

Message #1**Various Texts**

Back in 1958, a man named Cliff Hillegass was working for a Nebraska book company in Lincoln, Nebraska. He met a man from Canada, whose name was Jack Cole, who had developed a series of study guides that were designed to enhance learning for Canadian students. Cliff and his wife Cathleen decided to start a little business in their basement to promote learning by condensing and compacting the main components of great literary works. They decided to name the business “CliffsNotes.”

The booklets are available today on hundreds of works. They are written to give a thorough understanding to a student by condensing and compacting the key data. When you read one of these “CliffsNotes” books, you do come away with an accurate grasp of the information.

The Gospel of Mark is like the “CliffsNotes” of the Gospels. It is condensed and compact. It is all action. It is present tense condensed action. Of all of the Gospels, Mark uses the adverb “immediately” more than all other Gospel writers combined. Matthew, Luke, and John use the word “immediately” a collective total of about 30 times and Mark uses it 42 times alone (1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 30, 42, 43; 2:8, 12; 3:6; 4:5, 15, 16, 17, 29; 5:2, 29, 30, 42, 42; 6:25, 27, 45, 50, 54; 7:25, 35; 8:10; 9:15, 20, 24; 10:52; 11:2, 3; 14:43, 45, 72; 15:1).

As Kent Hughes said, “Everything is in vivid “Eyewitness Newsbriefs,” brilliantly vivid and fast moving” (*Mark*, p. 15). Dr. Mark Strauss said, “Mark’s gospel starts off with remarkable speed and energy. The author wastes no time...” (Mark L. Strauss, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Mark*, p. 17). William Hendriksen said the three most obvious characteristics of Mark are “compactness, vividness, and orderliness” (*The Gospel of Mark*, p. 18). This is a short compacted book.

In the next weeks we would like to take you through this remarkable 16 chapter book known as the Gospel of Mark.

QUESTION #1 – Why study Mark?

Let us give us four reasons:

Reason #1 - Because Mark is one of only 66 inspired books that God has given to man.

This probably seems redundant, but the fact is it is always true with any book in the Bible. God has inspired only 66 books and He has given those books to man for his benefit. Therefore it behooves us to study it.

The fact that Mark is an inspired book of God is established by the manuscript evidence. There is a museum called the Beatty Museum located near Dublin that contains a critical collection of Greek manuscripts which were copied in A.D. 250. The manuscripts are called p45, 46, 47.

P45 is made up of pieces of 30 leaves of a papyrus in book form and in it are two leaves from Matthew, two from John, **six from Mark** and seven from Luke, and thirteen from Acts.

There is also a collection of manuscripts copied around A.D. 350, written in all capital Greek letters (Uncial). This collection is called the Codex Vaticanus (B) and it contains the Gospel of Mark. Another key collection of Greek manuscripts is called the Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) from A.D. 340 and it contains the Gospel of Mark.

Furthermore, Mark was quoted as being an inspired book by Polycarp (A.D. 140); Justin Martyr (A.D. 150); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 160); Tertullian (A.D. 170).

It was specifically named as an inspired book of the Bible by Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315); Eusebius (A.D. 325); Jerome (A.D. 340); and Augustine (A.D. 400).

All major council meetings identified Mark as being an inspired book of the Bible. Council of Nicea (A.D. 325); Hippo (A.D. 393); Carthage (A.D. 397); Carthage (A.D. 419).

Clearly the evidence is overwhelming that Mark is one of the rare inspired and preserved books of God.

Reason #2 - Because Mark is the least studied book of all of the Gospels.

Mark's Gospel was probably the most neglected Gospel of the early church and frankly is probably the most neglected by the modern church. Matthew, John, and Luke have been studied much more than the Gospel of Mark.

In fact, no commentary was written on the book of Mark until the sixth century. At that time Victor of Antioch, who could not find any previous commentary on Mark, wrote down some comments on Mark based on other comments made by other teachers on the other Gospel books. So Mark has been somewhat of a neglected book in Biblical exposition.

This is absolutely true for me personally. My goal is to have carefully expounded all 66 books before God takes me home and I am nearing about 50 books so far. I have to this point expounded every N.T. book except one and that one is Mark. So in some respects I have been guilty of falling into the same trap as the history of the church.

Now probably the reason why Mark has been neglected is because Mark is the shortest Gospel and about 90 percent of the stories in the Gospel are found in the other Gospels like Matthew or Luke.

