

JOHN MARK: Always Playing Second Fiddle

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Web Document: <http://www.idolphin.org/johnmark.html>

Introduction

There is a little ditty that describes John Mark perfectly. It goes like this:

'It takes more grace than I can tell To play the second fiddle well. ♦

A statement attributed to the late Leonard Bernstein, the famous conductor of the New York Philharmonic, states: 'The hardest instrument in the orchestra to play is second fiddle. ♦

A fellow named Bo Bradham attended a fiddle camp in September of 1996 and wrote about that experience. The story is recounted of a fiddler from Texas named Randy Elmore who was at a 'jam session' the first night of camp. Bo states that ♦ [Randy] sat there quietly, and every time Mark [O'Conner, an accomplish fiddler in his own right] played a tune, Randy was right there with the second fiddle part. 'Playing second fiddle' has become synonymous with being out of the limelight, not the lead dog, ♦ but you know and I know just how hard it is to do, and how uncommon it is for someone to be really good at it. Moreover, it speaks volumes about someone to volunteer for that difficult but unglamorous part. ♦ [1] I was intrigued by Bo's statement so I contacted Randy Elmore in order to get an understanding of what it means to play second fiddle. [2]

I was fascinated to learn that the fiddle and the violin are the exact same instrument. The only difference between them, however, is the musician and the music being played on the instrument. For example, the instrument is called a violin when the musician plays classical music in an orchestra at Carnegie Hall. The same instrument is called a fiddle when the musician plays Bluegrass music or other 'non-classical- music for events such as a square dance, or a ho-down, at the State Fair.

The person playing first fiddle plays the melody. This is the tune that people know and the audience listens for at a concert. Mr. Elmore chuckled when he said that, in reality, the first fiddle is the boring part because the fiddler only plays the melody and should not deviate from it. The second fiddle, on the other hand, plays the harmony. Mr. Elmore thought this was the fun part because the fiddler could be creative with the harmony and do fancy finger work. This is the harder part because the fiddler must know how to harmonize the music as well as play higher notes as he moves his fingers up the throat of the fiddle. It takes much practice to play this part well. The purpose of the second fiddle is to play a supporting role and compliment the first fiddle, thus making the first fiddle look and sound good. The audience does not realize that the second fiddler is playing his heart out in order to make the first fiddler look good; yet the second fiddler does not get any credit for what is played. Thus, this part is unglamorous.

John Mark seems to have been always played second fiddle (ah, Gospel bluegrass, of course! ☺). He played second fiddle for Peter, as a son in the faith and a disciple. He played second fiddle to Paul, as a helpful servant and later, a trusted confidant. He played second fiddle to Barnabas, his cousin and co-worker. He was good at this difficult but unglamorous task.

I will meaningfully try to reconstruct the life of John Mark. He keeps popping up here and there in Scripture, so we will have to use some conjecture as well as rely upon two early church Fathers, Eusebius and Jerome, and the apocryphal book of *The Acts of*

Barnabas which allegedly was written by John Mark.^[3] The apocryphal books should be used with caution, but could prove helpful.

The Life and Ministry of John Mark

First Mention

Our first introduced to John Mark is in Acts 12. These events take place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem (12:3) in the year AD 44. At that time Peter miraculously was released from prison and he went to the house of Miriam / Mary (12:12). Because there are a number of Miriams in the early Church, Luke has to distinguish which one he is referring to, so he identifies her as the mother of John Mark. Whether John is there or not, we are not told. He could be in Jerusalem because it is the Passover, a festival where all Jewish males were required to go on pilgrimage to the Holy City (Deut. 16:1-12). Luke also tells us that many were gathered in Miriam's house to pray for Peter (Acts 12:12).

In the English Bible his name is given as 'John. ♦ This was his Hebrew name and it would be translated 'Yohanan' which means 'grace'. His Latin name was 'Marcus. ♦ This may indicate that he was a Roman citizen. Paul wrote his latter epistles in the AD 60's and calls him Mark (Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). Dr. Luke, also writing in the AD 60's uses both names together three times (12:12, 25; 15:37), his Hebrew name alone, twice (13:5, 13), and his Latin name alone, only once (15:39).

His Teen Years

Alfred Edershim, in his monumental book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, suggests that Jesus and His disciples had their last Passover meal together at the home of Miriam and her husband (1976: 484, 485). This is conjecture, but it is a very strong possibility. Mark later would record the instructions that Jesus gave Peter, 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples? ♦ ♦ ♦ (Mark 14:14).

