

## **Meet Mark!**

**September 23, 2018**

Welcome to CrossWinds. If you are new, you came on a good Sunday. Today, we begin a study on the Gospel of Mark. This study will take us about a year. I am really excited for this series. Mark is one of four books in our New Testament that tells us the story of Jesus' life. As we study this book, we will come to know know Jesus better and love Jesus more. I cannot think of anything better for a church than to be passionate for Jesus.

Before we study any book in the Bible, it is always good to learn a little on the background of the book. Who wrote it? When did he write it? Why did he write it? How is the book put together? Answering those kinds of introductory questions will help us with everything we study.

This morning, we are not beginning with the text of Mark. That begins next week. Today, I simply want to review the introductory elements of the book so we can better understand it. That is why I titled the message "Meet Mark!"

I want to introduce Mark two ways. First, I want to introduce you to the book of Mark. Next, I want introduce you to Mark the person. Understanding the background of the book of Mark and the person of Mark will be of immense help.

### **Meet the book of Mark.**

#### **How does Mark relate to the other gospels?**

As far as we can tell, Mark was the first of the four gospels written. One of the exercises we did in seminary was to have, in the Greek text, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John in front of us. We had to highlight portions of Mark used in the other Gospels. I

remember that homework well because it was a long and painful exercise. I must admit, as I worked through it, I was shocked to see how clearly Matthew and Luke used portions of Mark's Gospel as a foundation for what they wrote. This is one of the reasons we know Mark was the first gospel written. When Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels, it feels like they had a copy of the Gospel of Mark in front of them. John is different. It was written later and is unique unto itself.

### **When was Mark written?**

None of the Gospels come with a date stamp. They are hard to date. We know Mark was closely associated with Peter. It appears that Mark's gospel was written either shortly before or immediately after Peter's death. The apostle Peter died under the persecution of Nero in Rome around AD 65. That means the Gospel of Mark was either written in the late 50s or early 60s. As we study Mark, you can almost hear Peter's voice recalling the time he spent with Jesus 30 years before.

### **To whom was the Gospel of Mark written?**

Matthew was written to the Jews to convince them Jesus is the Christ. That is why the Gospel of Matthew is filled with Old Testament references. That is why the Gospel of Matthew starts with Jesus' genealogy from King David. Matthew wants to prove Jesus is in the kingly line of David. The Gospel of Luke was written for a gentile audience. Luke was not written for just any gentile audience, it was written for a higher educated gentile audience. The opening verses of the Gospel of Luke are written in complex Greek that could only be written by someone with a higher education. This way, when someone that was

highly educated began reading this gospel, that sophisticated linguistic introduction gained his or her respect, and he or she had trust for the intellect of the author. What about Mark? To whom was his Gospel written? Mark was also written for a gentile audience but it was written in simple Greek so even a grade school student could understand. The Gospel of Mark was written for everyone. The Gospel of Mark is also fast-paced. One of Mark's favorite words in his Gospel is the word *immediately*. Jesus was doing one thing, and then immediately, he was doing something else. Mark is an action-packed Gospel written in simple words. Reading it is like watching a modern action movie.

The Gospel of Mark was also written to be read out loud. Most people in the ancient world were not educated enough to read. When the Gospel of Mark was read out loud, its fast-paced movement and simple language held the attention of everyone in the room. Everyone could learn the truth about Jesus from this Gospel.

There are a number of hints in Mark's Gospel that the people hearing it were facing persecution. Mark's Gospel tells us many times that Jesus suffered like you are suffering.

What conclusion can we draw from this data? When you match the probable date the Gospel was written and the persecution the audience was enduring, that means the Gospel was written to Christians in Rome who were suffering for their faith, most likely during Nero's persecution in Rome, when Christians were falsely accused of setting the fire that burned down 80 percent of the city.

