

After Disgrace: The Restoration of John Mark

Mark 1 Part 2
Mark 1:1 9/2/2017

Summary: We have strong external evidence that John Mark wrote the book of John to put on paper the teachings of Peter. Mark deserted Paul on the mission field and Paul later refused when Barnabas wanted to restore Mark. So Paul and Barnabas parted ways, and God restored Mark. He was a close disciple of Peter's, became indispensable to Paul, and was used by God to write the gospel that presents Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah. No reputation is so damaged that it can't be restored by God.

Introduction.....	1
Review	2
Authorship.....	3
The Failure of John Mark.....	4
Early Relationship with Peter.....	4
Mark on the Mission Field.....	4
Mark Deserts.....	5
Controversy over Restoration	5
Mark Restored.....	6
The Helper.....	7
Full Restoration.....	7
Reconciliation with Paul	7
True Humility: Service, not Quitting	8
Authoritative Slavery.....	9
Beginning.....	9
Conclusion.....	10

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Introduction

How many of you have ever totaled a car? It used to be that totaling a car meant the car was utterly demolished and couldn't be repaired. But nowadays, it might just mean the air bags went off and there's a dent – it's so expensive to repair cars these days. If it's a \$1500 car, it's easier for the insurance company to just give you a check for \$1500 so you can replace it than to try to repair it. So because of repair costs, the lower end cars are almost disposable. Like a paper towel – you just use it up, and then toss it.

We treat cars that way, and very often in the church we treat people that way. As long as they are useful to us, we use them. As long as they have something to offer, then they have a place. But when they get ruined, and they no longer have anything to offer – they are more trouble than they are worth, they are set aside like a used paper towel.

And sometimes the person who is treating you that way, is you. We get down on ourselves and set ourselves aside. We get discouraged with our failures, and we quit. We make the decision that we are irredeemable or unrecoverable or disqualified.

But what is God's attitude toward ruined people? Does God cast us aside? No.

Lamentations 3:31 For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. 32 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.

We could do a whole study tonight just on all the passages where God expresses his heart to restore people who have failed and then repented (I will restore the years the locust have eaten, don't gloat over me my enemy, though I have sinned and sit in the darkness now, the Lord will plead my case and bring me back, he heals the broken, restores my soul, brings renewal) – many, many passages in Scripture assure us that that is the heart of God toward us.

But it's one thing for me to just tell you that piece of information about God; it's another to actually see it. And so tonight I'd like to show you an example of it.

Review

Last time I showed you that Mark presents the gospel in three main parts – the 3-legged gospel. Who can remember what those three legs are? Leg 1 (first 8 chapters): Jesus is the Messiah. Leg 2 (last 8 chapters): The Messiah is going to be a humble servant who suffers and dies. Leg 3 (whole book): If you want to be his disciple, you have to follow in those footsteps of humble suffering and death.

That's the gospel, and if you don't know all that about Jesus, you don't know anything. People who want to talk about Jesus as a good teacher or prophet or moralist or inspiration or an angel or whatever – any conception of him that doesn't have the cross and the resurrection front and center misses all of it. That's why no other religion works. If you're a Buddhist or Muslim or Hindu or Orthodox Jew or any other religion – who dies for your sins? If Jesus doesn't pay the penalty for your sins, who's going to pay it? It's going to have to be you. The cross is essential.

But that truth wasn't any more popular back then than it is now, and no matter how clear Jesus was about it, the people just couldn't grasp it. They couldn't grasp it because they wouldn't grasp it. They just didn't want a lowly suffering servant Messiah. But Mark forces us to come to grips with that.

That's the flavor of Mark's book – Jesus as lowly, suffering servant, except for the first verse. There's nothing lowly at all about his presentation of Christ in the opening verse.

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He starts with that, then goes on to write a whole book about how Jesus was real hush hush about titles like Son of God or Christ. Why? It's because if you have titles like Christ, Messiah, Son of God, son of David, etc., during the lifetime of Jesus, it conveys the wrong idea. People were expecting a political revolutionary to come along and lead a successful military rebellion against Rome. And their titles for that person were messiah, son of David, Christ, etc. Jesus didn't want to publicize himself using those terms before people understood the part about him coming to suffer and die.

Jesus didn't want people to think that at his first coming, he was going to set up an earthly kingdom, or a kingdom established through military conflict.

