
John Mark – The Enlister

2 Timothy 4:11

Ken Ebert

Introduction

All of us at one time or another has known a young enthusiastic person who was eager to volunteer for ministry, someone who is always ready to raise their hand to say pick me I'll go without fully realizing what may be required of him for that ministry.

John Mark was a young man much like this. He was eager to enlist, and volunteer for ministry. I like to begin this evening by setting the stage as to why this young man John Mark may have become enthusiastic about wanting to enlist for this ministry. Try if you will to put yourself in the shoes of John Mark for the next few minutes. He come from, you might say, a good and a godly family. He is around people who are obviously quite well-known as Christian leaders. One day these gifted Christian leaders approach this young man, and ask "John Mark "would you like to assist us on a missionary journey. We are going Antioch, to minister, and share the gospel, and there is a variety of ways you can help us, and perhaps there will be some spiritual activities that you will be of assistance to us as well". I believe a young man who was eager and enthusiastic to minister would say "are you kidding; I would love to go", not realizing what sacrifices, hardships, and dangers that would lie ahead for him. You have to imagine that John Mark was probably very flattered to have been asked to go and minister with these well know, and Godly men. Perhaps he thought to himself "they must see something useful in me, and I must be valuable to them if they want to take me with them when there are others to choose from". So you can imagine that John Mark must have felt very encouraged, maybe even flattered, to think that here were these two well-known Christian leaders that were going to take him on this great missionary adventure.

John Mark may have never been away from home before, and thinking of sailing across the Mediterranean, to the island of Cyprus was I'm sure very exciting for him. He may have been thinking to himself "we can start church after church, and share the gospel throughout the island, and God will draw many to Him", but John Mark wasn't fully aware of laid ahead of him, and he wasn't fully prepared for the circumstances that would arise in the future. Before we go any further let take a deeper look into scripture to learn more of who this young man John Mark was, and look at the men he partnered with in ministry.

Partners in Ministry

His story as it emerges from the pages of Scripture.

His Connections

Colossians 4:10; Acts 12:12, 25

What do we know about this man John Mark, and his relationships? In Colossians 4:10 we see some of the connections he had. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions if he comes to you welcome him). So we see from this passage that John Mark was a cousin to Barnabas.

What else do the scriptures tell us about John Mark? In Acts 12:12 we read “When he realized this (Peter who was rescued from prison), he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying”. So we know that John Mark had, and was raised in a home where there were many Christians, as well as family members who prayed. There is no record of John Mark's father, but we do know something about his mother Mary. She obviously had quite a large house because there the Christians or at least a large number of them in Jerusalem, were meeting together to pray for Peter who had been incarcerated in prison. Remember that the church at this particular time, and for about a hundred and fifty years after this, did not have church buildings. Today when people talk of a church, they usually mean a building, but the church is not a building at all; it is a building in which the church meets. The church is the body of believers. At the beginning the church rarely met in a public place building. For the most part they had none. They met in homes, and Mary's home was a place where the church meets.

Peter was to have been put to death the next day; and they got together to pray for his release. They gathered together much like we gather together each Wednesday night at flock to pray for one another and encourage one another. When sickness, discouragement, and personal problems are affecting us we need to come together in prayer for one another. We need to take off our masks of everything ok with me, and become more transparent so that others will know how to pray for us that we might be encouraged, and in return be encourager to others in times of difficulties. Even when we think we have no human hope, and we have no power to heal or deliver, we must realize that God may still work in changing the outcome. Prayer does not always operate as we would prefer, but that doesn't mean that it is ineffective, or that it is little more than talking to ourselves. There is power in prayer; it can make a difference in the outcome of events when we become a church family who fervently prays for one another, and it did here in the house of Mary, in answer to their prayers of the release of Peter.

