

**“THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL”**

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Mark 1:1-3

**Intro:** We all know that there are four records of the life, teachings, and works of our Lord Jesus Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Gospel of Mark is the shortest, and, in comparison with the other Gospels, places more emphasis upon the works of the Lord rather than on the words of our Lord.

We first meet John Mark in Acts 12:12. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), but he left them when they got to Perga in Pamphilia (Acts 13:13), and returned to Jerusalem. When Paul and Barnabas prepared for their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them again, but Paul refused. And so Paul and Barnabas parted company, Barnabas taking Mark with him to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas with him. See Acts 15:37-39. Later on John Mark seems to have had a close relationship with the Apostle Peter. Peter referred to him in 1 Peter 5:13 as “my son,” probably meaning his spiritual son, like Timothy was to Paul. When Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, he mentioned “Marcus,” or John Mark approvingly, indicating that John Mark evidently was related to Barnabas, probably as a cousin. When Paul wrote his last epistle to Timothy, he sent for Timothy to come to Rome to be with him, and asked him also to bring John Mark with him, saying, “For he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). So John Mark has a close relationship with both Peter and Paul, but it seems that his relationship with Peter was what gave him the burden and the authority to write his record of the life and ministry of the Lord. The authority of the NT rests upon the authority of the apostles. Two of the Gospels were written by apostles: Matthew and John. Two were written by men who were not apostles: Mark and Luke. But both of these latter men were known for their close connection with the apostles, particularly Peter and Paul. All four of the Gospel writers combined do not give us what could be called a biography of the Lord Jesus, but their writings give such support to each other so as to give strong confirmation that what they wrote was the truth. The main subject in all four Gospels is the Lord Jesus Christ.

John Mark was a Jew. John was his Jewish name; Mark was his Roman name. It seems that his Gospel was written especially for the Romans. It tells us nothing about the birth and earthly life of our Lord. His introduc-

tion is very brief, but very much to the point, as we see in the first three verses of chapter 1. He may have gotten his burden for the Romans as a result of the time spent with Paul in that city. Scholars differ at many points regarding the back ground of this gospel, but it is certain that it was written under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and thus it belongs where it is in our New Testaments.

Graham Scroggie tells us this about John Mark:

This name occurs eight times in the New Testament, sometimes simply Mark, or Marcus, sometimes John, and sometimes ‘John, whose surname was Mark,’ or, ‘John who was called Mark.’

And then Dr. Scroggie added these references: Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39; 1 Pet. 5:13; Col. 4:10; Philemon 23, 24; 2 Tim. 4:11. But not a single time in the Gospel which bears his name.

But what we are mainly interested in tonight and in the weeks to come, is not when it was written, nor where it was written, nor to whom it was written, *but what was written*. Even who wrote it is not primarily important because we know, after all of these years, that it is a vital part of the Word of God. The Word of God carries its own authority. It is “living and powerful and sharper than any twoedged sword.” And in that connection no book of the Bible needs any further confirmation. Personally I believe it was written by John Mark, but by that I do not mean that he was the author. We need to distinguish between the writer and the author in each book of the Bible. The writers were John Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, just to name a few, *but the Author of every book of the Bible is the Holy Spirit*. This is what is extremely important for us to remember.

Now I hope that while we are going through this Gospel, you will be able to add it, or parts of it, from time to time, to the other Bible reading that you are doing. And I expect to do the same. We can’t experience the power of the Word by simply reading what others have written about it. We need to read the Word for ourselves. We need to read it prayerfully and carefully. We need to read it repeatedly. We need to read it when and where we will be the least distracted in our reading. We can all be thankful for what we have learned from our parents, from pastors we have had, from Sunday School teachers who have taught us, from books we have read by men and women who have been taught by the Lord, and who have written to share their knowledge with us. But with all of that influence, we will be missing the greatest blessing of all if we are not reading the Bible for ourselves.

