

John Mark

by W.F. Anderson

The sermon explores the story of John Mark, a young man who failed in his ministry, and highlights the importance of encouragement and support for those who fail, as well as the need for friends in the church to help one another.

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:1, Acts 13:13, Acts 13:22, 2 Corinthians 5:19, 2 Timothy 4:6-9

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Personal Relationships"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by discussing the Gospel of Mark and the author, John Mark. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing and learning from the failures of individuals in the Bible, such as John Mark. The speaker highlights the tendency in society and churches to value success based on size and money, and encourages a shift towards valuing spiritual growth and transformation. The sermon concludes with a focus on the apostle Paul's request for Timothy to come to him before his impending execution, highlighting the significance of personal relationships and support in times of difficulty.

Transcript

Do I say good morning? Good morning. We're glad to be back at Park of the Palms for this week. We always enjoy, and I particularly appreciate, the invitation to bring my wife along.

That, in my experience, is a rare invitation, and I very much appreciate it. And we look forward to this week together, and to share this week with you, and to share the Word of God with you. When I go away like this and return, the folks in Florence always say that I have been revived.

My preaching has greatly improved. In fact, one of them said, last time we ought to send you away more often. So you folks do us good.

This week does us good. We very much enjoy it. Now, I don't expect you to remember, three years ago when we were here, we took up some lessons about our Lord Jesus in the early chapters of Mark's Gospel.

I think we covered the first two or three, and then we looked at some other passages in the New Testament in which our Lord interacted with people in their varied needs, and we saw what our Lord Jesus was like. I'd like to go a little further in Mark's Gospel this year, and look at some of the teaching and the activity, the action of our Lord Jesus. But before we do that, I want to look at the man who wrote the

Gospel, and that's this young man, John Mark.

He shows up in the book of Acts, and then in some of the letters of Paul, and in the first epistle of Peter. We'll not read all the passages that refer to him, but I do want to look in the book of Acts, chapter 13, and then we'll see what Paul has to say about him in his last letter, 2 Timothy. But I want to begin in Acts, chapter 13.

Or perhaps we should begin in chapter 12, because this is where we pick up the story of John Mark. We first meet him in chapter 12, when Peter is released from prison. That is, we first hear about him.

And when Peter was released from prison, miraculously he went to the house of one Mary, the mother of John Mark, where a company of God's people in the city of Jerusalem were meeting, praying. And now, when Barnabas and Saul returned from a famine-relief visit to Jerusalem, we discover in Acts, chapter 12, verse 25, And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark. Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Mana'an, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me, Barnabas and Saul, for the work unto which I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they had also John as their helper. Now, further in chapter 13, verse 13, now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia, and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. Chapter 15, verse 36, And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.

And so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus. And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being commended by the brethren unto the grace of God. Now, 2 Timothy, chapter 4, the letter that Bishop Mould has called the dying letter of the apostle.

It's the last letter we have from his hand. 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 9, Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me. We all know the reason for that.

Paul was going to be executed, and he wanted to seek Timothy. He wanted some help from Timothy before that occurred. Do thy diligence to come shortly, or to come quickly unto me.

For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica, Cretans to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

We live in a world that has gone mad with the idea of success. Success is usually determined in our Western culture by size and money, because both indicate power, and we admire the successful

individual. We have unfortunately carried this over in our Christian life and into our churches, the idea of success, where again success is very often determined by size and money.

And as I think I've indicated to you before, when we get together and I discover where you are from, we have never met before, and I want to know what church or assembly you come from, one of the first questions I ask is how large, how many are in fellowship. Why? Because again we think of success in terms of size and money. We are success-oriented, and I think very often with the wrong measuring stick for success.

It would be good if we had God's measuring stick for success and not our society's measuring stick for success. But one of the ways this has infected us in our Christian thinking is we never talk about failure. This is so true that missionary reports are conditioned to what the audience wants to hear, or what the audience will tolerate.

And we have learned to write letters to people, and we have learned what to put in them and what not to put in them. And what we put in our letters is the accounts of success, but we do not put into our letters the accounts of our failures. And what happens then is that when we come together as a company of God's people, those of us who have failed have nowhere to turn for help, because all of you have done nothing but succeed.

