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## A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Mark: 1-1-13

### 42. THE BOOK OF MARK

Ray Steadman tells the story about “*Matatma*,” Gandhi who went about barefoot, wearing the simple clothes of the poor and who travelled on foot or by the cheapest railway class. He chose to make his home in the slums among the poor people he lived. Gandhi led a nonviolent struggle to bring self-government to the land of India. Through he was of the Hindu religion he studied the life of the Lord Jesus and patterned his actions after the servanthood model of Christ. In 1931 Gandhi went to several European nations to visit the leaders of various states. Wherever he went he took a goat with him as a symbol of humility and lowliness. When he went to Rome to pay a call on the Italian dictator Mussolini, he arrived as always dressed in beggars clothes leading his goat by a rope. Mussolini’s children laughed when they saw the thin, bald, powerless seeming man but the dictator snapped. “*That scrawny old man and his scrawny old goat are shaking the British Empire.*”

Is this not the power of servanthood ? The power to shake kingdoms, the power that was first modelled for us, by the greatest servant of all, Jesus Christ. Now the gospel of Mark, the second in the New Testament, is the shortest of the four gospels, with only sixteen chapters. It can be read

in one sitting in shortly over an hour. Its brevity is probably the reason it is the most translated book of the New Testament. Did you know that the Wycliffe translators begin their translation with Mark’s gospel because it succinctly gives the whole gospel story ? Now as we come to this gospel of action there are several questions we need to ask.

#### 1. WHO ?

I mean who was Mark ? Well, Mark’s full name was John Mark. John was his Jewish name, and it means “*the grace of God*,” and Mark his Roman name, which means “*the hammer*.” Do you recall that when Peter was released from prison we read “*And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.*” ( Acts 12:12 ) His mother’s name “*Mary*,” indicates that she was Jewish and his father may have been Roman. Obviously, his mother was a wealthy and prominent Christian in the Jerusalem church, and evidently the church there met in her home. At the beginning of Paul’s missionary journeys, John Mark was with him ( Acts 12:25 ) and he accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey as far as Perga in Pamphylia ( Acts 13:13 ) but he left them there abandoned the work sowing the seeds of a later serious quarrel between Paul and Barnabas.

Later Mark made good in the Lord’s work so much so that when Paul was in prison in Rome he wrote to Timothy,

“ *Take Mark and bring him with thee for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*” ( 2 Tim 4:11 ) So here is a young man who had a serious spiritual fall, and who through that backsliding became a cause for division among two great men of God. Yet it was this man who the Holy Spirit used to give us this wonderful gospel. The young man who once quailed, and quaked and quit. “ *Many a ragged colt makes a noble horse,*” says Alexander Maclaren. Could it be that you have failed in the service of Christ ? Have you had a serious spiritual blip ? Will you then take a look at this man and see how wonderful is the restoring grace of God ?

**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**

Now Mark was a nephew of Barnabas ( Col 4:10 ) and he was the spiritual son of Simon Peter because Peter, writing in ( 1 Peter 5:13 ) says, “ *The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.*” So Mark it seems was saved through the ministry of Peter and that’s very interesting. Why ? Because the gospel of Mark, has long been considered, Simon Peter’s gospel. Papius, the bishop of Hierapolis said in A.D. 140 said this, “ *Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered.*” So what are we saying ? That Mark was

inspired by the Spirit of God to give us the gospel as it was preached by Peter, especially as recorded in ( Acts 10:34-43 ) Now let’s have a look at this sermon. Here is Peter going to the Gentiles, to the house of Cornelius a Roman centurion living in Caesarea. And what does he preach ? Look at ( 10:34-43 ) Peter tells the story of Jesus Christ beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist and ending with the ascension. Now is it not interesting that Mark’s gospel follows the exact same ground ? As John Phillips says, “ ***Mark fills in the details but in essence his gospel is an expansion of Peter’s preaching.***” Is it therefore surprising that while Mathew wrote for the Jews, Mark wrote for the Romans ? 1.

## **2. WHEN ?**

Well, it must have been written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 because of the comment of Christ in ( 13:2 ) Most Bible scholars believe that Mark is the first of the four gospel records and that it was written in A.D. 50’s.

## **3. WHERE ?**

Where was this gospel written ? Justin Martyr writing about 150 A.D. referred to the gospel of Mark as “ *the memoirs of Peter,*” and suggested that Mark wrote his gospel while in Italy. This probably based on 1 Peter chapter 5 that is if Babylon means Rome.