John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

If Jesus publicizes himself with those politically charged titles, and Rome sees him as another political revolutionary trying to lead a military revolt against Rome, what would happen? Rome sends soldiers to squash the rebellion, and when those soldiers confront Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, right after his baptism, what would happen? One of two possibilities. Either the Romans kill Jesus and his followers in battle, and instead of dying an innocent man, Jesus is just another revolutionary who is put down by Rome (so Pilot doesn't say, "I find no fault with this man," he's not a spotless lamb, he doesn't die an innocent man, etc.); or, the other possibility, is Jesus wins that battle. Then he's seen as a military figure whose kingdom is of this world, and the cross doesn't happen. Either way it destroys his whole reason for coming into the world.

So Jesus downplays that kind of terminology during his earthly life – before people understand about the cross. But then why does Mark start out his gospel with those terms? Because Mark is writing after the death and resurrection of Christ. Mark is writing at a time when all three legs of the gospel have been made clear, and everyone knows Jesus is not a political revolutionary. No emperor is going to read the

Gospel of Mark and say, “We’ve got to do something about this Jesus person before he starts a revolution” because the Jesus of Mark’s gospel has already been executed by Rome. So Mark lets the readers know right up front exactly who Jesus is, and he’s not hindered by the potential misunderstandings that existed during Jesus’ earthly life.

He starts out with the grandiose titles so there is no confusion for the reader, but then presents the life of Jesus as it happened, with Jesus presenting himself as a suffering servant. And it’s fitting that the gospel that emphasizes Jesus’ lowliness and suffering and servanthood would end up being the lowliness of the 4 gospels, as we discussed last time. It tends to be neglected by scholars and pastors and throughout history it’s been the least favorite of the 4 gospels in the church. That just fits, doesn’t it?

And I also told you last week that it’s fitting that this gospel would be written by a disgraced nobody by the name of Mark, who wasn’t even one of the disciples and wasn’t an eye-witness. How fitting that God would pick a guy like that to write the gospel about Christ as the lowly, rejected, suffering servant.

Authorship

However, when I say Mark wasn’t an eyewitness, I don’t want that to undermine your confidence in this book. He got the information from the Apostle Peter. We know that from very early, very reliable historical accounts outside of the Bible. Mark never tells us that he is the author in the book (none of the 4 gospel writers do), but the external evidence that it was written by John Mark is very strong. It was the unanimous testimony of the people who were around back then. All the early manuscripts have Mark’s name on them. And if it were a fake, they would not have put Mark’s name on it. If you write a fake gospel and want it to be accepted, you put an Apostle’s name on it – not someone as obscure and lowly as John Mark.

And the evidence for Mark’s authorship is early. A man by the name of Papias who wrote around 120-130 A.D. personally knew people who had known the Apostles. And he affirmed that the author of this gospel was the John Mark of Scripture. Here’s what he wrote: “Mark was the interpreter of Peter and wrote accurately...whatever he remembered about the things which were said or done by the Lord. He [Mark] neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as I said, [he relied upon] Peter who adapted his teachings to the needs [of his hearers] without setting forth an orderly account of the Lord’s sayings.¹ Therefore Mark did not err in writing various things as he remembered them, for he made it his first priority not to omit or falsify anything which he heard.” Justin Martyr (155 A.D.) referred to Mark as “the Memoirs of Peter.”² Irenaeus of Lyons (180 A.D.) said John Mark did write this gospel, and that he was the disciple and interpreter of Peter. Clement of Alexandria (200) said that Mark was a follower of Peter and wrote in Rome at the request of the Christians there. Tertullian (210) described Mark as an “apostolic man” who was the interpreter of Peter and who edited a Gospel. Origen (254) wrote: “The Second [Gospel] is according to Mark, who did as Peter instructed him.” Eusebius: “So great a light of religion shone upon the minds of the hearers of Peter that they were not satisfied with a single hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine proclamation but with all kinds of entreaties urged Mark whose gospel is extant seeing that he was a follower of Peter to leave them in writing a record of the teaching transmitted to them orally, nor did they cease until they had prevailed upon the man and so they became responsible humanly for the Scripture that is called The Gospel According to Mark.”

So yes, Mark was the author, and yes, he did get it from Peter. That’s why Mark’s style sounds so much like Peter – it came from Peter. The style of writing in Mark is very similar to the style of 1 Peter.

¹ It’s unclear exactly what Papias meant by this. Perhaps he thought Matthew’s gospel was chronological, and Mark does not follow the same order. But it’s more likely that he wasn’t referring to chronology, but to presentation. Luke made an effort to present an “orderly account” (Lk.1:3), which seems to refer to the fact that he was following the standard rhetorical style for writing a biography, whereas Mark was simply recounting it the way he heard Peter preach it, which was more focused on speaking to people’s needs. For an explanation of this view see the introduction in the NIGNT Commentary.

