

# Who Was Mark?

## WWJ: Message Four (000213PM)

We are in our 4<sup>th</sup> stop on this year-long time of WALKING WITH JESUS, Through the eyes of Peter, from the pen of Mark, and under the flawless breath of God's Spirit the words of the Gospel by Mark lay before us.

First, **MARK'S GOSPEL IS EXCITING**. Why? Because it is the apostle Peter recounting the greatest story ever told. If you will let him, Mark will let you see, feel and experience what it was like to walk around Israel watching God in a body, right here on earth. This gospel is Peter's dramatic, vivid, full of color action packed video that takes us on an eye witness journey with none other than the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ.

How do we know this is Peter's Gospel? From Church History we find the very earliest statement about the Gospel by Mark. This reference was written by Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, about A.D. 140. Here is what he said:

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 he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, he followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so 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.

In a gospel written from Peter's words to the fast paced Roman Empire, Jesus is constantly in action! Mark, perhaps the first gospel account written, opens with: The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." God Himself ratifies the declaration in 1:11: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

The Gospels record Christ's ministry to the four groups of people then and now in the world.

- ✓ The Jews who loved the Scriptures and the prophecies of God, would only listen to one of their own. So **MATTHEW** speaks to the deeply religious Jews AND THE DEEPLY RELIGIOUS OF OUR DAY.
- ✓ **MARK** spoke to the Romans. These were the leaders and leadership and action impressed them. They knew nothing of Scriptures but everything of power. So to this group comes the action packed Gospel of the powerful ministry of Christ. Mark uses the word "and" 1,375 times to tie together the endless actions of Christ. LIKE OUR MODERN SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN AND WOMAN, THEY WANT A GOD WHO CAN POWERFULLY MEET THEIR DEEPEST NEEDS.
- ✓ **LUKE** was a Greek speaking to the Greeks. The Greeks loved culture, beauty and ideas. Happiness could be found in the pursuit of truth. Luke fills his book

with insights, interviews, songs and details that fascinate the inquiring mind.  
SO TODAY THE TRUTH SEEKERS FIND JESUS IN LUKE!

- ✓ John wrote to everyone, because everyone needs to meet God and only Jesus can reveal Him. In this book we meet an absolutely powerful God in human flesh who controls and rules the Universe He created. So the best known verse is the best of all offer that God loves all and offers all -- His Son as their only hope!

Mark uses a simple three-part outline:

1. The Birth and Preparation of Servant Jesus 1:1 - 13;
2. Servant Jesus Speaks and Serves 1:14 - 13:37;
3. Servant Jesus Suffers and Triumphs in Passion Week 14:1 - 16:20.

So to meet the eyes that saw all the exciting scenes in the Gospel by Mark, turn with me to II Peter 1:12-21. This is the testimony of Peter who was the source Mark used as he wrote. AS we stand and read this, listen to the confidence and joy of Peter as he looks back on those greatest days on earth he ever lived!

So **MARK'S GOSPEL IS EXCITING** and secondly, **MARK'S GOSPEL IS ENCOURAGING**. As Mark sat to capture the words of Peter, inspired by God' Spirit the start of over 600 miles of catacombs under the city of Rome had been started by Christians facing persecution.

The world that Mark served the Lord in was a terrible time in history. One of the most memorable pages of the History of Christ's Church are the 0 years from AD 60 and 70. For half those years the hatred and evils of Nero had led to the random acts of fierce persecution upon Christians. Across the city of Rome believers were killed from the arenas to the prisons. For his evening dinner guests Nero would have the followers of Jesus dipped in tar and burned alive in sticks as torches in Nero's gardens. For the delight of the masses in the games, Christians were wrapped in animal skins and chased to death by wild beasts.

Have you pondered how hard it must have been to be a Christian in those ten years? Yet in that dangerous time to even be a believer, Mark boldly wrote to the Romans of Jesus, the Servant Savior. And he did so seated next to Pater who had become the "Most Wanted" man of the day. Mark demonstrated the holy boldness Christ can bring into the lives of His children.

Ten generations of Christians, starting with Mark's generation, built and inhabited the Catacombs over a period of 300 years. In the early centuries of the church, the catacombs served as meeting and burial places for perhaps as many as four million Christians. A common inscription found on walls there is "The Word of God is not bound." This hope shared by all believers was captured in the famous hymn "A Mighty

Fortress Is Our God,” as Martin Luther declared, “The body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still.”

Mark writes a biography of encouragement to those living through the Roman persecutions and beyond. He weaves together Peter's eyewitness accounts, and the Holy Spirit's revelations into a fabric that portrays Jesus as the One who has suffered and triumphed for us. So we who are His can suffer and triumph through Him.

**MARK'S GOSPEL IS EXCITING, ENCOURAGING** and finally, **MARK'S GOSPEL IS CHALLENGING**. Why? Because this study will teach us what it meant to Peter and the other Apostles to be WALKING WITH JESUS. I say this because the Gospel by Mark is probably the *oldest* of the Gospels. It is so powerful that we find Matthew and Luke making such great use of it in writing their own Gospel accounts. In fact if you study closely you will find that between them they reproduced all but a few verses of Mark's! Thus we start with what is for the New Testament Church, the very first systematic account of the life, deeds, and words of Jesus.