But the fact is Mark is an inspired book of God and we do not want to overlook any inspired book because the data in this book is as important for us as any other book in the Bible. William Graham Scroggie said, "Mark is not in the front line of Christian personalities" (*The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*, p. 277). **What Mark shows us is non front line people can end up doing a prominent and important work for God.**

Reason #3 - Because Mark gives us very unique salvific truth about Jesus Christ.

Right at the outset we learn that this will be a discourse about “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1). We must assume that there is a portrait in Mark about Jesus Christ that God wants us to have that is unique. Mark obviously brings to the inspired table something about Jesus Christ that enhances our knowledge that we gain from Matthew, Luke and John. Otherwise, God would have never gone to the trouble to inspire this book.

Now we know that Matthew presents the fact that Jesus Christ as God was truly Israel’s King.

Luke presents the fact that Jesus Christ as God was truly man.

John presents the fact that Jesus Christ as man was truly the God/Son.

Mark presents the fact that Jesus Christ the God-King-Savior was truly a servant who was willing to suffer.

The first half of the Gospel (Mark 1:1-8:30) demonstrates that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and Savior and Son of God. The last half of the Gospel (Mark 8:31-16:8) presents the idea that Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, Savior and Son of God, was willing to take on a suffering role as a servant in order to be the Savior.

This point became critical for Israel to grasp. Jesus Christ was, in fact, the mighty King and Messiah, but his initial role in coming to this role was not to conquer the Romans. His initial role was to suffer and die for sin.

Mark’s job was to present a portrait of Jesus Christ that showed the Gentile world that this King of the Jews and God-man-Savior was willing to suffer as a servant of God so that sinners could be saved.

Reason #4 - Because Mark teaches us that faithfulness to doing God’s will as a servant of God often leads in this world to opposition, persecution, suffering and even death.

Serving God in this world does not typically lead one to great popularity and acceptability. You typically do not win elections by serving Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Perfect servant of God, and as a servant He was opposed, hated and eventually killed.

When Mark wrote, the Gentile believers were being arrested and even executed by Nero and Mark wanted to remind all that a relationship with Jesus Christ is not popular. Serving God faithfully often leads to suffering.

We need to remember this point. Faithfully serving the Lord does not immediately win awards. Mark wanted us to realize this point. He wanted us to see that Jesus Christ, who was the God/King, who perfectly served God and did great things, also suffered.

For these reasons we are going to study Mark.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote Mark?

None of the four Gospels actually name themselves. Undoubtedly the reason for this is because they are presenting an account of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

However, there is strong evidence that **the Gospel of Mark was written by John-Mark** (John is his Jewish name and Mark is his Roman name).

John Mark is mentioned frequently in the New Testament (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-39; Col. 4:10; Phile. 24; II Tim. 4:11; I Pet. 5:13). He apparently was the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He also was a part-time associate of both Peter and Paul. Both of them mention him.

He travelled with Barnabas and Paul on Paul's first missionary journey, but when they came off the island of Cypress and got to Perga, he left them and returned home. This led to a real breach in the relationship with Paul, and eventually Paul would not let him travel with him again and, as a result, Barnabas took Mark and went to Cypress and Paul took Silas and went on missionary journey #2 (Acts 15:36-39). But in the end, Mark proved himself to be faithful.

In fact, Paul would refer to him as a "fellow-worker" (Philemon 24) and he wanted to see him one more time before he was executed (II Tim. 4:11). We also learn that Mark developed a close relationship with Peter, who called him his son (I Pet. 4:13). So Mark had a rich heritage, he had literally been with Paul, and his spiritual father apparently was Peter. Those are two big name apostles that Mark personally knew.

It was this Mark who wrote this Gospel of Mark. Eusebius says that Papias, who was the Bishop of the church of Hierapolis (A.D. 95-110), claimed that Mark wrote down things he had learned about Jesus Christ by listening to Peter. Papias did not know the apostles himself, but he did know those who had direct contact with Peter, specifically the daughters of Philip the Evangelist.

There is a writing in the late second century by Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236), who wrote against the heresies that were surfacing in the early church, that says Mark was the author of the Gospel of Mark and it links him to Peter. Hippolytus claimed that John Mark was nicknamed "stump-fingered" because one finger was very short. Some have said it was a congenital matter, which he was born with and others say it was caused by an accident. There is an odd note in the Latin Vulgate that claims Mark amputated a finger so he could disqualify himself from going into the Jewish priesthood. Hippolytus claims that Mark wrote this after the death of Peter and he wrote it from Italy.