## **4. WHOM ?**

To whom was this gospel written ? Well, when you read this gospel it soon becomes clear that Mark had Gentiles in mind. I mean if Mark has Jews in mind would he have explained that the “ *preparation,*” was “ *the day before the Sabbath,*” ? ( 15:42 ) Or that the Mount of Olives was “ *over against the temple,*” ( 13:3 ) Or that the disciples of John and the Pharisees “ *used to fast ?*” ( 2:18 ) My .... none of these explanations would have been necessary for a Jewish audience. So, Mark wrote his gospel in Greek at Rome, for Gentile Christians there. 1,2,3,4, and now,

## 5. WHY ?

What is the purpose of the book ? Well, read it through and you'll discover that Mark wants us to see the Lord Jesus at work. It is as though he says, “ **Look. What Jesus Christ did proves who He was.**” Now remember who is he writing to ? The Romans and since the Romans were the masters of the world and had millions of slaves of people, Mark presents Christ as a slave. Not the slave of a Caesar, nor the slave of an empire, or some social system for no man was ever His master. No, but He was the slave or servant of the Lord. In Mark's Gospel, the Lord Jesus lays aside the regal robes of kingship and girds Himself with the towel of service. He is King in Matthew's Gospel but, He is the Servant in Mark's Gospel. You see, it is Mark who picks up Isaiah's challenge “ *Behold my servant,*” ( is 42:1 ) Isn't it interesting that Mark presents Christ as the servant ?

I mean he had gone with Barnabas and Saul to be their servant or their “ *minister,*” and he had failed and now he

says “ *Look at One who does not fail, the perfect servant.*” So the key idea in Mark's gospel is that of our Lord as Jehovah's Servant, the mighty Worker. The key word is “ *straightway,*” ( *eutheos* ) or “ *immediately.*” The key verse is ( 10:45 ) “ *For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.*” Now I have divided this gospel into three parts.

## (1) THE MINISTRY OF THE PERFECT SERVANT 1:1-8:26

Remember Mark is concerned not so much with the words of Christ but with the works of Christ. In this opening chapter He is presenting the Lord Jesus at work. You see, the Romans were a very practical people, they got things done. They would not be much interested in the religious questions that so interested the Jews. They would be more interested in what Jesus Christ did than what Christ said. I want you to see here,

### (a) THE PERSON OF THIS MINISTRY: 1:1-8

Do you see how Mark opens ? “ *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.*” ( 1:1 ) This is not the beginning of either John or Jesus. It is the beginning of the gospel when the Lord Jesus came to this earth and died upon a cross and rose again. That, s the gospel. There are three beginnings recorded in Scripture. Let us put them down in chronological order.

#### 1. “ *In the beginning was the Word,*” ( *Jn 1:1* )

This goes back to a dateless beginning, a beginning before all time. Here the human mind can only grope. J. Vernon McGee says “ *If I see an airplane in the air, I assume there is an airport somewhere. I may not know where it is, but I know the plane took off from some place. So when I look around at the universe, I know that it took off from somewhere and that somewhere there is a God. But I don't know anything about that beginning. God comes out of eternity to meet us. I just have to put down the peg at the point where He does meet us, back as far as I can think, and realize He was there before that.*”

**2. “ *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,*” ( *Gen 1:1* )**

This is where we move out of eternity into time. The Psalmist said, “ *The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.*” ( Ps 19:1 )

**3. “ *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God,*” ( *1:1* )**

This is dated. It goes back to Jesus Christ at the precise moment He took upon Himself human flesh. Jesus Christ is the gospel. Now do you see here a powerful fourfold statement about the Lord Jesus.

He is the Son of God. ( 1:1)

He is the Lord. ( 1:3 )

He is the One mightier than John the Baptist ( 1:7 )

He is God's Beloved Son. (1:11 )

Now listen again to what Christ says in ( 10:45 ) where He calls Himself the Son of man. “ *The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.*” Is that not the essence of the gospel ? Is this not why Mark says that this is “ *the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God ?*” The fact that God became man, that the Almighty came down to earth as a worker to procure our salvation by His life and death is what makes the gospel the glorious message it is. R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Mark, tells a story about one of the world renowned scholars of the classics, Dr E .V. Rieu. He completed a great translation of Homer into modern English for Penguin Classics series. He was sixty years old and he had been an agnostic all his life.