² We know it’s a reference to Mark because it contained the words “named Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder.’” These words are found only in Mark 3:17.

And that's also why there's so much in Mark that has that eye-witness type color. He mentions details you don't find in the other gospels, like, "Jesus looked at the disciples who were seated in a circle around him," or the men with the paralytic digging through the roof above Jesus, or Jesus laying his head on a pillow in the boat, Peter warming himself by the fire – the kinds of details that only an eye-witness would mention.

And Mark's writing sounds like a story that someone was telling verbally. It's really more of a speaking style than a writing style.³ And the abrupt, energetic characteristics of the book remind of you Peter, don't they? You can just picture Peter preaching in the style the we find in Mark. Peter was impulsive and energetic and forceful and urgent about everything. The final conclusion of the book is right there in the opening sentence. That's not how Peter communicates - he blurts things out.

The Failure of John Mark

Early Relationship with Peter

So we know it was John Mark, and I think that's significant, given what we know about John Mark. So I'd like to take a break from our study of the book of Mark (even though we're only one week in), I'd like to take a break and show you what the rest of Scripture tells us about this man. The Holy Spirit gave us quite a bit of information about Mark, and I think you'll be encouraged to see it.

He first appears in Acts 12. It was a scary time for the church. Persecution was heating up, and Herod found out he could gain favor with the Jews if he went after Christians. And so he started making arrests. One day he even arrested one of the Apostles – James. That had to be a shock to the church. No doubt they were praying like crazy for him, and they probably figured he'd probably be beaten and then released. But then the news came: Herod cut off James' head. The Apostle James, one of the sons of thunder, one of Jesus' inner three, is dead. Now there are only 11 Apostles.

Then they get news that Herod got another Apostle – Peter. Now Peter is in prison awaiting execution. Herod has him in prison, chained up, guarded by 16 soldiers, with soldiers on either side of him as he slept. They really, really didn't want Peter escaping.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

So God answers the prayers, sends an angel to break Peter out of prison, the chains fall off, and Peter finds himself free in the street. At first he thinks it's a dream, but when he gets out on the street he says, "Wait a second – this is real!" Now, if you were Peter, where would you go at that point? God just broke you out of prison where you were on death row, now you're on the lamb – where is the first place you go? Peter went to John Mark's house. Actually, it was his mom's house.

12 ...he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark

John was his Jewish name, Mark was his Roman name, so he was John-Mark. And Peter goes there – why? He must have had a friendship with Mary and her son Mark, such that their house was the first place he would go in that situation. So we know that Peter and Mark had a connection very early on.

Mark on the Mission Field

All that happened in Jerusalem. Later on, Paul and Barnabas show up there in Jerusalem to help the church there. Barnabas was a great guy. His name means "son of encouragement," which is a perfect name for him, because he was always encouraging people.

Acts 11:24 [Barnabas] was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith

³ For example, when Mark tells the story of John's death, it sounds more like stream of consciousness storytelling than an ordered, written account, as each element seems to remind the speaker of another aspect.

So Paul hooks up with Barnabas, and after Paul and Barnabas finished their work there in Jerusalem, it was time for them to head out on Paul's first missionary journey. And of all the people in Jerusalem, guess who they decided to bring along with them on this mission?

Acts 12:25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

They leave town, and the only person they take with them is John Mark. How did they know Mark would be useful? It could be that Peter recommended him, because he knew Mark. And Barnabas also knew Mark, because Mark was Barnabas' cousin.⁴

So they go to Antioch. And when Luke gives the list of prophets and teachers there, he mentions Barnabas and Paul and several others, but not Mark. Why not Mark? Because Mark's not a prophet or a teacher. He's there, but he's not a pastor or evangelist or leader of any kind. Then what is he? What's his role?

Acts 13:5 ... John was with them as their helper.

That's his role. That's the only credential he's ever given. He probably had the gift of helps, which is probably the most common spiritual gift there is. That's the gift most Christians have, which is why most Christians don't know what their gift is, because the gift of helps never gets any press. Mark is just a helper - a servant. He had proven helpful enough in Antioch that they decide they need him to come along to be an assistant to attend to them on the first missionary journey.

Mark Deserts

And so he came along and helped on that journey – until the going got rough. They ran into some opposition and some hardship, and then we read this sad account:

Acts 13:13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

John Mark just bails. "Did he have a good reason, or what this desertion?" It was desertion. That's what it says in Acts 15:38.

