

2000 Advent Week 3 - John Mark

by John Piper

The sermon explores the profound connection between John Mark and Peter, highlighting themes of grace, forgiveness, and the transformation from despair to hope.

Duration: 12:20

Scripture: Matthew 26:34-75, Mark 14:51-52, Luke 22:32, John 18:10-11, John 19:30

Topics: "Jesus' Sacrifice", "Redemption Through Faith"

Description

In this sermon transcript, a voice is heard from deep inside a cave, asking if the person approaching is a friend or foe. The voice belongs to John Mark, who is hesitant to come out because he doesn't have anything to wear. The speaker reassures John Mark and invites him to come out into the morning light. They discuss the significance of a candle flame representing Jesus' eyes and the sovereign sorrow he felt as he died for the sins of humanity. The transcript also mentions Peter's denial of Jesus and his subsequent remorse, highlighting the power of Jesus' words and the forgiveness he offers. The sermon emphasizes the transformation of darkness into hope through Jesus' sacrifice.

Transcript

From the New Testament, we know several things about John Mark. We know from Peter's epistle that he considered him his spiritual son. We know that he had a mother who had a large house in Jerusalem, which is where the prayer meeting took place in Acts 12 while Peter was in prison.

We know that he was the cousin of Barnabas, whose other name was Joseph, from Cyprus. What we don't know is what I will read this poem about, namely, how he came to be so intimately connected with Peter. The Joseph in this story is Barnabas, just by way of illusion.

So John Mark, part one. Not far beyond Gethsemane, in bending toward the barren sea beyond the Kidron Valley, lay the hills of hope. The name, they say, that Peter gave to Joseph's field when he had sold it and then knelt before the Lord's apostles at Jerusalem and gave all that he got to help the poor.

It was a better name than field because there were so many bluffs and caves and sacred mounds from ancient graves. And Peter knew this district of Judea well. It stood above a hundred other places in his heart because the weight of sin was lifted in a cavern where he tasted grief and grace.

For there, amid those hills and bluffs, one cave was transformed from a gloomy grave into a birthing place of hope, from fearful darkness where you grope along the unseen walls into a world of happy light. And through one night of darkness passed not one, but two despairing men undone by craven cowardice. And so he made the field of Joseph grow with lilies, as it were, and turned a field where bones were burned into the hills of hope.

He came to pass this double deed the same night that the Lord of glory set His face against the mob that met Him in Gethsemane and saw His fair wind followers withdraw and leave Him utterly alone, as if He were a common stone rejected for the jewel of security. As though His love were not more precious than our breath or worth a thousand woes of death. That night, one common sound and one uncommon sight was seared upon the depths of Simon's mind.

The sound? A crowing cock. It would have drowned the rolling thunder had there been a storm besides the one that in. And in that moment, Jesus turned and looked at Peter.

How they burned these eyes of Christ. But not with rage, nor blame, nor pleading to engage some pity for himself. This sight would make no sense until the light of dawn had transformed Joseph's land into the hills of hope, as planned.

When Peter saw those eyes, he fled across the Kidron Brook and sped in fear and grief to Joseph's field in hopes that night and flight would shield him from the Jewish court and from the eyes of Christ. When he had come, he groped until he found a cave and there he hoped that he would save his life. And in the dark, he cried and poured out everything inside to God.

Oh God of Abraham, what have I done? Three years of sham of faith. Three years of patient grace now thrown back in my Savior's face. Three years of hope that this untamed and cursed mouth might be inflamed with truth in one dark night undone.

Three years of saying, I am one who will not fail you, come what may, in one weak moment thrown away. Then all the promises about my name, the rock, cut out and dashed in pieces by one thing, the damning of my precious King and friend. Oh God, would I have died before I Jesus Christ denied.

The sun was rising on the field of Joseph, but the cave was sealed in darkness deep within. And there, as if in answer to some prayer, a memory awoke among fresh thoughts of suicide. His tongue began to move again as though some solid fact that he should know had forced itself from somewhere deep below the pain of grief and heap of heavy self-reproach into his conscious mind.

Then, softly, through the darkness, Peter spoke. The earth and sky may pass away, the worth of stars may fade, but every word that Jesus spoke and that I heard will stand and never fall. And did he not just hours ago forbid despair and say, You will deny me, Peter, these three times, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you turn, display this mercy for the ones who flee and weep that they have forsaken me.

He paused and thought he heard a sound, but then went on. Lord, if I found in you forgiveness for my sin and treachery, I would begin to speak this grace in hope to all of those who fell and think their fall too far for grace to reach. Again he stopped more suddenly.

And then he swung around. Who's there? He cried. The sound from further deep inside the cave was clear this time.

Hello? Who's there? And are you friend or foe? A trembling voice replied, A friend, I hope. That is, if you intend, oh please, to do what you just said. If I'm not speaking with the dead, what is your name? John Mark, the voice replied.

Well, John, shall I rejoice that you are here or think some bleak and dreadful thought? Come here and speak and let me take your hand and go out in the morning light and know what happened, lad. I can't, the youth replied. Why not? Come, speak the truth.

I don't have anything to wear, he said. You what? My body's bare. I have no clothes.

Well, what on earth? Is this some ritual of birth? You think this cave's a womb? The lad was silent. Peter said, Here, clad yourself with this and held his cloak out toward the voice. It's not a joke, I'm sorry.

Put this on, my son. What happened? I just tried to run. They grabbed my clothes.

I thought that they would kill me. Then I broke away and ran to Joseph's field to find a hiding place. I knew you dined last night at Mother's house and when you left, I saw the spying men and hurried out to tell you there was danger so you could prepare.

But as I crossed the brooks, the men among the rabble noticed when I tried to go around. They sent a squad to chase me and prevent the warning that I brought. I hid until I thought the way was rid of danger.

Then I came. The Lord was being led away. A horde of angry men seemed everywhere.

I followed, but I didn't dare come close. I thought that you and James and John would strike with flames of rage and I would join the fight and we would die or put to flight the enemies of God. And then they saw me, maybe eight or ten.

I outran all but two. And when they caught my cape, I left it. Then they laughed and left me in the dark.

And here I am, the brave John Mark. As Peter held the shivering lad, silence filled the cave. I'm glad God put us in the same dark place here, Peter said.

It is a grace to you and me, for now I see how Jesus' prayer was meant to be and how my sin and burning grief and turning back bring you relief. When you have turned, then raise the dead, he said. Then let me fall and led me, weeping, to an open grave in Joseph's field, the only cave in all these hills where John Mark said farewell to life among the dead.

Is that not what I saw last night in Jesus' eyes? No sacred rage, no blame, no pleading to engage some pity for himself. Instead, a sovereign sorrow as he bled to make my sin your soul's repair and buy the answer to his prayer. Now come and look at candle three, a flame that burns for you and me.

This is the fire in Jesus' eyes, the sovereign sorrow as he dies and takes the lonely field of graves, the mounds of grief and desperate caves, the midnight foothills where we grope and turns them into fields of hope.

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