Barnabas' cousin Mark," Wow! Ten years later Paul's a prisoner in Rome and guess who's his companion? The defector, Mark. "about whom you received instruction, if he comes to you, welcome him." Something dramatic has taken place. Something dramatic. In his letter to Philemon, verse 23, at the end of that letter, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you as do Mark and Luke," and some others.

Here we are ten years later. Paul is in Rome. Mark is in Rome with Paul again. And Paul says, "I'm sending Mark on my behalf. When he gets there, welcome him." He's back in the good graces of Paul. How long did that relationship last? Turn to 2 Timothy. Second Timothy, Paul wrote from his second imprisonment some years later. It's – it's his last letter, 66, 67 A.D. Twenty-two, twenty-three years since the incident of Peter's release from prison.

This is the end for him. He says, "I'm ready to be offered. Time of my departure is at hand." He's going to have his head chopped off, and he did. But he has this last letter to Timothy. Verse 9, says to Timothy, "Make every effort to come to me soon. Come, I want your fellowship, Timothy." Why? "Demas, having loved this present world has deserted me." He had another deserter, Demas. Gone to Thessalonica; Crescens, he's gone to Galatia; Titus, he's gone to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Then he tells Timothy, do this, "Pick up" – Whom? – "Mark, bring him with you for he is useful to me for ministry."

From the time of his first imprisonment, he had Mark at his side. A few years later in his second imprisonment on the brink of his death, he wanted Mark with him. So I say to you, this is the story of the restored deserter. What kind of privilege is that, folks? What kind of privilege is that? For a guy who's not an apostle, not a prophet, not a pastor, not a teacher, not an evangelist, not a leader, just a helper, to be given the privilege of serving alongside the apostle Paul, defecting from that privilege and being restored years later to become so intimately associated with Paul, so loved by Paul, so trusted by Paul that Paul would send him to the Colossian church on his own behalf. And that when Paul is facing death at the end of his life, the one person he asks to come in addition to Timothy is bring Mark.

You're not surprised by that, are you? That the Lord would use people like that? Those are the only kind of people there are, recovering sinners, restored deserters, recovered defectors. Now, that part of the story is interesting, isn't it? His relationship to Paul is monumental. Can't imagine a simple, humble helper being an intimate friend and companion of the great apostle Paul. But his relationship to another apostle is far more significant. That other apostle is Peter. Certainly it would be the privilege of all privileges for a failure, defector, deserter, rejected by Paul to be restored in grace to become the helper and friend of that marvelous man. How could he expect that kind of honor?

But he had even more than that. He became the companion and confidant of Peter. If Paul was the greatest apostle in terms of the volume of things that he wrote. Peter was Christ's most intimate friend. What kind of privilege would it be to spend years alongside Paul and years alongside Peter? Did he know Peter? Sure he knew Peter. Peter had come to his house many times in the years of the early church. Had he heard Peter preach? Absolutely he heard Peter preach.

But it wasn't the early acquaintance with Peter that was so significant, it was the later acquaintance with Peter. Remember those ten years when John Mark disappears? Part of the time he was with Peter. You remember when he left, he went back to Jerusalem? He didn't stay in Jerusalem. Peter took him somewhere. Turn to 1 Peter chapter 5 and I'll tell you where. First Peter chapter 5, Peter writes his letter that we know as 1 Peter, his first general epistle, and he is in Rome when he wrote this letter, Peter is. He is in Rome.

He is writing in Rome to the Roman believers and others beyond. He makes reference to Rome in chapter 5 verse 13. "She" – meaning the church – "who is in Babylon." That's a code word for Rome. And the reason he uses a code word is because persecution has begun to break out, severe deadly persecution. And so in a cryptic way he substitutes Babylon for Rome so as not to exacerbate the persecution. "She" – the church – "chosen together with you who is in Babylon," – or Rome – "sends you greetings." The greetings extend from the church in Rome to the other churches that will read the letter. "And so does my son, Mark." My son, Mark?