## What is Mark's structure?

This past week a friend mentioned he heard a radio preacher teaching on the Gospel of Mark. The radio preacher said the Gospel of Mark was probably dictated to Mark by the apostle Peter. My friend wondered if I agreed. My answer was a definite yes and no. The “yes” is that Mark's Gospel was strongly influenced by Peter. It does feel like much of it is a firsthand account of Jesus. The “no” is that Peter did not simply dictate the gospel and Mark wrote it down like you and I would use Siri to send a text message on our phones. The Gospel of Mark was very carefully and patiently put together.

My doctoral work was on the study of rhetorical analysis in the Bible. That means how books in the Bible were carefully put together for public listening. In the ancient world, Rome was the epicenter of rhetoric. It had strict rules writers followed when composing their publicly read letters. My doctoral work focused on the book of Romans in particular. Rome being the epicenter of rhetoric in the ancient world, when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he followed these strict structural requirements. That is why Romans feels like such an ordered and logical book of the Bible.

Remember Mark's audience. He also wrote to the Romans, and his Gospel was also meant to be read out loud to everyone. He also had to follow these rules. Once you understand these rules and how they work, the purpose of Mark's Gospel unfolds in front of you.

The Gospel of Mark was written to answer two questions: “Who is Jesus?” and “What did Jesus come to do?” Chapters 1 to 8 are all focused on answering

the question, “Who is Jesus?” In those chapters, we follow the disciples as they see Jesus work miracles, teach in parables, heal the sick and face opposition. In the first eight chapters, a picture of Jesus’ true identity slowly comes into focus. Right in the middle of the book, at the end of eighth chapter, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded with the right answer after being with Jesus for his healings and miracles.

Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” Mark 8:29 (ESV)

That is the point Mark was developing for the first eight chapters. As soon as Peter got it right, and we know who Jesus is, the book starts to the question, “What did Jesus come to do?” In the Jewish mind, the mission of the Christ was to overthrow the Romans. Yet as soon as Peter affirmed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus started talking about his death. For the last eight chapters the disciples did not understand why Jesus kept talking about his death when he is the Christ. Jesus was repeatedly trying to tell them, but they were too dense to understand that Jesus came to overthrow an enemy much greater than Rome. He came to conquer Satan, sin and death, and he would do that through his death. Mark makes it abundantly clear that Jesus’ death on the cross was not an afterthought. It was always God’s plan.

Just as the first half of the book ends with Peter confessing Jesus as the Christ, the second half of the book ends with the Gentile centurion who was in charge of Jesus’ crucifixion confessing that Jesus truly is the Son of God.

And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” Mark 15:39 (ESV)

This is why Pastor Jordan and I titled this series, “The King and the Cross.” The question of the first half of the book is, “Who is Jesus?” The answer is that he is Christ, our king. The question of the second half of the book is, “What did Jesus come to do?” The answer is that he came to die on the cross. As you see the subtitle of this series, “The king and the cross” throughout this series, I hope it reminds you of how Mark carefully put the book together.

There are many more detailed rhetorical structures in the book, but we will save them for the future.

### **What is a key theme in Mark?**

**The Christian life means denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following in the footsteps of Jesus.**

One of the major themes of the book is that following Jesus means we deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow him. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane before he died pleaded with God the Father to take the cross from him but ended by saying, “Yet not my will be done but your will be done.” In a similar way, as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus, we should expect we will also experience suffering. We may plead with God the Father to take times of suffering away but that may not be God the Father’s will for us. Like Jesus, God’s will for us may involve suffering. It may even involve death for our faithfulness to him.

The Gospel of Mark teaches us suffering to follow God’s will is a normal part of the Christian life. If Jesus had to carry his cross and suffer, we should

expect that as Christians, it will be God the Father's will for us to face times of suffering as well as we try to honor him with our lives.

This is a good corrective to the current health, wealth, and prosperity gospel taught by so many around the world.