And those of us who have failed have a very difficult time of it. That's one reason I have taken up the story of John Mark. Because John Mark was a servant of God who failed.

And in the depths of our own hearts, if we are alone before God, all of us know the same story, that in some way or another we have failed. Some of us, unfortunately, are bound by that failure, and no longer free to serve God. Sometimes as churches, we bind God's people into their failure in the past, and we never set them free.

John Mark was a servant who failed. He had a tremendous background growing up in the city of Jerusalem. I assume he grew up in Jerusalem, though his cousin was Barnabas, who was a native of Cyprus.

At least his early years were spent there in Jerusalem, and I would take it that his mother was quite wealthy, relatively so. She had a house large enough to accommodate a group of Christians who met together to pray. It was probably one of the meeting places for the Christians in the city of Jerusalem.

They met in various homes throughout that city, and her home was obviously one of them. Her home was large enough to have a courtyard and a gate that fronted on the street. The peasant's home had the door right at the street.

There was no courtyard. You didn't go through a gate. The door was right there at the street.

But there was a gate, and there was a gatekeeper. You remember the young girl who kept that gate? So he grew up in those circumstances, rather well off financially, and exposed to the leaders of the Christian movement in the city of Jerusalem. Peter went to that home when he was released from prison.

The first place he went to, and the company with which Peter was associated, met in that home. And John Mark had grown up under the influence of the apostle Peter. That shows up in Peter's first letter in chapter 5. We didn't read it.

That was written before Paul's second letter to Timothy. But Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 5, talks about John Mark as his son. And only very early in this young man's Christian history there grew up a very, very close bond between Peter and John Mark.

It may have been that Peter was the means of John Mark's conversion, or Peter may simply be referring to John Mark as a disciple. The father-son relationship was very often the figure used for a rabbi-student, a rabbi-disciple relationship. And in the Christian church, of a teacher as a student who had become very, very close.

But there was that very close relationship between John Mark and Peter, and that was the background this young man had in the city of Jerusalem. And now he is brought to Antioch in chapter 13, when Barnabas and Saul return from their ministry of mercy to the Christians in Jerusalem, from the Christians in Antioch, they bring John Mark with them back to the city of Antioch. And what a tremendous experience that must have been.

This church in Antioch was going to be the missionary center through which the Spirit of God began the ministry of reaching the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. When John Mark arrived in Antioch, there was a thriving assembly there, leadership of five prophets and teachers who are listed here in chapter 13, verse 1. He was exposed to an assembly where all these gifts were being used. And he sat unto the ministry of godly and good men, men who became the voice of the Spirit of God to this young man and to the others in that congregation.

And he was exposed to the Word of God and the direct ministry of the Spirit of God through these people in the teaching ministry of the church at Antioch. He had more than that in Antioch. He had leaders who met together to fast and pray before God.

In my mind, there isn't any question in the church, as in any group, what happens to a local congregation depends upon the leadership of that congregation. In my mind, there isn't any question about that. And the leadership of a congregation cannot take that congregation any further along the ways of God than they themselves are walking as leaders.

They are out in front. Wherever they go, the congregation goes. If the leadership is divided, there isn't any question the congregation will be divided.

If that leadership is godly, they can bring God's people along in the same path. But wherever the leadership goes, that's where the congregation is going. And the leadership in the church in Antioch was the kind of leadership that would be a great blessing to any congregation.

They fasted and prayed before the Lord. No wonder things happened in that church in Antioch. No wonder that became the missionary center.

And that was the kind of church to which this young man, John Mark, was exposed. So, the Spirit of God could speak about things to these leaders. He could not speak to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

And it was out of Antioch that Barnabas and Saul went on that first missionary journey that we have recorded in chapters 13 and 14. And he had the great good fortune to be taken along on that first journey by these two great men, Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas and John Mark were cousins, and that may have played a large part in him going along on that first missionary journey.

But off he went. What a tremendous privilege this young man had in all his experiences in Jerusalem and now in Antioch, and now going on this first missionary journey. But we have those abrupt words that, when they left the island of Cyprus and sailed north in the southern part of the land we now know as Turkey, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.