Acts 15:38 [Mark] had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

Mark failed. They had trusted him, they had invested in him, they needed him, but when the going got rough, he deserted. And Paul made a mental note: *Don't trust Mark.*

Controversy over Restoration

At that point Mark disappears from the pages of Scripture until ch.15. Years have passed now. Paul and Barnabas have completed that first missionary journey and came back to Jerusalem. They stay there quite a while, and then:

Acts 15:36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

Let's retrace our steps from our first missionary journey years ago and check in on those churches. Barnabas says, "Great idea. Let's do it. And let's bring Mark."

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah, let's give him another chance."

"There's no way I'm bringing Mark. He's unreliable, he can't handle hardship, he's a deserter, he can't be trusted."

⁴ Col.4:10.

“That’s how he used to be, but he’s changed now. He’s matured. I think he’ll be a great help.”

“Forget it Barny – no way.”

“Come on Paul...”

Acts 15:37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

That’s really a sad verse. Two of my greatest heroes in the Bible - the greatest missionary team there had ever been up to their time, and now they are splitting up over the question of whether Mark should be restored. This is like the smallest church split ever – 2 guys, both full of the Spirit, and those 2 couldn’t even get along and they had a split. The ministry of the gospel was Paul’s passion, and he didn’t want anything to put it at risk. No way is he going to trust Mark again.

Acts 15:39 ... Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left ...41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

So godly brothers dividing over the question of whether someone could be restored to ministry after a major failure is nothing new. So Barnabas disappears with Mark and we never see Mark again in the book of Acts.

Mark Restored

So that’s Mark. And when it comes time for God to pick someone to write a book of the Bible, and not just any book, but one of the 4 biography accounts of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ upon which the entire gospel message depends, instead of using one of the Apostles, or Barnabas, or someone with great credentials and knowledge of the OT Scriptures, like Apollos, or even Paul; God chose Mark – the failed, disgraced helper. Of all the people God could have used, he picks Mark. Why? Because that’s what God is like. Men and women who fail are not cast off by him forever – he restores.

What does that mean for us? The controversy these days is over restoration of fallen pastors. Some say that when a pastor falls into disqualifying sin, he can never be restored because it’s impossible to restore a ruined reputation, and a pastor must be above reproach and have a good reputation. It’s true that pastors must have a good reputation, but do we really think that a man can do so much damage to his reputation that not even God is powerful enough to restore it?

And if God is able to do it, is he also willing? What do we see in Scripture? Do you see a God who tends to permanently cast people aside when they fail, or a God whose heart is to redeem and restore? God’s Word gives us multiple examples of leaders who fell into disqualifying sin, for example, David, Peter, and Jeremiah – a king, a pastor, and a prophet. And all three were restored to leadership after repenting. Moses committed an egregious sin as publicly as you could possibly commit a sin when he struck the rock. It was so serious that it disqualified him from entering the promised land, and yet he remained the leader of Israel until the day he died.

There are no examples in the Bible of a repentant sinner not being restored. And the examples God gave us include the most extreme kinds of failures – accusing God, lying, murder, adultery, cowardice, and public denial of Christ. And they were all restored.

And so was John Mark. “But Mark wasn’t a pastor.” That’s true, he was just an author of Scripture. Peter was a pastor, but let’s just focus on Mark. He wrote a gospel. If anyone needs to have a good reputation, it would be a writer of Scripture – especially a writer of one of the gospels. The entire Christian religion is based on the veracity of the accounts of Jesus life, ministry, teaching, suffering, death, and resurrection. If the historical accounts of that are unreliable, the entire Christian faith fails. Everything depends on the gospel writers getting it right. And the spread of the church totally depends on the gospel writers being seen as credible and believable. Our entire task is to bring about faith – people believing the gospel. If the reports of the gospel are questionable, how can people have faith in it?

So reputation is crucial for a gospel writer, and yet God brought Mark from a failure that disqualified him from even being a helper on the mission field to being entrusted to write one of the gospels. John MacArthur: “You’re not surprised by that, are you? That the Lord would use people like that? Those are the only kind of people there are, recovering sinners, restored deserters, recovered defectors.”

The Helper

Another encouraging aspect to this – not only does God restore ruined people, but he also uses lowly nobodies. He uses Mark, who isn’t an Apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, evangelist, or leader – just a helper.