### **Meet the man named Mark.**

While this book is called the Gospel of Mark, Mark didn't identify himself by name in the book. Many other books in the Bible do not identify their authors by name. They wrote anonymously. Why did they do that? In that day, when you wanted to make sure the person you were writing about received all the honor and attention instead of yourself, you wrote anonymously. The goal of Mark's Gospel is to have you remember Jesus, trust in Jesus, and to make Jesus your Lord, not Mark. That is why Mark wrote anonymously. He wanted Jesus to have all the attention.

That being said, we still know this Gospel was written by Mark. The title "According to Mark" was attached to this letter from the very earliest of times in the first century. We also have the writings of numerous early church fathers that wrote about Mark's Gospel from the very time it was first written. They universally and unequivocally credited Mark as the authorship of this book. Even though Mark wanted Jesus to get all the attention, he wasn't successful at hiding. We know for sure he wrote this Gospel.

Let's meet Mark in the Bible and get to know him as a person. The first time Mark shows up in the Bible is in the book of Acts, in Acts 12. That is a point in the book of Acts where a significant transition takes place. The book of Acts begins after Jesus' resurrection. Acts 1:8 gives the theme of the book.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8 (ESV)

The first 12 chapters of Acts is the story of the good news of Jesus spreading in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Beginning with Acts 13, it is the story of the good news of Jesus spreading to the ends of the earth. In the first 12 chapters of Acts, the primary figure is Peter in Jerusalem. In the second half of Acts, when the gospel is spreading to the ends of the earth, the primary figure is Paul. Let's pick up the story in Acts 12 which will give us an easy on-ramp to meet Mark, the author of our Gospel.

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Acts 12:1–5 (ESV)

Herod was a leader determined to stay in power. Like many rotten politicians, he made his political decisions based on what would keep him in power, not based on what was the right thing to do. After he arrested and killed James, and learned arresting and killing apostles made the Jews happy, he arrested Peter with plans to kill him. If they loved me killing one apostle, why not kill two apostles?

Acts 12 takes place approximately 12 years after Christ's resurrection. The church in Jerusalem began with 3,000 people. At this point, the church in Jerusalem was extremely large. Let me pull a number out of the hat. It was maybe 10,000 people. It may have been much bigger. That is a mega church. Peter was the key spokesman for the church. He was a very popular and



powerful person. That is why Herod went right for the church's jugular and arrested him with plans to kill him. That is why Herod surrounded Peter with four squads of soldiers. If crowds of thousands were thinking of breaking Peter out, it wasn't happening. Peter was in the ultra-max security prison. There were four squads of soldiers each taking six-hour shifts guarding him and chained to him night and day. Nobody was breaking into the jail, and there was no way Peter was getting out of jail. The situation was hopeless.

What was the strategy of the church in this desperate situation? It was to pray. Let's see what God did in response to their prayers.

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. Acts 12:6–12 (ESV)

The night before Peter was to die, he was sleeping between two soldiers when an angel of the Lord woke him up, told him to get dressed, then walked him past the guards, through the gates and out of the prison. The whole time Peter thought he was dreaming. If that happened to any of us, we would probably think we were dreaming too. Where did Peter go in Jerusalem in the middle of the

night? He instinctively went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was also called Mark. Here, for the first time, we meet Mark.

Incidentally, you will notice he had two names: John and Mark. That was actually common. John was his Jewish name. Mark was his Gentile name. It is similar to what happens when we hosted the international students. They have a Chinese name none of us can understand or pronounce that to us sounds like every other Chinese name. Eventually, to make things easier for Americans, they adopt an American name, like Frank. Just call me Frank. To Americans, they are Frank. To their Chinese friends, they are still their Chinese name. That is John Mark. He had two names. Mark was his gentile name that the Romans could pronounce. John was his Jewish name.

His mother's name was Mary. Interestingly, no father's name is given. If there was a father in the picture, his name would have been mentioned. This means Mark was raised by a single mom. We don't know what happened to Mark's father. Bible scholars think he probably died. He left his wife a sizable house, a house that was large enough to host a church-wide prayer meeting for Peter. Remember the church in Jerusalem was very large, so this was a big house.