Now, nobody knows why. All sorts of speculations are given. The difficulty of the work there in South Galatia, the fact that his cousin Barnabas was now playing second fiddle to Saul of Tarsus.

I want to suggest something else. And it's just a suggestion because I've already said nobody really knows why he left the work. Believe it, he did.

John Mark came from the city of Jerusalem. And the city of Jerusalem was largely dominated by Jewish Christians whose whole background was Jewish. They spoke Hebrew or Aramaic.

They had grown up in Jewish culture. They were what is known technically as Hebraists. There was another group of Jews who did not grow up in Jewish culture.

They had grown up in Greek culture. Their Bible was the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Their education was Greek.

Their outlook was Greek. While they were still Jews worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and many of them believing in Jesus as the Messiah, their outlook was quite different from the outlook of the Hebraists. And a lot of the trouble that you find in the book of Acts is because of the background of these two groups.

It was inconceivable to a Hebraist that a Gentile could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew. It was necessary that they be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Absolutely inconceivable to a Hebraist that a Gentile could become a Christian without first becoming a Jew.

That was a severe limitation upon the church in Jerusalem. It could not be the instrument that God would use to reach the Gentiles. And so, the church in Antioch became the center for God's reaching the Gentiles.

Now, John Mark comes out of that background where even the apostle Peter, when he came to Antioch, ran into trouble. You remember when the men came up from Jerusalem, and then Peter separated himself from the Gentile Christians with whom he'd been in fellowship? That was the background of John Mark. Now, when they go to the island of Cyprus, which is Barnabas' home country, and they are preaching in the synagogues, fine, no problem.

But perhaps it became evident that Saul of Tarsus was determined on a different course, that he was going to reach the Gentiles as Gentiles and bring them into the Christian church without bringing them through the door of Judaism. And that may have been more than John Mark could handle. If that is going to be the ministry of this missionary group, no, I'm going back to Jerusalem.

It's possible that's what John Mark saw, and his whole background at this time in his life would not permit him to go on in that team in happy fellowship with the apostle Paul, who now had become the leader of the team. Be that as it may, at least he left that missionary team. And at the end of that missionary journey, as we saw in chapter 15, when Saul and Barnabas are ready to go back over the ground they had already covered, Barnabas wants to take John Mark with them.

And the apostle Paul says, nothing doing. There is no way John Mark is going to go with us. I will not have a man, and it's a strong word that's used in chapter 15, I will not have a man who apostatized, is the word.

Now, it's not that he apostatized from doctrine, but that's the force of the term. He apostatized and did not go to the work. What is in Paul's mind? The work! We've got a job to do, and the job God has given me to do is to reach the Gentiles with the good news about Jesus Christ.

I will not have a man with me who's going to stand in the way of reaching the Gentiles. No, John Mark cannot go. What the apostle Paul saw was the work, and we need people like that who see the work and who can get the job done.

Men who are leaders and administrators and organizers and know how to get about it and get it done. We need people like that. Of course we need the doers, but we need the administrators who see how it can be done, and can use the doers to get it done.

And that was the apostle Paul. He saw the job. He knew how to handle it.

He knew how to get the job done, and he didn't want anything or anyone standing in the way of the job getting done. And we need people like that. On the other hand, there was Barnabas.

What did Barnabas see? Barnabas saw a young man with real potential, and he wanted to save that young man for the works of God. Barnabas, as all of us know, has a name that means the son of consolation, and he was given that name by the apostle. His real name was Joseph, but he was given the name Barnabas by the apostle because he was a son of consolation, a son of encouragement.

And that figure of speech has the idea, not that he was the one who was encouraged, but he was the kind of man who encouraged others. And I think we were better to translate it encouragement rather than consolation. What was the ministry of Barnabas? To encourage.

That's why the Christians in Jerusalem sent him up to Amphioch when they heard about the work of God there. And he saw, what did he see? He saw the grace of God. That's what he saw.

And he was the one who encouraged them to plead to the Lord with all their heart. That's the kind of man he was. And he saw this young man, John Mark, and what he wanted to do was encourage this man to go on for God.

