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### FEEL LIKE GIVING UP?

John Mark, the author of this book, once turned back for home out of fear. Yet his later life also shows us that even though we may sometimes shrink away from Jesus' mission, He will never give up on us. Christ's path is one of suffering, but also glory – yet to come.

## SUFFERING. SERVANT. SAVIOR.

### **Sermon on the Move**

The Gospel of Mark may be likened to a Twitter feed: brief, concise, and driven straight to-the-point. The vignettes and explanations are fast-paced snapshots tied together by one of Mark's favorite words, "immediately" (εὐθὺς).<sup>1</sup>

While Luke and John provided long discourses, Mark wrote to get the bottom-line across as rapidly as possible – one action scene to the next.

Matthew recorded Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, but Mark – under the direction of the Holy Spirit – compiled a *Sermon on the Move*: the journey from introducing Christ's public ministry at His baptism (1:1-15), His preaching and healing across Galilee (1:16-9:50), and Jesus' steps toward the cross in Jerusalem and His victorious resurrection (10:1-16:8).

### **Author**

Virtually without dispute, John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and protégé of Peter, was the writer. John was his Hebrew name and Mark, his Greek name. Early church fathers all confirm this Mark was the author; most notably Papias in A.D. 130, but also Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine.<sup>2</sup> None of the gospel writers personally labeled their work, probably because they believed their writings were *by* the Spirit and *for* the Church, not to be owned or attributed to any one person.

John Mark was from a prominent, wealthy family.<sup>3</sup> His mother housed the early Jerusalem church during Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12:12). Peter led him to faith in Christ (cf. "my son" in 1 Pet. 5:13). He later accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary

journey but ran home mid-trip when the path became difficult (Acts 13:13; 15:38). In his youth, Mark wavered in his commitment and faith. He was likely the "young man who fled away naked" on the night of Christ's arrest (Mark 14:51-52). But through the process of exhortation from Paul, encouragement from Barnabas, and discipleship by Peter, he matured into a man who understood that following Jesus is a path of hardship, persecution, and even poverty before glory.

### **Central Theme**

Writing originally to believers across Rome during the tyrannical reign of Nero, Mark's point was direct: Just as Christ was the Suffering-Servant to save us by way of the cross, so all who follow Christ must take His path of suffering-servanthood by carrying their cross until the glory to come (Mark 8:34-38). Follow Jesus to the end.

## HAPHAZARD HICCUPS OR HEROES?

Mark vividly portrays the disciples as faulty, self-centered, ignorant, skeptical, petulant, fearful, and weak in faith. As one who worked alongside Simon Peter (as his interpreter and spiritual son), it's clear these men modeled humility and transparency to the young man, John Mark. He, too, struggled with fear, indecision, and discouragement. But if they could faithfully follow Christ under pressure, so the believers across Rome could also – even amid the heat of Nero's furnace of persecution.

*And so can we by the grace and power of God...*

## Date & Historical Setting

Mark's focus on strengthening the faith and commitment of his readers, coupled with the time of his ministry points to his account being penned between A.D. 64-69 during the rule of Nero.<sup>4</sup> After the great fire of Rome, this Caesar placed the blame on the Christians and led intense persecution, likely ordering the deaths of Paul and Peter. The ancient Roman historian, Tacitus gives us a glimpse of what Jesus-followers endured:

"Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called "Chrestians" by the populace. . . an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."<sup>5</sup>

Amid such desperate circumstances, Mark wrote to embolden believers across Rome and unveiled the true cost of following Jesus, but also the hope of glory to come.

## Original Audience

Mark's account of Christ is focused on the gentile Christians in Rome, far to the west of Judea and Galilee. How do we know this? Here are several indicators: (1) He goes out of his way to explain Jewish customs, (2) He translates Aramaic expressions for the reader, (3) He uses few Old Testament prophetic quotations, and (4) He utilizes "Latinisms," i.e. terms commonly used in the Roman Empire (i.e. "legion" cf. 5:9, 15). He is clearly aiming toward predominantly gentile Christians in western Roman culture. Lastly, Mark points toward the pressures of persecution and the possibility of dying for Christ more than the other gospel writers – demonstrating his readers were concentrated in a region where these issues were a daily reality. (cf. 8:27-38; 10:28-31; 13:9-13).

## Q: How About You?

We, as Americans, are far richer and more comfortable than 90% of the world. It's so easy for us to back away from the pain, difficulty, and challenges of following the Way of Jesus. As persecution rises in our culture, how are you tempted to respond? Fear? Anger? Silence? Compromise?

**Remember:** Disciples of Jesus are called to be faithful to the One who remains faithful to them.



The Roman Forum | The ancient epicenter of governmental, monetary, and religious activity. Early Christians who received Mark's Gospel were very familiar with this region of earthly power.

## Purpose: Bottom-Line

Mark wrote so we'd grip onto the good news of Jesus – the Suffering-Servant-Savior – and so *believe* in Him, *follow* Him to the cross, and *go* boldly with Him to proclaim He is alive!

## Overview Outline

- I. Introducing Jesus: The Good News! (1:1-13)  
*What is the gospel?*
- II. Jesus selects His disciples in Galilee (1:14-3:35)  
*Who will you follow?*
- III. Jesus tests His disciples in Galilee and Beyond (4:1-8:26)  
*Where is your faith?*
- IV. Jesus prepares His disciples for Jerusalem (8:27-10:52)  
*Who is Jesus to you?*
- V. Jesus challenges the Pharisees in Jerusalem (11:1-13:37)  
*Who is in charge?*
- VI. Jesus journeys to the Cross (14:1-15:47)  
*What love is this?*
- VII. Jesus rises from the dead: He's Alive! (16:1-8)  
*Will you go and tell?*

"Surprised that God would use people like John Mark? That's the only kind of people there are. . . we are all restored defectors, deserters, redeemed fugitives and failures."

– John MacArthur

## NOTES FOR TODAY:

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## Dig Deeper

<sup>1</sup> Carson, D.A., and Douglas J. Moo. An Introduction to the New Testament. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005: 169.

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, Grant R. "Mark" in *Teach the Text Commentary Series*. (Grand Rapids: Baker: 2014), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Barbieri, Louis, "Mark" in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 1515.

<sup>4</sup> Swindoll, Charles R., "Mark" in *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Series Vol. 2*, (Carol Stream, IL: 2016), 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Tacitus* 15:44, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (London: MacMillan, 1921), 304-305.

**Believe. Follow. Proclaim.**