The publisher soon approached him again and asked him to translate the gospels. Can you imagine an agnostic classical scholar being asked to translate Matthew, Mark, Luke and John ? When Rieu's son heard about this he said, “ *It will be interesting to see what father will make of the four Gospels. It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels make of father.*” He didn't have to wonder very long, for within a year's time E.V. Rieu, the lifelong agnostic, responded to the Gospels he was translating and became a committed Christ. Oh, the power of the gospel. I wonder this .... Do we need to get a fresh vision of Christ ? Of who He is ? He is the Son of God, He is the Lord, He is One mightier than John the Baptist, He is God's Beloved Son. (a)

***(b) THE PREPARATION FOR THIS MINISTRY:  
1:9-13***

For here we see the commencement of Christ's public ministry which began with His baptism. My .... would you seek to the Lord effectively ? Do you want your service for the Lord to count ? Well, did you notice here four indispensable requirements for all who would serve the Lord ? Notice,

***There is a PARTING:***

The fundamental purpose of Christ's baptism was to symbolically show the main work of Christ for mankind which was the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. But as Dr. Sidlow Baxter points out our Lord's baptism was His deliberate separation of Himself to His public ministry. There was a parting from His former kind of life and a separation to His new ministry of service. My .... is this not a requirement for us ?

***There is a POWER:***

Our Lord saw something “ *the heavens opened,*” moreover He felt something “ *the Spirit descending upon Him.*” ( 1:10 ) My .... do we not need the heavens “ *opened,*” to our praying and this enduement with “ *power from on high ?*”

***There is a PROCLAMATION:***

“ *Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*”

( 1:11 ) Do we not need the assurance of the Holy Spirit that our motives are well pleasing to the Lord ?

***There is a PROOF:***

Look at ( 1:12-13 ) Strange is it not that the entirely separated, Spirit anointed, Heaven attested servant must undergo this testing to settle whether He will go only and utterly God's way or man's ? My .... His victory over Satan is further proof of His Divine Son-ship. Tell me, are you willing to yield yourself here and now to Christ for His will to be done through your life ?

***(c) THE POWER WITH THIS MINISTRY:  
1:14-8:27***

Why we read in this opening chapter “ And they were astonished at his doctrine for he taught them as one that had authority and not as the scribes.” ( 1:35 ) Again in this opening chapter we have a rapid series of astounding exploits.

A demon cast out in the synagogue ( 1:26)

A fever case healed in the home ( 1:31 )

Crowds of invalids cured at the door ( 1:34 )

A leper cleansed by the wayside ( 1:42 )

My .... are you getting Mark's message ? What Christ did proves who He is. Look for a moment at Chapter 5 for here we have a three-fold manifestation of the power of Christ. This chapter has been called the Bible home for incurables. You see, this chapter describes three cases that

are absolutely humanly speaking, incurable, the demoniac man, the diseased woman and the dead girl. All three were considered impossible cases in our Lord's day and would be in our day as well. The man would be sent to a mental facility, the woman would be assigned to a terminal unit and the girl would be taken out for burial in a cemetery. But there are no incurables with the Lord Jesus. In every situation Christ is more than adequate. To the man who was demonized Christ became the great psychiatrist. To the woman with the disease Christ was the great physician. To the girl who was dead the Lord was the great pediatrician. Thus,

***In 5:1-20 we see His Power over Demons:*** For the chapter opens with the story of the deliverance of the demoniac of Gerasa. Before Christ met him he ran wild and naked, possessed and polluted by Satan, Then the Saviour came and with a word set him free. I tell you when “*Jesus comes the tempter's power is broken.*”

***In 5:21-34 we see His Power over Disease:*** I mean her body was drained of strength. Earthly doctors could do nothing for her. Then one day she met the Master.

***She only touched the hem of his garment  
As to his side she stole  
Amid the crowd that gathered around him  
And straightway she was whole***

***In 5:35-43 we see His Power over Death:*** The old saying is “*where there is life there is hope.*” But for man death spells the end of hope, but not for the Lord Jesus. In

Jairus's daughter there was no life but there was still hope because the Divine Worker came to her and said “*Damsel I say unto thee arise. And straightway the damsel arose.*” ( 5:42 ) Now these are but three examples of the Lord Jesus giving His life in service. As Dr. Alan Cairns reminds us in his book “***A Sure Foundation,***” the Lord Jesus had always time, always had grace always had power to meet every human need. Is this not a sight of the Saviour we need to recapture today ? Do you recall Peter's words that summed up the Saviour's entire ministry ? “*Jesus went about doing good.*” ( Acts 10:38 ) The Lord Jesus came in the winsomeness of His humanity and the fullness of His deity doing good. Someone has put it like this,