Let's give him another chance, Paul. Let's help him. Paul says, no, I'm not going to take him.

And Barnabas says, well, I'm committed to John Mark. I'm going to help him. We're going to take him.

No, we're not. And here are two great men fighting over John Mark, so much so that Paul and Barnabas break up their missionary team. A couple of things come to me immediately.

What I want to do when I come to that chapter is who was right, Barnabas or Paul? And that is always a useless question. Who was right? Who was wrong? Who was right? Was Paul right? Was Barnabas right? That's a useless question to ask and try to answer because the Word of God doesn't answer it. But I know this.

Barnabas was willing to pay a tremendous price to help John Mark. I know that. It cost Barnabas a lot to save this young man for the work of God.

It cost him his co-service with the Apostle Paul. And as far as the record of the book of Acts is concerned, because of course Luke is interested in the work of Paul and traces the development of the gospel westward through the Roman Empire, but as far as the record of the book of Acts is concerned, Barnabas drops right out of it. It cost him a lot to help that young man, John Mark.

But I want to think about John Mark. Put yourself in John Mark's place. You had gone with these two great men on that first missionary journey, and now Barnabas is saying, I want to take him back.

And here you are face-to-face with the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Paul says, no, I will not have a man to apostatize from the work of God. Yes, John Mark failed. Whatever the reason, John Mark failed.

Now what are we going to do with a man who failed, particularly a preacher who has failed? What are we going to do with him? I think one of the most tragic stories in our churches is the way we treat preachers and missionaries who fail. What does a man like John Mark need at this point? He needs a friend. That's what he needs.

And thank God he had one in his cousin Barnabas, a friend who was so committed to him that he would pay any price to help him. And that was the salvation of John Mark in his service for God. Are there people in your assembly who have failed? What do they need? They don't need a lecture.

They don't need to be told how terrible it is that they have failed. What do they need? They need a friend who is completely committed to them, and who is willing to bear the shame of identification with them in their failure. Isn't that what our Lord did for us? Didn't he, as the friend of sinners, identify himself with us in our failure and bear the shame of that identification? Didn't he do that for us? Why are we so slow to do it for each other? What did we sing this morning as we remembered our Lord? He brings a poor, vile sinner into his house of wine.

Whom did he bring in? Poor, vile sinners. The truth of the matter is we are all failures, and we needed a friend to come alongside us and identify with us and bear the shame of that identification. And that's exactly what our Lord Jesus did.

And that is what we need to do for each other. Bearing shame and scoffing, rude, in my place, condemned, he stood. To some degree that's what Barnabas did with John Mark.

He stood with him in his rejection and his shame, and it cost Barnabas a lot to do that. That was John Mark's failure, but he had a friend. Was it worth it? Well, if we had had time this morning to read what Paul wrote to the Colossians about John Mark, we did read what he wrote in 2 Timothy about John Mark.

Now years and years have passed, and the Apostle Paul is in his second imprisonment. He wrote about John Mark in his first imprisonment, spoke very glowingly of him there in Rome with him, and of the comfort that John Mark and others had been to Paul. Where do you suppose, where do you suppose John Mark learned to be a comfort to somebody? Huh? Yeah, he learned it from his cousin Barnabas.

That's where he learned it. And the lesson of that experience was burned into John Mark's life. And now, when the Apostle Paul himself is rejected and in shame and imprisoned, who stands with him and bears that shame? John Mark.

Others, like Demas, seeing what it was going to cost them to stand with the Apostle Paul in his shame, left. They loved this world, Paul writes of Demas. Now, not this evil world, this world, this present world.

They wanted to save their own necks, and they went to serve God where it was safer. To stay here with the Apostle Paul might bring down the same judgments on them who stood with the Apostle Paul in his shame. John Mark.

Do you know one of the most important pieces of work we can do is get hold of other people and help them, and to see in their lives some of the lessons we have been trying to put into those lives, and then to stand back and see that whole thing work in their experience. I'd rather have that than 10,000 people listening to me on a Sunday morning, to see something of what you have learned before God reproduced in another Christian's life. And that's exactly what Barnabas could do when he saw John Mark.