A few verses later in Acts 12:25 we learn a little more about those individuals who were involved in John Mark's life. “*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark*”. Barnabas and Saul are returning back up to Antioch. If you go back one chapter, the end of chapter eleven of Acts, you remember that there had been a prophet named Agabus who had come from Jerusa-

lem to Antioch to warn them in a prophetic way that there was going to be a great famine, throughout the world, that actually came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. So how did Barnabas and Paul come to know John Mark? They may have stayed at John Mark's mother's house. Most of us if we had relatives, and we were in a strange city would go there in hopes that they would put us up. So it could have been possibly that Paul and Barnabas were actually living there in the house of Mary and they would have got to know John Mark in a more intimate and close way, seeing in him potential, and as a result choose to take John Mark under their wing and mentor him. What a great foundation to have as a young Christian, Key relationships, a good Christian family environment, and having seasoned men of God to mentor you. What a great foundation for a successful ministry. But there more to the story, and John Mark was about to face some challenges.

His Challenge

Acts 13:5, 13

Acts chapter thirteen opens by telling us of the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, and the Lord has indicted to them that they are to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He has called them so they fast and they pray, they lay hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them on there way. In verse 5 we read *“When they arrived at Salarmis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them”*. So here is John Mark, he is accompanying his cousin Barnabas and the Apostle Paul. Remember John Mark was along to minister as their servant; He was someone who was going to help them in the many task of ministry. As we read on in the chapter we come to the sad incident in verse thirteen, *“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem”*.

John Mark had gone as a helper, showing willingness to serve, but perhaps his commitment was not strong enough. I once heard someone say, “serving in ministry produces joy but not ease; although at times fulfilling, it also includes hardships”, and perhaps John Mark was taking a second look at the difficulty and danger he would be facing, and what might be in store for him on this journey. We are not told why John Mark turned back, maybe it was a bit of homesickness, conflict with one or both of his companions, a realization that he wasn't ready for ministry, perhaps he was missing his mother and wanted to get home, but most probably it was a case of being fearful. John Mark may have realized that there was going to be beatings and the possibility of death that awaited him if he were to go on with Barnabas and Paul. So John Mark abandons that mission, and he goes back to Jerusalem.

His Conflict

Acts 15:37-39

Now in Acts 15:37-39 we see the conflict that arose between Barnabas and Paul because of John Mark returning to Jerusalem. Now John Mark had returned to Antioch to the church there. Barnabas wanted to take him with them on the next journey. He wanted to give him another chance. Follow along with me in Acts

15:37-39 “*Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus*”. Try to image for a minute their discussion with each other. Paul saying “listen Barnabas, John Mark just doesn’t have what it takes to be a missionary. He came with us the first time. He saw how the Lord provided all the time, but when it comes to risk he can’t take the heat he is to wet behind the ears. I won’t take him with me. He abandoned us the first time; there no way we can rely on him for what’s in front of us now. He blew it, he’s not going. But Barnabas, the encourager might have responded by saying “Paul he may be a little wet behind the ears, but can’t you see what he did right? He’s wasn’t a total failure. I see a lot of potential in him. After all he did have the faith to at least come with us didn’t he? If we’re just patient, gracious, and mentor to him I believe John Mark can be valuable to us and a partnership can be developed. I believe the Lord has great plans for John Mark”.

Barnabas went the extra mile to help John Mark. Barnabas took a young inexperienced zealous man with him, and we find out later that Barnabas’s support, encouragement, and mentoring changed the life of John Mark. We need people in our lives like John Mark had; people who believed in the greatest Encourager. Don’t turn there, but in 2 Cor. 1:3 “*Gods word says “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”*”. The grace of Jesus changed Barnabas into a son of the Father of encouragement. Like Father, like son. So Barnabas was treating others the way God treated him with grace. He knew the source of encouragement, and he became a wonderful imitator of our Father Love, mercy and kindness.

His Commendation Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11

Now as we look in 2 Timothy 4:11 and Colossians 4:10 we come to a touching reference from the hand of Paul. 2 Timothy 4:11 “*Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry*”. In the last imprisonment of Paul, he asks Timothy to bring a number of things with him when he comes to visit before winter. One of those was John Mark. Paul says bring him he is useful to me. Colossians 4:10 also indicates to us that John Mark had been fully restored to a place in ministry that was profitable. *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions if he comes to you, receive welcome him)*, Paul again is saying welcome him as he is useful to you.

Paul recognized the value that Mark had for the ministry. So we see that Paul by this time was more then pleased for John Mark to be involved again in the ministry. So obviously Mark had been completely rehabilitated by this time. So in the end, John Mark received praise, approval, and commendation.

Principles for Ministry

What do we see, and learn from the observations of John Marks character and conduct?