That’s encouraging, because most Christians – that’s their spiritual gift. They have the gift of helps, and it’s a very uncelebrated gift. We make a big deal out of people with gifts of teaching or leadership or spotlight kinds of gifts. And we talk about those people being “really gifted.” But no one ever talks about someone with the gift of helps being “really gifted” even if he’s really gifted at helps. We think little of helping as a ministry, but God doesn’t. God elevates that gift, even to the point where he picked a guy who was just a helper – and a failed helper at that, to write a gospel account of Christ. Don’t underestimate what God is able to do with someone who has nothing but the gift of helps, or service, or any other gift.

Full Restoration

Reconciliation with Paul

Not only did God use Mark to write one of the gospels, but he also became useful again to Paul. You won’t believe what eventually happened. It’s so beautiful to see how God restores. Paul writes the Colossians from prison in Rome and says: **Colossians 4:10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)** Then Paul writes a letter to Philemon. **Philemon 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.**

Mark is once again one of Paul’s beloved companions and fellow workers. And Paul mentions him first. That actually says something about the character of Mark. Because this requires that not only did Paul change and accept Mark, but Mark was willing to go back to serving Paul. After being so thoroughly rejected by Paul earlier, you might think Mark wouldn’t want to have anything to do with Paul. If someone rejects you as unfit – especially if they do it publicly, it’s hard to forget that. I know from personal experience what that’s like, and it’s hard to set that aside. But now, in Paul’s time of need, when other people are abandoning Paul, who is the man who is there for him in Paul’s imprisonment? John Mark.

How did Mark go from being an unreliable helper who bailed as soon as things got rough and left his partners hanging, to being the one of the few who sticks by Paul in in imprisonment when other Christians are turning against him? I have to think it had something to do with the discipleship efforts of Barnabas. Barnabas was always the type to stand by someone when no one else would. In fact, you may remember he did that with Paul himself when Paul was struggling for acceptance.

Acts 9 is the chapter that reports Paul’s conversion. He goes from persecuting the church, to joining the church. And he immediately starts preaching, as a brand new convert, but he has a hard time getting an audience because all the Christians are scared to death of him. They don’t believe his conversion is real.

Acts 9:26 When [Paul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the

apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

That's just the way Barnabas was. Way back then he stuck up for Paul, and then when John Mark failed, and Paul doesn't want him restored to ministry, Barnabas does the same for John Mark that he had done years earlier for Paul.

So I'm sure Barnabas was the instrument God used to restore Mark, and no doubt Peter as well, but whatever the instrument God used, it was God who did it. Instead of just disqualifying Mark and setting him aside, God brings him from being an unreliable helper, to being a man who sticks by an unpopular convict in prison who has become a punching bag for Jews, unbelievers, and Christians in the church.

Paul was eventually released from that imprisonment, and he goes back to his missionary work. Fast forward now all the way to the end of Paul's life. Now he's in prison in Rome again. But this time it's not in an apartment under house arrest like before. This time he's in the horrible Roman dungeon where they put people on death row. Paul knows he's about to die. And he writes one last letter to his beloved Timothy. Remember the letter to Colossae where he sent greetings from his fellow workers Mark and Demas and a couple others?

2 Timothy 4:9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful (once again – just a helper) to me in my ministry.

I'm about to die Timothy. Others have deserted me. Please, get Mark, and bring him. I need Mark. I need his gift of helps. Mark, the disgraced, failed helper, had become indispensable to Paul.

And not just to Paul. Remember those ten years when John Mark disappears? Where did he go during that time? Did he just stay at his house in Jerusalem? No. Peter wrote his first epistle from Rome, and he said this:

1 Peter 5:13 She who is in Babylon (code for Rome), ... sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.

So Mark is with Peter in Rome. And Peter calls him **my son**, which means Mark was a very significant disciple of Peter.

True Humility: Service, not Quitting

When someone has failed like Mark failed, there's never any shortage of people who have really long memories, and who want to make sure neither you nor anyone else forgets how you blew it. And sometimes that person is you. People think that humility demands that, after they have failed in some big, public way, they have to go around the rest of their life hanging their head in shame. And for the rest of their life, they are on the shelf when it comes to ministry. They might be able to do some little thing here and there around the fringes, but nothing of any real consequence.