He could stand back and watch John Mark be a comfort to the Apostle Paul in his first imprisonment. But now it's Paul's second imprisonment, and this time there's no question about the outcome. He's going to be executed, and he can write to Timothy, the time of my departure is at hand.

I know it. I know it. Now, Timothy, please hurry and get here before then.

I want to see you again. Now, when you're in that extremity, there are only certain people you want to see. Is that right? Some of you have been quite ill in a hospital.

Who did you want to see? Some impersonal hospital chaplain coming in? Who did you want to see? Oh, your loved ones and your close friends, didn't you? Yes, of course. That's one reason we prefer to die at home. We want to be surrounded by our loved ones and our friends.

Now, Paul knows he's going to die, and he wants certain people with him when that happens. Whom does he want? Well, Timothy, for one. And you see that strong bond of affection that has grown up between Paul and Timothy.

Who else? Oh, I want John Mark. Bring John Mark with you. Isn't that great? Years before, Paul says nothing to him.

I won't have him. And now when he's dying, he says, I want to see John Mark. Oh, I like that man, Paul.

I like him. He wasn't fixed on what John Mark did on the first missionary journey. He was willing to adjust himself to the realities of the situation now.

John Mark's failure on that first missionary journey was wiped out. And the man he wanted as he faced the executioner's sword, the man he wanted was John Mark. Isn't that great? Paul and John Mark so totally reconciled, so totally one in the spirit of Jesus Christ, that that's the man Paul wants.

Get hold of John Mark, bring him with you. I want to see. I think sometimes we forget that God has not given us the ministry of judgment, but the ministry of reconciliation.

We would like to exercise the ministry of judgment, but he has reserved that for himself. He's the only one who can judge with a heart of love. And so he's reserved that for himself, but we still want it.

If you're like me, you want to find out who was right and who was wrong. Does that mean in second Timothy chapter four, that Paul had been wrong? That's the question that comes to my mind. I suppose it comes to yours too, because I want the ministry of judgment.

What difference does it make who was right and who was wrong? The only thing that really matters is Paul and John Mark were friends, very deep friends. That's the only thing that matters. When a couple comes to me having marital trouble, it happens almost every time they want me to decide who is right and who is wrong.

And when that starts in the session, I say, look, wait a minute, wait a minute. You take your case down to family court. That's what that judge is paid for to find out who's right and who's wrong.

I'm not interested. I'm only interested in one thing, what we can do to work out a reconciliation. That's all I'm interested in.

If you want to find out who's right and who's wrong, go to court. God has given us a ministry of reconciliation, not a ministry of judgment. And who was right and who was wrong is of no importance.

The only really important thing is they were friends and they could walk into the presence of Jesus Christ arm in arm. And that's all that matters. But there was John Mark.

I find that very encouraging. John Mark was a servant of God who failed, but he found the grace of God through his cousin Barnabas. And what we should have lost, humanly speaking, if it hadn't been for Barnabas, that lovely gospel of Mark, what we should have lost if it hadn't been for a man like Barnabas, who was willing to pay a tremendous price to see this man restored to the usefulness of Christian service.

You fail? Who hasn't? You failed grievously. Who hasn't? You failed and that's the end of your usefulness to God? Oh, no, no, no, no. God in Christ was reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.

And he's still doing that for us. Your days of usefulness are over? Not by a long shot. And the other thing I want to leave with us is let's try to be a Barnabas.

Let's help one another. And as Harold St. John said in his lovely devotional commentary on the gospel of Mark, we have the record of the perfect servant, our Lord Jesus, written by the servant who failed. And you can write the same record in your own life, the record of the perfect servant, written in the life of the servant who failed.

That's the grace of God. Let's pray. Our Father, with hearts filled with thanksgiving this morning, we praise you for your grace, the grace that brought us to our Lord Jesus to begin with, but the grace that we have every day that you deal with us on that same basis.

Help us, we pray, to get hold of this in our own lives, your restoring, forgiving grace, and help us to show it to each other. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Audio: http://archive.org/download/SERMONINDEX_SID7969/SID7969.mp3

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wf-anderson/john-mark/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net