***I read In a book where a man called Christ, went about doing good. It is very disconcerting to me that I am so easily satisfied with just going about.***

I wonder is that you ? Are you just going about ? Or are you going about doing good ? You see, this is a gospel about busyness. Forty one times Mark uses a Greek word “*eutheos,*” which is variously translated “*straightway,*” “*forthwith,*” “*immediately,*” all indicating energy and activity. It portrays the Lord Jesus in constant action yet in the midst of His busyness He always had time for people. What about you ? Have you time for the needy ? Have you a word of grace for the guilty ? Are you going about or are you going about doing good ? (1)

**(2) THE MISSION OF THE PERFECT SERVANT  
8:27-15:47**

What was the mission, the specific task of the perfect servant ? Well, do you recall Mark's key verse ? The key verse is ( 10:45 ) “ *For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.*” John Phillips analyses the gospel of Mark in this way. He suggests that the book falls into two parts corresponding to the two parts of this key verse. *The first part deals with Christ giving His life in service, the second part deals with Christ giving His life in sacrifice.* So from ( 8:27 ) to the end of Chapter 15, we see the shadow of the cross over all that our Saviour does. Now notice that,

***(a) The Sacrifice of the Servant is Foretold:  
8:27-13:37***

Do you know what a watershed is ? It's an important period that serves as a dividing line ? Well, there is a watershed in Mark's gospel. Mark starts his story at the River Jordan which is the lowest point on the earth's surface, then He moves to Galilee where Christ conducted the bulk of His ministry. Then the Saviour ascends to the highest point in the Promised Land, Mount Hermon, at the foot of which is the town of Caesarea Philippi. Now it's here as David Pawson says that the gospel reaches its watershed. You see, from this point on Christ sets his face toward Jerusalem and it is downhill the way, literally down from the high point of Judaea, through Perea, which is east off the Jordan and eventually to Jerusalem where the Saviour dies.

*So what happened at Caesarea Philippi that Mark is so keen to highlight ? ( 8:27-30 )* Caesarea Philippi was renowned for its many shrines and temples. So against a backdrop of pagan deities the Lord Jesus posed a question about His identity. Whom do men say that I am ? ( 8:27 ) The disciples gave the various views of that day. Then He said “ *But whom say ye that I am ?*” ( 8:29 ) And it was Peter who stepped forward and made that great confession, “ *Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.*” ( Matt 16:16 ) Now once the disciples understood the identity of who Christ was, He could tell them why He had come. ( 8:31 9:30-32 10:32-34 ) From this point onward the cross was uppermost in our Lord's mind and repeatedly on His lips. ( 9:12, 31 10:21 12:7-8 )

**He talks about the Necessity of the Cross:** “ *the Son of Man must suffer many things ....*,” ( 8:31 ) The word “ *must*,” is a word of necessity. There had to be a cross.

**He talks about the Misery of the Cross:** “ *The Son of Man must suffer many things,*” ( 8:31 ) My .... there are volumes in those two words “ *many things.*” Who knows all that Christ suffered ?

**He talks about the Victory of the Cross:** “ *and after three days rise again.*” ( 8:31 ) Christ kept referring to His victory over death and the disciples always missed it. It went right over their heads. So (a)

***(b) The Sacrifice of the Servant is Focused: 14:1-72***

For Mark in ( Ch 14 ) concentrates on the last hours leading up to the cross. Here we see the conspiracy against the Saviour ( 14:1-11 ) the communion with the Saviour ( 14:12-31 ) and the custody of the Saviour.

( 14:32-72 ) Here we see the Lord Jesus as the Honoured Guest: ( 14:1-11 ) as the Gracious Host: ( 14:12-26 ) as the Submissive Son: ( 14:27-42 ) as the Obedient Prisoner: ( 14:43-72 ) Do you see the contrast in these opening verses between Judas and Mary ? Judas Iscariot betrays the Lord Jesus for money ( 14:11 ) but Mary anoints the Lord Jesus for burial. Do you see the comment of Christ ? “ *She hath done what she is could, she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.*” You see, one was an act of complete selfishness but the other was an act of utter selflessness. No doubt she had opportunities to use this perfume elsewhere. But she said, “ *No, I am keeping this for Jesus.*” ( Jn 12:7 )