Remember how Mark lets us see Jesus through the eyes of those who brushed against His robes, looked into His penetrating gaze and reacted. Look at a few of these on the scene eye witness reports of what it was like to be around Jesus.

Mark 1:22 And **they were astonished** at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Mark 1:27 Then **they were all amazed**, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”

Mark 4:41 And **they feared exceedingly**, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

Mark 6:51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And **they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled**.

As we start such a life changing journey, we need to ask ourselves, how is this in-depth study of the Gospel of Mark going to impact you and me?

First we see that **God is in the business of using ordinary people**. The Gospel by Mark is the book of God's Word written as the Holy Spirit inspired John Mark. According to Colossians 4:10, he was Barnabas' young cousin. He evidently came from a well-to-do family in Jerusalem and had been privy to the great goings-on in the Holy City.

Secondly, we see **God even uses those we might call failures**. Virtually everyone agrees that the author was John Mark, a young man who had a shaky beginning in the ministry when he abandoned Paul on the apostle's first missionary trip and decided to return home (Acts 13:13). So, before Mark wrote this Gospel he was a drop out from ministry. Paul was so unhappy with Mark that he refused to take him on the second journey, thus beginning a bitter quarrel between Paul and Barnabas which ended with Paul and Silas going one way and Barnabas and Mark another (Acts 15:36–41). Although intimate details are lacking, Paul and John Mark later reconciled when Paul was in prison in Rome.

Next, we see how greatly **God can use a young person in ministry**. When the Apostle Peter was writing 1 Peter in Rome, he affectionately called Mark his son (1 Peter 5:13). It was Mark's close relationship with Peter which motivated and enabled him to write an intimate portrait of Christ. How Mark had changed from that 1<sup>st</sup> missionary trip with Paul. Back then he was probably enamored with the romance of the venture. In his mind he saw himself accompanying Barnabas and Paul as they conquered the world. He probably expected to see the miracle of the Antioch church duplicated elsewhere. There was also the appeal of a cruise to far off places, sights and experiences. But once on the missionary journey, reality quickly set in. They all became tired, even exhausted. The accommodations were not always the best, and soon the romance was gone. Mark began to wonder why he had come on this trip. And soon bails out. All of that is recorded in Acts 15:37-40. So again God shows He is the God of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chance, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and on and on. His mercy endures forever.

Because of the urgency of the times in which he lived and wrote, Mark dispenses with confusing Jewish genealogies and birth reports. Instead he gets right into the action of Christ's life and keeps it going at a rapid pace to the end. If we could survey<sup>1</sup> Mark we could say:

***Jesus is seen quite easily in the Gospel by Mark.*** Even a slow reader needs only about two hours to read Mark. And if you do so at a single sitting, soon you would feel surrounded by the crush of crowds, wearied by the constant demands of ministry, and besieged by the relentless attacks of Satan and his demons.

***Jesus is seen transparently in the Gospel by Mark.*** In the pages of this book we are treated to Jesus weary, Jesus grieved, Jesus sorrowing; in other words we are repeatedly brought face to face with the human emotions of Jesus. And we are witnesses to the astonishment of the multitudes.

***Jesus is seen constantly in action in the Gospel by Mark.*** By Mark's use of the historical present tense at least 150 times in this book we see Jesus always in action. It is: Jesus *comes*, Jesus *says*, and Jesus *heals*—all of these are in the present tense.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from R. Kent Hughes.

***Jesus is seen constantly using divine power in the Gospel by Mark.*** If you look closely you will find that there are more miracles recorded in Mark than in the other Gospels, despite its being far shorter. The style Mark uses is a vivid “Eyewitness News Reporter Format”. Mark moves along with a vivid and fast-moving story of Jesus the Powerful Servant.

- ✓ In fact, Mark uses the Greek word for “immediately” some forty-two times, while Matthew only has seven occurrences and Luke just one.
- ✓ Mark uses the conjunction “and” in an unusually frequent manner. He starts 12 of his 16 chapters with “and” which only adds to the rush of action.
- ✓ Mark chronicles Christ’s life as what we would call super busy. Jesus is recorded as even having trouble finding time to eat in 3:20 and 6:31.

One final thought about Mark. Remember the Book of Acts tells us he was a quitter, a drop out. He was not useful at one time in ministry. But have you thought about how gracious our God is? Every time we read this book we are experiencing the result of God’s transforming grace. History records the path of Mark. Mark the failed follower of Christ, becomes Mark the forgiven follower, becomes Mark the devoted disciple, becomes the man who writes what may be called the premier biography of Jesus Christ, and finally becomes Mark the honored martyr.

Mark’s Book should remind us of Mark’s God who can encourage all of us to keep going. Listen to the poet who said:

*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.*

In one way or another, all of us too have stumbled. And for each of us, John Mark’s triumph by God’s grace is an incredible source of encouragement.

If we were to sum up the entire Gospel by Mark in a verse it would be

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

So we could answer<sup>2</sup> our initial question with this verse. What will walking with Jesus teach us?

It will challenge us to be servants like the Master.

It will instruct us how to be effective servants of *action*.

It will remind us that God is all we need in any crisis!

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the opening comments of Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

It will demonstrate that Jesus lived in God's power.

It will lead us to the same powerful Christ.

And by His grace, we can walk in His power as good and faithful servants.

So where do we start? Tonight we start with the attitude of a good servant of Jesus Christ.