

JOHN MARK

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John Mark was not an apostle, but he occupies a special place in the early history of the church of Christ. Bible students are more familiar with him than some of the apostles. Mark witnessed many of the great events recorded in the New Testament, and he helped make some of them.

Mark had the honor of writing one of the four accounts of the gospel. He obviously knew Jesus personally when he was a “young man”—possibly a teenager. His early adult life spanned an exciting and turbulent era for the church. While working with Barnabas and Saul in Antioch of Syria, Mark was invited to accompany them on the first great effort to preach to the Gentiles.

For some unexplained reason, he left them at Perga and returned home. Perhaps he thought, as most dedicated young men tend to do, that this mission was high adventure—exciting and romantic. He quickly learned there was very little “fun and games.” Instead, it was hard, demanding work.

The trip was full of disappointment and bitter, hateful, vicious opposition by evil men who hated the light and those who brought it. Whatever his reason for leaving, it was unacceptable to Paul, so Mark lost his opportunity to serve this great apostle for many years. As far as Paul was concerned, he was “**Mark the Quitter.**”

John Mark has not been the only quitter to disgrace the Lord’s church. Many can doubtless remember how full of enthusiasm and ready for any good work they were when they first obeyed the gospel. They were zealous in doing the Lord’s will—teaching the lost, visiting the sick, encouraging the weak, and faithful in worship.

Then, for some reason, the fire died out. Activity ceased, and numbing lethargy claimed them. They are still in the church, but now they only occupy space on a pew—occasionally.

If every Christian were as faithful as they are, the church would seldom meet except on Sunday morning, and it would miss at least half of those assemblies. The church would have no Bible classes; they were cancelled long ago for lack of interest.

If the church were like them, no one would be visited for any reason: sickness, grief, physical or spiritual need, or even social fellowship. There would be no effort—ever—to reach the lost or to help brethren grow spiritually. Not one soul would ever again be taught the truth, and none of us—the church or the world—would be saved. Think of it, and consider. Perhaps this describes you!

But this does not tell John Mark’s entire story, and yours does not have to end here either. Years later, Mark was a different man. He had certainly lost his self-respect and the apostle Paul’s confidence; but with passing years, all this was regained.

He had made a mistake, but his life was not over. He obviously corrected the error and learned from it. We cannot know everything that contributed to Mark’s recovery. The influence and encouragement of Barnabas was surely a factor.

Paul refused to endanger his next mission by taking someone who had earlier deserted under pressure. He may have told Mark frankly, but lovingly, why he could not go. This would have helped Mark to see, better than anything else, just how immature and undependable he was.

Sometimes the cruelest thing we can do to our friends is to be so gentle and kind (or too cowardly) that we will not tell them the truth. How many have been saved because some brave Paul looked them squarely in the eye and told them exactly what they needed to hear?

Of course, it takes courage and uncommon love to do this, but there are times when nothing less will suffice. Nathan confronted David the king with his sin (2 Sam. 12:1-15); and, in repenting, David wrote the bittersweet penitential Psalms we all cherish so much.

Jesus told the rich young ruler just what was lacking in his life. He did not repent, but he certainly had no illusions about the god he really worshipped (Mark 10:17-22).

Paul told the Corinthians what they needed to hear, and many of them, in repenting, found a renewed enthusiasm (2 Cor. 7:8-11). He reminded the Galatian brethren of their folly and danger although he incurred the risk that by doing so he could become their enemy (Gal. 4:16).

John Mark did redeem himself. During Paul's first imprisonment many years later, Mark was not only with him but was also a source of comfort (Col. 4:10f). Perhaps the greatest compliment Mark ever received was shortly before Paul died. In the last letter the apostle wrote, he said: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is useful to me for ministering" (2 Tim. 4:11).

His recovery should encourage us; for who does not, at one time or another, fail to live up to the challenges we face? One of the endearing things about Christ's religion is that, even when we do fail, we can be forgiven and begin again to strive for that "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phi. 3:12-14).

The important thing is for us to be faithful to our God. We may stumble and falter at times, but let us never give up! It is those who continue faithful to the end who receive the crown of life (2 Tim. 4:7-8; Rev. 2:10).

Then, one day, we can pass the baton of challenge and conquest to other faithful brethren who will continue the battle for men's souls (2 Tim. 2:2; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). We can then go to our eternal home in peace, knowing we have fought the good fight; we have finished the course; and we have kept the faith (2 Tim. 4:7f).~