Is that not what true consecration is all about ? Sacrifice. There's a price to be paid. It means taking the dearest thing in all of your life to you and laying at the feet of Jesus. My .... As you stand under the shadow of the cross, let me ask. Has it cost you anything to serve the Lord lately ? Have you inconvenienced yourself any time lately to serve Him ? Yes, here we see (a) (b) and then,

### ***(c) The Sacrifice of the Cross is Fulfilled: 15:1-47***

As the Servant of Jehovah goes willingly to the cross. Do you recall how this gospel begins ? It begins with the picture of the Lord Jesus, as the wonder-worker of Galilee, the mighty person of power, the Servant with

authority from on high. No wonder the high priests as they watched Christ die said, “ *He saved others himself he cannot save.*” ( 15:31 ) Now, they were mocking Him, the fact was Christ was saving others by refusing to save Himself. My .... is this not the purpose of the cross ? ***To save others.*** Here is an admission on their part that Christ did save others. Did He not save Legion ? Did He not save that little dead girl ? Did He not save the woman with her diseased body ? Christ saved others all over Israel. What did He save them from ? He saved them from their physical ailments but more than that. He saved from their sins. ( Matt 1:21 ) What's the big problem we face as a nation ? As a country ? As individuals ? What's your problem and mine ? Sin.

**Was it for crimes that I have done  
He groaned upon the tree  
Amazing pity, grace unknown  
And love beyond degree**

The purpose of the cross was to save others and ***sacrifice Himself.*** “ *Himself he cannot save,*” they cried. The truth of the matter is. It is not that He could not come down, it is that He would not come. Was it the tenacity of the nails that held Him there ? Was it fear of the soldiers that kept Him on the cross ? No, it was cords of Calvary love that kept Him there. He did not save Himself in order to save you and me. Bless God, the sacrifice of the cross is fulfilled. Something happened at Calvary that never needs to be, that never can be and thank God that never will be repeated again. (1) (2)



### **(3) The Majesty of the Perfect Servant 16:1-20**

For as Mark brings his gospel to a close we see Christ's resurrection: ( 16:1-8 ) we see the Saviour's reappearance: ( 16:9-14 ) and we see His reception in glory. ( :16:15-20 ) We get a glimpse of,

#### ***(a) The Majesty of the Servant in Arising: 16:1-8***

For these eight verses contain the greatest news the world has ever heard, that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and is alive for evermore. “ *Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified he is risen he is not here.* ” ( 16:6 ) My .... We cannot visit too often that empty grave, delight in it too ardently, revere it too solemnly or declare it too loyally, for that empty grave preaches that the Father was so well pleased with the His Son's sacrifice on our behalf that He raised Him from the dead. The resurrection was God's indication that He was fully satisfied with the work of His Son.( Rom 1:4 ) And “ *Up from the grave He arose.* ”

#### ***(b) The Majesty of the Servant in Appearing: 16:9-14***

To Mary Magdalene ( 16:9-11 ) to the two on the road to Emmaus ( 16:12-13 ) to the eleven in the upper room ( 16:14 ) Do you recall how the Doctor puts it ? “ *He showed himself alive.* ” ( Acts 1:3 )

#### ***(c) The Majesty of the Servant in Ascending: 16:15-20***

Do you see ( 16:19 ) ? Do you know what this means ? *The Lord Jesus is still the same servant.* He is indeed glorified, but He is still serving His people. On earth He gave his life in service and sacrifice but now in heaven He is interceding at the right hand of God.

In 1878 when William Booth's Salvation Army had just been so named, a man came over from the United States to enlist. He was once a Methodist minister, Samuel Logan Brengle and now he turned from a fine pastorate to join Booth's Salvation Army. Brengle later became the Salvation Army's first American born commissioner. But when he first came and introduced himself to Booth, Booth accepted his services reluctantly and grudgingly. Booth said to Brengle, “ *You've been your own boss too long.* ” In order to instill some humility into Brengle, he set him to work cleaning the boots of the other trainees. Brengle said to himself, “ *Have I followed my own fancy across the Atlantic in order to black boots ?* ” Then, as if in a vision, he saw Jesus bending over the feet of rough unlettered fishermen, and he said, “ *Lord, You washed their feet, I will black their boots.* ” What about you ? Are you too big to stoop to the lowly task ? Are you too great to humble yourself ? Are you too proud to follow Him who is the Perfect Servant ?