Partners are cultivated not in isolation, but in personal relationships.

If we are honest, we have to admit that John Mark would not have been able to be mentored in a way that would have brought him to the place of restoration in the ministry if he had not allow himself to seek out, and make relationships so that he could be mentored. We will never be able to cultivate relationships with other people if we remain isolated. It will require us to step out of our so called comfort zones, and become engaged with people that are in ministry, which in turn will allow us to partner with others in ministry.

Partners are developed through patient mentoring.

When we look at different types of ministries, do we include the ministry of mentoring? Mentoring is the way of partnering with other to make disciples. We need to be partnering together in Christ. Mentoring is important to developing gifts so that others can learn to minister. Barnabas gave us that solid biblical model for mentoring others. On the flip side of the coin there are those who need to seek out a mentor. The distressed need comfort, workers need compliments, new believers need support, and wayward Christians require help. Allow someone to mentor you, and take you under their wing like Barnabas took John Mark under his, so that you can again become useful for the kingdom of God.

Partners sometimes fail in ministry in spite of the best of intentions and instructors.

Sometimes when we read biographies of great Christians, missionary it looks very exciting to us. We may think would it not be wonderful to be a missionary. Would it not be wonderful to be a preacher of the gospel and to be used like that, but often times we are not told of the blood, sweat, and tears in between, and as a result we fail in our ministry. Possibly this was what it was like for John Mark, being a missionary was not quite as he thought it was going to be, even known he had the best of intentions and instructors. Remember to fall is not failure but to refuse to get up again is where the real failure takes place. Even when we fall into sin we can repent and get back up again and continue partner with others for God glory. All of us at one time or another will fail. Perhaps you can identify your life with that of John Mark when there were times you were active for Christ in a great way, and there were other times your were not. The reality of any Christian serving God is found in our willingness to be faithful and actively partnering with others to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Partners sometimes need to be given opportunities to try again.

John Mark's story is an encouragement and proves that failure is not final and that God extends the promise of a second chance to each of us. John Mark learned from his experience that God used it for good. What happened to John Mark can happen to us today, and we like John Mark can move forward for Christ to become faithful reliable Christian soldiers for the Great Commission. Our Father wants you to continue His work, and you can start tonight.

Those of you in leadership positions, are you large hearted in your attitude of others who have failed in ministry? Are you a leader that will go the extra mile like Barnabas did for John Mark? Are you encouraging people who may have failed, and finding ministries that may be better suited for them, and help them to cultivate, grow and go in those ministries? If people were to give you a nickname, as they did Barnabas, would encourager apply to you? Look for those who have failed and need to be given another opportunity to minister again.

Leaders need to be great hearted towards those who have changed and grown into usefulness.

I believe we can learn a very valuable lesson from Barnabas and Paul's examples. Barnabas had gone the extra mile for the young missionary John Mark. Barnabas took this young and inexperienced missionary with him on his missionary journey. Barnabas encouraged and helped John Mark hone his gifts, and as a result John Mark became useful again for the ministry. We also see that Paul did not harbor any ill feeling towards John Mark because of his past failures, and was willing to accept the changes, and growth that had occurred in the life of John Mark. Can I challenge the ministry leaders tonight to try everyday to express at least one genuine, uplifting comment of appreciation for the people you have in you ministry.

Conclusion

In closing let me challenge some of you here tonight that have never been involved in ministry not to be afraid to step-up and step-out like John Mark did. Realize the any ministry you step into will take time for you to develop, and as we look at the life of John Mark learn to pace yourself, and prepare yourself for what is involved so you don't come to a place in your life where you abandon your ministry, and return home like John Mark did.

For those of you who need to be mentored. Do you have a mentor or mentors like John Mark did? Are you praying, and asking God for a ministry that you can serve in. Are you seeking out someone who could help you be better equipped to meet the challenges of that ministry? Are you someone here tonight that blew it like John Mark did, and needs to get up and try again so that your God given talents will be used for the glory of God?

We all need to be building relationships with one another just as John Mark had built a relationship with Barnabas humbling himself to become teachable. And all of need to continually be people great hearted, full of grace and mercy for our brothers and sisters in Christ, that we will continue to glorify our Father in our service to Him.