At this point, Mark is non-descript. He was living in his mother's home, probably in the basement. The good news is she had a big house so he felt like he had his own space.

Why did Peter know to head for Mary's house in the middle of the night? My guess is this was where Peter and others from the church in Jerusalem met

all the time. Peter didn't have to text or use the Find My Friends app on his phone. Peter knew where to look. Just go to Mary's home to find people from the church. That is where church people always met.

The best we can discern, Acts 12 took place around AD 44. At that point, Peter had been the leader of the church in Jerusalem almost a decade. He spent a lot of time at Mary's house. This means Mark also spent a lot of time around Peter when he visited the house. Mark probably became a Christian under Peter's preaching. I am sure Mark and Peter grew close over the years as Peter undoubtedly came over for dinner many times because of church meetings in Mary's home. This close relationship between Mark and Peter is a very important part of our story.

As we saw, when we get to the end of Acts 12, there was a switch from the gospel spreading in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria through Peter to the gospel spreading to the ends of the earth through Paul. Acts 12 closes with an interesting note.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. Acts 12:25 (ESV)

Earlier, the book of Acts tells us Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem, bringing a financial gift to the poor in Jerusalem from the church in Antioch. Here we see Paul and Barnabas returning to Antioch, but Mark was with them.

Why did they bring Mark? Colossians 4:10 gives us a clue.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him)... Colossians 4:10 (ESV)

Barnabas and Mark were cousins! Maybe Mary was tired of having Mark around the home without a father. Maybe she wanted Mark to spend some time with good godly men. She saw the opportunity to ask Cousin Barnabas to take Mark with him back to Antioch to spend time with him and Paul.

Another interesting piece of trivia is that Barnabas was a Levite. Levites were to help the priests in the temple. This means Mark was also likely a Levite and trained to be a helper. Mark's job around Paul and Barnabas was to be their helper.

The next chapter of Acts, Acts 13, begins with an interesting roll call of all the amazing super gifted preachers and prophets that were in the church of Antioch.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1–3 (ESV)

Whose name is missing? Mark's! Mark didn't get listed! Mark was not a famous, up-front, gifted person like Paul or Barnabas. Mark was just the luggage guy for Paul and Barnabas. He was a completely ordinary, behind-the-scenes person that was under the radar. Since Cousin Barnabas was taking care of him, when Paul and Barnabas left on their first missionary trip, Mark was to travel with them and help.

When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. Acts 13:5 (ESV)

What I find interesting is that John Mark is called an assistant. In the Greek, the word assistant means subordinate. It means servant. John Mark was a totally behind-the-scenes servant.

What happened next is Paul and Barnabas ran into trouble as they began their mission trip to share about Jesus. A magician named Elymas opposed them. This guy was a seriously bad dude. He turned people against Paul and Barnabas. This was a huge tension-filled time with high spiritual stakes. Things came to a head in a power encounter where Paul, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, rebuked Elymas and struck the magician blind. Usually the Holy Spirit was healing people. When the Holy Spirit was striking people blind, you know they were extremely spiritually dark.

This was more than Mark bargained for when he went to see Barnabas. He was not prepared for the spiritual opposition and stress of mission work. He couldn't handle the intense spiritual battle waged by Paul and Barnabas. Guess what Mark did? He left and ran home to mom!

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem... Acts 13:13 (ESV)

At that point, Mark disappears from the New Testament record. He went home to mom in Jerusalem. The book of Acts continues. Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey. They returned to Jerusalem. When it comes time for their second missionary journey to go back to the churches they planted, we read this.

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had

not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Acts 15:36–41 (ESV)

Barnabas wanted to give his cousin Mark a second chance. Mark was a little older and a little more mature. Years later Paul still didn't trust Mark. He was still smarting from the time Mark abandoned them on their first mission trip. The disagreement over taking or leaving Mark became so strong that Paul and Barnabas parted ways. Barnabas took Mark. Paul took another young man named Silas.