Oh, not his physical son, but his spiritual son. No doubt Mark had come to Christ listening to Peter preach way back when he was young. No doubt Peter was the first great impactful spiritual influence on his young life. Peter was responsible for his conversion. There is consistent historical testimony that goes all the way back to the first century that after Paul left his first imprisonment in Rome, after he had been there with Mark, after he had written Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, he left Rome, was let out of prison, came back at a later time.

But in the middle period of time, Peter went to Rome. Peter went to Rome. The consistent historical testimony is that Peter spent at least a year there, maybe more than a year. and he was in Rome and he was preaching constantly the gospel day after day after day after day. He died in Rome as a martyr in the summer or the autumn of the year 64 A.D., right at the time Nero burned the city and blamed the Christians and launched the persecution. And while Peter was there, he sends greetings and he says, "So does my son, Mark." Mark was with Peter in Rome.

Can you imagine being the companion of the apostle Paul? That would – that would be enough. But then to be the companion of Peter? And he was, just an astonishing privilege. He wrote it from Rome. And he was in Rome with Peter. You say, "Why is that important? Why does that matter?"

Because Mark's gospel is the product of Peter's eyewitness testimony. The source for Mark from a human viewpoint is Peter.

His gospel is based on Peter's eyewitness accounts of the life of the Lord Jesus, which Peter rehearsed day after day after day after day, as he went out into the streets and the buildings of Rome and preached the gospel with Mark at his side. And, believe me, Mark had heard it before that, going all the way back to his childhood.

This is Peter's account through John Mark, not an apostle, not a prophet, not a pastor, not a leader, not a teacher, just a helper. He is given this immense incredible privilege of writing what he calls the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who controlled all the information that had come to him through Peter, he wrote this gospel.

Matthew, a former tax collector; Luke, a Gentile; John, a brash son of thunder, and Mark, a defector. And you ask, "Why did the Lord choose those people?" Because those are the only kind of people there are. Sinful, unqualified people, forgiven sinners to choose from. You say, "But are we sure John Mark is the author since his name isn't in the gospel?" Universal church testimony going back to the first century, at the top of each gospel on the original manuscript it says Kata Mattaion, Kata Markon, Kata Lotkan, Kata Johannen; according to Matthew, according to Mark, according to Luke, according to John. The title "according to" goes way back before the early church fathers. It was unequivocally affirmed, never disputed, never debated.

And the ancient writers actually say that Mark wrote from material he heard from Peter. In fact, the testimony goes on. It's wonderful testimony. Somebody like Polycarp – Polycarp, one of the early church fathers who knew John, had a student by the name of Papias who wrote, "Mark, who was an interpreter of Peter, wrote with exactness." You have Justin, lives from 100 to 150, in his famous Dialogue with Trypho, speaks of the memoirs of Peter being the gospel of Mark. He says Mark wrote in Rome after Peter's death. You have Irenaeus around 200, you have Origen around 230, Clement, the year 300, Eusebius, 362, they all say the same thing.

Here's a quote from Eusebius, "So great a light of religion shone upon the minds of the hearers of Peter that they were not satisfied with a single hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine proclamation, but with all kinds of entreaties urged Mark, whose gospel is extant, seeing that he was a follower of Peter to leave them in writing a record of the teaching transmitted to them orally. Nor did they cease until they had prevailed upon the man and so they became responsible humanly for the Scripture that is called The Gospel According to Mark."

They prevailed upon Mark to write it down. This is the true authentic work of John Mark, inspired by the Holy Spirit, protected, controlled to be inerrant revelation concerning the life, ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's only the beginning of the story, only the beginning, and that's how it starts, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The ending hasn't been written yet. This is just the very, very beginning. And, in fact, it ends in a very strange way.

The legitimate ending is in chapter 16 verse 8. That's where it really stops. And to show you how much a beginning without an end it is, here is the last verse of Mark. Just listen. "They went out, fled from the tomb for trembling and astonishment had gripped them, they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid." End. In fact, that is such a strange ending that a false ending was added later, which

you'll see in brackets in your Bible. It doesn't appear in the early manuscripts. But that's so consistent with Mark.