That's not humility; it's false doctrine. It's an attitude that says, "I've messed up so royally that not even God can restore me." Not only is that not humility; it's arrogance, because it assumes that God is so helpless and needy that he can only use undamaged, highly qualified folks. That is a twisted conception of God. The reason God allows us to be involved is not because our great competence and qualification helps him out. The reason he involves us is to prove how much mercy and patience he has. And that even goes for someone like the Apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 1:15 ...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience

If you ever wonder why God chose you to be saved and not someone else, it may be the same reason he chose Paul – because he was look through humanity and thinking, "Which one of these people, if I

saved them, would be the most extreme example my patience and mercy?” God saves us and uses us in ministry not because of our amazing qualifications and competence, but because of our amazing disqualification and incompetence, which puts his infinite mercy on display. So when people think that a big, public failure is unrecoverable – they just don’t understand even the beginnings of what God is like.

Now, is there such a thing as being unfit for ministry because of some failure? Of course. But is there such a thing as an unrecoverable unfitness? Maybe you’re thinking, “What I did was worse than what Mark did. Worse than what Moses did, worse than what Jeremiah did – even worse than Peter – worse than publicly denying Christ repeatedly, and worse than having such bad influence that you lead someone like Barnabas astray. What you did was worse than all that, and worse than David – worse than adultery and murder to cover up the adultery. Even if your failure is worse than all those things, doesn’t that make you an even better candidate for showing God’s infinite mercy? The worse your failure, the better candidate you are.

When you have a major failure, it’s not a humble response to just put yourself on the shelf and say, “Oh well, I guess I’m out of the game now because I’m unfit.” That’s not humility. Humility repents and then says, “I will use whatever resources and gifts God has given me to serve Christ and his people to the utmost of my ability until the day I die.”

Authoritative Slavery

I wanted to take a week just to show you the portrait Scripture gives us of Mark so you will be confident about the authenticity and value of this gospel, but also so we could learn from his example of what true humility looks like. Did his humility make him timid and sheepish and apologetic about his ministry? No – Mark wrote with amazing authority.

Beginning

I mentioned last time that he begins his book with the language of the Prophet Hosea.⁵

The beginning of the word of the Lord through Hosea.

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ.⁶

Did Mark know when he wrote this that he was writing Scripture? I don’t know, but he definitely presents his book in a very authoritative way. He begins with wording that sounds like the words of sacred Scripture in Hosea. And whether or not he knew it was Scripture, at the very least he is presenting a definitive account of the gospel that would be the foundation and basis for all Christian belief for the centuries to come and that would be used as a foundation for all future preaching of the gospel. When Mark writes about the woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany, we see another use of that word “gospel.”

Mark 14:9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

Jesus himself talked about a gospel that would be preached throughout the world, and Mark, in v.1 of his book, calls his book that very gospel. You say, “Wow, that’s a high level of confidence for a

⁵ Commentators differ on the significance of the phrase **beginning of the gospel**. Some see it as referring only to the prologue, so the point is that Jesus’ baptism is the beginning of the gospel story. The term “just as” at the beginning of v.2 gives strength to this view. John’s baptism is indeed the beginning (see Acts 1:21-22).

Others argue that since there are no other similar headings for other sections, we should take this heading as referring to the whole book. So the whole story of Jesus’ earthly life is the beginning. This view is also supported elsewhere. Luke begins the book of Acts by referring to his first volume as a record of the things Jesus *began* to do and teach (Acts 1:1). This view also helps explain Mark’s abrupt ending.

A third possibility is that Mark is simply saying that he is beginning his book, using the language of Hosea 1:2.

⁶ Hosea 1:2 *arche logou kuriou pros Hosea* (ἀρχὴ λόγου κυρίου πρὸς Ὡσηε

Mark 1:1 *arche tou euaggeliou Iesou Christou* ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

disgraced, failed, helper. Where's the humility?" The humility is in the fact that he is obediently serving God – serving the church by using his gifts and resources to do what God called him to do. And he does it confidently and authoritatively because he knows the value of grace. God dispenses grace mainly through our spiritual gifts, and so if you understand how much grace is worth, you'll be passionate and persistent and insistent about serving the body of Christ with your gifts.

Conclusion

Each gospel gives us a little different perspective on Jesus. In Matthew the aspect of Christ that is most emphasized is that he is the great, promised King from the line of David. In Luke the emphasis is on the perfect humanity of Jesus. In John it's the deity of Christ. He's God - the I AM from the OT. But when God wanted someone to write the gospel that would present him as the humble, suffering servant foretold in the Prophet Isaiah, the very first gospel, he chose Mark. When he wanted a companion who would stick by Paul through the absolute worst of times, he chose Mark. And when he wanted a partner for Peter in Rome who would preserve Peter's legacy on paper forever, he chose Mark. That's what our God is like. What do you think he has in mind for you?