At this point, the profile we have of Mark was that he was nobody special. He was just an assistant. He carried luggage. He was also a deserter that Paul wouldn't trust. That is a tough place to be. What happened from there?

Barnabas and Mark disappeared from the biblical record for about 10 years. Paul was eventually arrested and put in a Roman jail. Paul was released from this time in jail. Paul would later end up in a Roman jail a second time, but that time he lost his head, literally. During this first stay in jail, Paul wrote the letters of Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Look what Paul said about Mark at the end of his letter to the Colossians that he wrote from jail.

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him)... Colossians 4:10 (ESV)

Apparently Paul forgave Mark. Paul and Mark restored their relationship. Mark even became Paul's helper. He was such a good helper to Paul that he even stayed with Paul in jail. Paul even went out of his way to tell the Colossians that if Mark ever came to them make sure they welcomed him, because Paul and

Mark had their relationship restored. Paul did not want any consequences of Mark's former abandonment to negatively influence Mark.

Paul was eventually released from prison in Rome and arrested a second time. In that arrest, he died in Rome. During his second imprisonment, Paul wrote the book of 2 Timothy to young Timothy. Look what he said at the end of the book about Mark.

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. 2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)

Paul loved Mark. Mark was a great helper. As Paul was facing death, the guy he wanted with him more than any other because he was such a faithful helper and friend was Mark.

Here is the picture we have of Mark. He was not a prophet. He was not an apostle. He was not an up-front person. He was a behind-the-scenes person. He was just a helper, and at one time he failed at that job miserably when he deserted the apostle Paul. He was eventually forgiven by the apostle Paul, then he traveled for many years with Paul and became one of Paul's closest and most faithful friends.

There is another interesting wrinkle to his story. What happened to Mark when he abandoned Paul and went back to his mother's home in Jerusalem? Mark already spent many years with Peter in his family home before Acts 12. Apparently Mark went back and spent more time with Peter. What made Peter unique? Peter was someone familiar with failure and desertion. He deserted Jesus three times on the night Jesus was betrayed. The good news is Jesus forgave him, restored him and used him in an amazing way to be the leader of

the church in Jerusalem. Peter was the perfect person to restore Mark, offer some forgiveness to him and believe in him again. Mark even became Peter's traveling assistant. We know Peter made a trip to Rome when Mark was estranged from Paul. Who did Peter bring with him for the trip? Mark. Peter talked about this in his first letter.

She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and **so does Mark, my son.** 1 Peter 5:13 (ESV)

Look how Peter felt about Mark. Peter called Mark his son! Mark didn't have a biological father. Peter identified himself as Mark's adopted father. Peter loved Mark like a son. Were Peter and Mark close? You bet. They were as close as you can get.

Mark ended up as a traveling assistant for Peter, who adopted Mark as a son, as well as for Barnabas and Paul. Mark knew Peter, Barnabas and Paul better than anyone. When the first generation of the apostles were dying off and the first-hand stories of Jesus were fading into history, Mark was uniquely equipped to write them down in his Gospel.

The Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel written, but it was not the last Gospel written. It was the foundation and inspiration for the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke.

Last week we talked about the importance of hospitality. Mary had no idea that offering a little church hospitality in her home would lead to her ordinary son rubbing shoulders with and becoming one of the best friends of Peter, Barnabas and Paul. She had no idea it would lead to her ordinary son being in a unique



position to write down Peter's firsthand stories of Jesus that have led billions of people to trust in Jesus as their savior for the last 2,000 years.

The message of the book of Mark is all about Jesus. Who is Jesus? He is Christ our king. What did Jesus come to do? He came to die on the cross.

*The message of the person of Mark is that God loves to take ordinary people, even people who have failed him, then restore them and use them in unexpected ways to advance his kingdom.*

That is good news for each of us. We are ordinary people. We have failed Jesus. Yet God still offers to forgive us and use us to tell more people about Jesus in ways we never imagined.



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