

John Mark

Acts 15: 36-41

Evangelical Symbol: The Lion of Courage



Background

John Mark was the son of the woman named Mary who made her home available to Jesus and his followers (Acts 12:12). Mark (John Mark) grew up in the center of the early Christian community.

Mark was also the nephew of Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas were partners on the first missionary journey beyond Palestine. Mark assisted them (Acts 12:25). Unfortunately, Mark did not finish the journey. When they reached Perga (modern day Turkey), Mark abandoned the mission and returned home (Acts 13:13).

Mark could have been avoiding the rugged mountain journey made dangerous by road bandits. He could have been upset with Paul's style of leadership. He may have been uncomfortable with the work of being an evangelist. Mark's troubles may have been due to his youth and inexperience. Years later, St John Chrysostom maintained Mark was lonely and ran home to be with his mother! Either way, Mark failed to complete the mission.

Paul and Barnabas successfully completed the journey and returned to Jerusalem. There was a challenging conference that set strategy for future missions work (Acts 15). The pair prepared for a second journey. Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance. Mark may have matured in the meantime. Paul refused to have anything to do with anyone who did not finish the job in the first place (Acts 15:37-40). Paul and Barnabas split company and went separate ways with different partners in ministry.

Barnabas gave Mark a second chance. Barnabas' encouragement was a gift of God's grace. They journeyed to the island of Cyprus and Mark was given an opportunity to grow in the faith. All of us make mistakes. God uses such setbacks to strengthen us.

Irenaeus, an early church leader, said Mark's Gospel was based on the reminiscences of Peter. He said Peter was the 'mind behind' this Gospel. Luke tells us that Peter was an uneducated person. "They saw the boldness of Peter

and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men” (Acts 4:13). Peter’s story became the Gospel of Mark.

The man considered a coward now had the wherewithal to write the courageous story about God’s Good News. Mark had been transformed. Mark’s Gospel is filled with grammatical errors. It’s really quite awkward but it illustrates God’s clever way of using imperfect people to share the world’s greatest story.

Reflections

Dr Reinhold Niebuhr, Lutheran pastor and theologian, shared “Serenity Prayer” with others. Many are unacquainted with the concluding verses that communicate confidence in Christ:

“God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can; and the Wisdom to know the
difference.

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting
hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking as He did, this sinful world as it
is, and not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I
surrender to His will, that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and
supremely happy with Him forever in the next.”

Mark grew in surrender, courage, peace, and heavenly joy. Mark’s Gospel illustrates a theme of second chances for all who fail. Mark and Peter both made big blunders and received forgiveness. God turned their weaknesses into strengths.

The name Mark means, “hammer of God.” His first efforts as a missionary were smashed. Eventually Mark lived up to the power of his name. Church tradition indicates that Mark served with Peter in Rome when the persecutions of the Christians began. He left Rome after the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul.

John Mark went to Alexandria (Egypt) and became its first bishop. He is an honored saint in the Egyptian (Coptic) Church. In 832 A.D. his bones were taken to Venice (Italy) as a war prize. Today that city honors Mark with a great cathedral and statues of winged lions (his evangelical symbol). It’s appropriate that the courageous lion now symbolizes John Mark. This is the transforming power of God.

Amazingly there are very few hymns or poems to celebrate the life and ministry of John Mark. He is not forgotten in the Coptic Egyptian Orthodox Church. He is considered their founder. This ancient hymn celebrates his contributions.

*Worthy are you O Apostle
The great martyr our Father St. Mark
For your confession and declaration
You accepted the martyrdom, O father St. Mark
Truly you declared freedom and salvation
In Jesus Christ, O our father St. Mark
The Egyptians and other gentiles
Became believers by, our father St. Mark
The lord Christ chose you a disciple
And Evangelist too, our father St. Mark
Your Gospel forever
Lightens the way, our father St. Mark
You established for us our church
In Alexandria, our father St. Mark
Also the other holy Church
In Libya, our father St. Mark
Didn't your church reach Ethiopia
And the rest of Africa, our father St. Mark*

Egyptian Orthodox Hymn of St. Mark

Strength Finders talent: Communications

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252185/communication-theme.aspx>

John Mark had the special spiritual gift of “communications” which is demonstrated in his writings, life, and mannerisms. He helped influenced many with a powerful Gospel. Mark’s was first Gospel written. He showed others how to communicate about Jesus.

Mark is also part of the “influencing” domain. These are the movers and shakers that lead by example (for better or worse) but also encourage others to take action.

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/252089/influencing-domain.aspx>

Enneagram connections: Seven

Mark comes across as a Seven. He lives in the moment. He is very intelligent. He leaves when things get uncomfortable. Changes came later in life as he matured. He does come across as possibly a Self-Protective Seven. He is very aware of fear as a young man but is known for courage later in life. Mark demonstrates that God is never quite done with us (if we give God a chance). Thank goodness for Barnabas and Peter who helped him as mentors.

<https://cpenneagram.com/enneagram-type-seven>

Questions

1. Presbyterian pastor George Duffield courageously dedicated himself to serving struggling congregations. What kind of strength does this hymn convey? What is the source of that power?

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict, in this His glorious day.
Ye that are brave now serve Him against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger, and strength to strength oppose.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the Gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there. (1858)

2. If God only used perfect people then nothing would ever get done. Have you ever made a mistake in the faith? Did some help you? Can you help others?

3. Paul ultimately boasted about his weaknesses. How can our shortcomings strengthen our service in the kingdom?

All these materials are pre-publication portions of new book by Rev Dr Wonhee Kang and Rev Dr Robert Driver-Bishop. We welcome your insights and suggestions to improve. These are not intended yet for publication or distribution without prior permission. We are willing to share but ask you to respect this process encouraged by our publisher. Thank you!