This is the beginning, this is not the end, the story has no end. If you want the rest of the story, go to the book of Acts. It was written from Rome to Roman Christians. It is the memoirs of Peter. We know it was written to Gentiles because of its Gentile character. Jewish material is always explained because the Gentiles didn't understand it. We'll see that as we go through. There is no genealogy because Gentiles didn't care about a Jewish genealogy. There are Latinisms all through Mark because the Romans spoke Latin.

Whenever there's an Aramaic term, it is explained because they wouldn't know it, they don't speak Aramaic. When they refer to time, chapter 6 verse 48, chapter 13 verse 35, it's Roman time. The style of Mark is fast paced like a sprint; no introduction, no conclusion. It's just the beginning. The content focuses on action, very few teaching sections. Chapter 4, chapter 13, a few teaching spots scattered around here and there, but mostly it's action intended to be read aloud, experienced by the hearers.

The theme is Jesus Christ the Son of God. The structure, real simple. There's a midpoint in the book. Sixteen chapters, go to the middle, chapter 8 verse 29 and right in the middle of the book you hear this confession from Peter, "You are the Christ." That is the pinnacle confession of the book. Everything in the front leads up to it. Everything in the back goes from it. The front half proves Jesus is the Christ by His deeds and words. The second half proves Jesus is the Christ by His death and resurrection. But everything moves to that pinnacle that He is the Christ. The goal of the book is for you to confess that Jesus is the Christ.

It has the same objective as John, who writes in John 20:31, "These things are written that you may believe and believing have life in His name." It's an evangelistic book. The first half is filled with confusion, the people are confused. In fact, the only people who aren't confused about Jesus in the first half of Mark are the demons. In the second half, it's not confusion, it's hostility. But the pinnacle is the confession of Peter. And isn't it what you'd expect from one who was a disciple of Peter, one who drew his gospel from Peter.

He would make Peter's confession which Peter must have given every day that he was with Mark when he preached. He must have said, "I believe He is the Christ, I'll tell you the story. One day we were here and Jesus said, 'Who do men say I am?' And we said, 'You're Jeremiah one of the prophets.' And then all of a sudden out of nowhere, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' That's what I said, that's what I believe." That's the pinnacle of Peter's testimony and that's the pinnacle of the gospel of Mark. And it's to bring all of us to that conviction.

What a privilege for this helper, the most unlikely of people. In fact, if I redo Twelve Ordinary Men, I'll change it to Thirteen Ordinary Men, throw Mark in there as an Appendix, a very ordinary man. And God gave him privilege beyond calculation to be an intimate companion of Paul, an intimate companion of Peter, helping both of them. But beyond that, giving him the privilege to write one of four inspired gospels. Don't underestimate what God is able to do with helpers.

Father, we thank You for this wonderful testimony to Your grace that's bound up in the heart of this man in his life. We're – we're thrilled to be his students now, as we embark upon the story as he told

it and as You directed him. We're just so blessed, Lord, so blessed to have another opportunity to look at the life of Christ, to be caught up in the glory of His person, His work, His words, His ways, to walk with Him through the world, to see His life from another angle. What a privilege.

Christ is all and all to us, He is everything to us. He is our life. We thank You that we see in this juxtaposition between the all-glorious Christ and Mark, a distinction that is part of our own lives. Here is a gospel written about the sinless Son of God by a sinful man, written about the almighty courageous strong Son of God by a cowardly, weak man. Here is the story of a sinless one written by a sinner. Here is the story of perfect righteousness written by a man in desperate need of grace.

Lord, we thank You that you use people like us 'cause that's all there are, just sinful people. Thank You for such mighty grace. Thank You that through history You have used helpers in such amazing ways.

It's a privilege for us, Lord, to be the beneficiaries of this great work that You did through this remarkable man. We know nothing about him. We know the name of his mother and that he was a helper, a recovered sinner who was found useful. That's all we need to know. That's what we desire. Restore us, forgive us, make us useful we pray. In Your Son's name. Amen.

END

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