Dr. Harry Ironside, who for many years was the pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, and was one of my teachers, a visiting lecturer who came to Dallas Seminary every year that I was there, had read the Bible for every year in his life. And he told us this when he was in his seventies. Obviously he had to double up some years to catch up on those years before he could read. But he was a man who saturated his heart with the personal reading of the Word of God.

Another man who was one of my teachers in seminary, Dr. Charles Feinberg, was a teacher who greatly influenced John MacArthur who sat under Dr. Feinberg's ministry at Talbot Seminary in Dr. Feinberg's later years. Dr. Feinberg for many years read the Bible four times a year. And I can often hear Dr. Feinberg's expressions or tone of voice when I hear Dr. MacArthur preaching.

I have told many of you about G. Campbell Morgan who, when preparing to teach a book of the Bible, would read it through forty times before he began to make notes on whatever book he was studying.

We need to read the Bible, and then re-read it, think about it, pray over it, but always keep reading it. None of us has anything that is more important for us to do. And it will produce rich dividends in our lives. That is one thing that I love to see in biographies of the Lord's servants who have lived in the past, and have been greatly blessed by the Lord. I think that it was George Mueller who said that we ought to read ten pages in the Bible for every page that we read in other books. He didn't mean that we need to count pages, but he meant that we need to do far more reading in the Bible than we do in other books. Giving priority to the Bible even makes good books about the Bible a greater blessing to us.

Now let me say one more word about the Gospel of Mark and the other three Gospels. Several years ago, I felt convinced that I ought to be reading the Gospels all of the time. And so I began reading the NT twice each year, using our Bible reading schedule. It is so arranged that if you begin reading the NT at the beginning of the year, and then begin again in July reading it a second time, there will only be about two weeks that you will not be reading in the Gospels. The Gospels tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ, focusing upon His ministry here on earth, but the writers all give us other facts about Him which carry us well beyond His earthly ministry. The Apostle John, for example, takes us back before the beginning of time as he began his Gospel.

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So read, read, read. Read God's Word. And you young people, start as soon as you begin to read. It may be years before you read it through the first time, but read it little by little. As families we need to be reading it together, encouraging each other to read. There is blessing, great blessing, awaiting all of us as we dwell on the pages of our Bibles.

But now let's look at that different way that Mark began his Gospel, and I am thinking tonight just of the first three verses.

It is very possible that he intended for verse 1 to be the title of his Gospel: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Now I have a question: How could this be the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ when Paul wrote in Galatians 3:8,

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

But even before that we have the Gospel in germ form as far back as Genesis 3:15. And then it is pictured by the way God clothed Adam and Eve before He put them out of the Garden. The Gospel is older than the Bible because we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to Eph. 1:3-6.

What does this expression mean?

Well, it could mean, as I have already indicated, that this is another record of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into the world.

But I am inclined to think that it means even more than that. I think that John Mark was tell us that Jesus Christ is the Gospel, that there would be no Gospel if it were not for Him. You can't preach Christ without preaching the Gospel, and you can't preach the Gospel without preaching Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark was telling us that there is not difference between Jesus Christ, as he came to earth in human form, and the Son of God. Any supposed preaching of the Gospel that does not recognized that as Jesus Christ He was the Son of God, is not the Gospel. The Gospel is good news. It is the best news. No other message can even begin to compare with it. There are men who claim to be preaching the Gospel in our day who actually deny that Jesus was the Son of God in human flesh. That is not the Gospel. The Gospel is Jesus Christ, the Son

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of God –Who He is, and what He did for the salvation of people throughout the whole world, from the beginning of time, to the end of time. If we are not straight here, we can't be right anyplace else if we are talking about man's relationship with God in salvation. This was a most powerful statement.

We need to get this truth firmly fixed in our minds.

And then John Mark went back to two OT passages:

- 1) In verse 2 he went to Mal. 3:1.
- 2) In verse 3 he went back to Isa. 40:3.

Now he was citing his authority for the statement that he had just made. The OT and the NT stand together on the meaning of the Gospel.