Irenaeus, in A.D. 180, said, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also handed over to us, in writing, the things preached by Peter."

From this we may conclude that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark.

The wonderful lesson to learn here is that one may be greatly used by God in powerful ways even after they have blown it if that one will re-focus and recommit himself to Jesus Christ and to the written Scriptures.

QUESTION #3 – When was Mark written?

There have been three main views on this point:

- 1) **View #1** - Mark was written A.D. 55-60 while Peter was preaching in Rome.
- 2) **View #2** - Mark was written in the mid-A.D. 60's during the persecution of Nero.
- 3) **View #3** - Mark was written after A.D. 67-A.D. 70 after the death of Peter and Paul.

Irenaeus claimed that Mark wrote after the deaths of Peter and Paul. If this historical statement is accurate, this would mean that Mark wrote this Gospel sometime after A.D. 67. We may also assume that **since there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem that it was written before Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.**

So our conclusion is that **Mark wrote Mark between the years A.D. 67 to A.D. 70.**

More than likely Mark was compiling this data while Peter was alive and then put it all together shortly after Peter and Paul were dead.

Now the theological lesson to learn from this is that when we are going through difficult things in life, we need to focus on Jesus Christ. We need to focus on our relationship with Him.

QUESTION #4 – What is the purpose of Mark?

This has been a much debated point because Mark does not specifically state his purpose. **Some have speculated that Matthew wrote an account of Jesus Christ for the Jewish mind; Luke wrote for the Greek mind and Mark wrote for the Roman mind.**

Mark is the only one who mentions that Simon of Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus, two men mentioned in the book of Romans (Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13). It also may be observed that Mark uses several Latin words not found in the other Gospels, i.e. “executioner” (6:27).

Some have suggested that Mark wrote this to Gentile believers who were living during the Neronian persecution to encourage them that being a servant of Christ does mean at times you do suffer.

Others say that he wrote to explain that even though Jesus Christ appeared to be a suffering servant, He truly was the God-King-Savior-Messiah.

We may assume that Mark's purpose was not just to give people a biographical or historical sketch of the life of Jesus Christ by picking out a few interesting stories about Jesus' life. The material that he chooses has specific purpose.

It would appear that it is possible that Mark wanted to write this so that Gentile believers would be strengthened to endure suffering and hardship and persecution for their faith. To do this he records a lot of information about the sufferings of Christ.

About 1/3rd of the book has to do with the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. There are many references to suffering in the book (1:12-13; 3:21-22; 30-35; 8:34-38; 10:30, 33-34, 45; 13:8, 11-13).

One verse in Mark that has often been viewed as thematic is **Mark 10:45 that says, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.”**

We would submit based on this verse that there are at least **three stated purposes**:

- 1) Mark does reveal the Son of Man did come to this earth. God did come in human form.
- 2) Mark does reveal that the Son of man came to this earth not to be served, but to serve.
The next time he comes, he will come to reign, not serve.
- 3) Mark does reveal that the Son of man came to this earth to give His life a ransom for many.
This, of course, would be the salvific purpose of His coming.

Mark wanted believers to know that faithfulness to Jesus Christ will often lead to suffering and persecution.

Mark is also interested in establishing the fact that the offer of the grace Gospel to us means that Jesus Christ had to come here as a real human and servant of God to suffer as no other Person has ever suffered.

But I also think it is legitimate to take a look at opening statements in a book. In fact, when it comes to Mark, one commentator said, “the first line of Mark’s gospel can be understood ...as the title to the whole work” (Mark Strauss, *Mark*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, p. 59).

If we take the opening statements of the various Gospels, we are not wrong to conclude the following:

- 1) Matthew was to show that Jesus was the Messiah, the Davidic King, and Jewish (Matt. 1:1).
- 2) Mark was to show how the Gospel began with Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God (Mark 1:1).
- 3) Luke was to give an accurate chronological account of Jesus Christ’s Person and work from His birth to His ascension (Luke 1:1-4).
- 4) John was to show that Jesus Christ is God, the only one who can save sinners by faith in Him (John 1:1).

Taking all things into consideration, we conclude that Mark’s purpose is this:

MARK’S GOSPEL WAS WRITTEN TO SHOW HOW THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST BEGAN WHEN THE SON OF GOD DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN TO BECOME A HUMAN AND A SERVANT OF GOD IN ORDER TO SAVE SINNERS.