The master of the house would be John Mark's father. In Acts 12, it is called the house of Miriam. One could surmise that John Mark's father had passed away sometime between AD 30 and AD 44, either by natural causes or part of the persecution of the church (Acts 8:1; 9:1, 3; 26:10; Gal. 1:13).

If the conjecture of Jesus and His disciples meeting in the home of John Mark's family is correct, what can we learn about John Mark's upbringing? The description of the house that John Mark lived in that is recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts indicates that it was a well-to-do house in the Upper City of Jerusalem.

In the excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem that were conducted after the Six Days War in 1967 several Herodian mansions were excavated by Prof. Nahman Avigad. These mansions were very impressive structures that attested to the wealth and high standard of living in Jerusalem up until the destruction of the city in AD 70 (Avigad 1980: 81-202).

We are told that the house had an upper room (Mark 14:25 // Luke 22:12) At least one room was large enough to hold many people for a prayer meeting (Acts 12:12, 13). At one time the house had a male servant (Mark 14:13) as well as a female servant, Rhoda (Acts 12:14). John Mark, most likely, was raised in a well to do, financially secure family.

John Mark also was surrounded with Christian influence in his teen years. He might have met Jesus as He came in for His last Passover with His disciples. After the Ascension of the Lord Jesus the disciples returned to the upper room for a prayer meeting

(Acts 1:12-14). The house seems to be one of the places where the early church gathered in Jerusalem. When Peter miraculously was released from prison in Acts 12, he went to the prayer gathering at Miriam's house. Rhoda recognized his voice. This seems to indicate that she knew him personally and that Peter was a frequent visitor to the house.

John Mark, when he composed the gospel that bears his name, records the events that took place in Gethsemane. One event indicates that he was an eye-witness to what transpired on that Passover night and another event only he would have known about and recorded.

After the Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples left the Upper Room and went to the Temple and then on to Gethsemane on the eastern slopes of the Kidron Valley. Judas led the Temple guards to the place where Jesus was, and they arrested Him. Mark writes that one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear (Mark 14:47). Mark does not identify who wielded the sword and cut off the ear because when he wrote the gospel, Peter was still very much alive and visiting Jerusalem.

Anything Mark wrote could and would be used against Peter in a court of law, and Mark did not want to rat on his friend and mentor. It is only after the death of Peter that the Apostle John, another eye-witness to the event, identifies Peter as the one who cut off the deputy high priest's ear (18:10, 11).

In this passage, Mark does not use the generic word for ear, but a specific term for the earlobe. This indicates that John Mark was an eye-witness to this event and tells us specifically what happened in the garden. Benjamin Viviano discusses the significance of the cutting-off of the earlobe in this account (1989: 71-80).

After Jesus was arrested and His disciples fled (Mark 14:43-50), Mark records, 'Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked (Mark 14:51, 52). Mark had not heard about this incident from Peter because he already had fled the scene. Only John Mark knew who the first, and only, Streaker was in the Bible; it was himself!

John Mark apparently went to bed after the family Passover meal, but when he heard Jesus and His disciples departing, his curiosity was raised. He threw a linen cloth around his body and followed at a distance. Later, he recounts his story.

Exactly how old John Mark was at this Passover in AD 30, we are not told. All Mark records is a certain young man, probably anywhere between 16 and 19 years old. I will assume he was 18 years old for the calculations of the chronology of his life.

Eusebius, the early church historian, quotes Papias^[4], an Apostolic Father writing about AD 140, as saying John Mark had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed Him (*Ecclesiastical History* 3:39:15; LCL 1: 297). He was too young to have traveled with Jesus and to hear His parables, sermons and discourses. Yet he was a curious onlooker in Gethsemane.

As a teenager, John Mark had godly Jewish parents who were interested and involved in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. He knew the giants of the faith: Peter, the apostles, and his cousin from Cyprus, Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He saw godly people praying and saw prayers answered. These were good examples for him to see in his formative years.

Peter, in his first epistle, calls John Mark, my son (5:13).^[5] This could be an indication that Peter was the one who had the privilege of sharing the gospel with him and leading him to put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. John Mark knew the traumatic events that took place in Jerusalem during Passover of AD 30, but he may not have understood the significance of the events. Perhaps he heard Peter preach to the Jewish people in Jerusalem from the Land of Israel as well as the Diaspora on the day of Pentecost, and he was one of the three thousand that trusted the Lord Jesus as Savior (Acts 2:14-

41). In this sermon, Peter, using the Hebrew Scriptures, demonstrates that the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of what the Hebrew prophets had predicted years before (I Pet. 1: 10-12). He concluded that the death of the Lord Jesus was important because He paid for all sins so that John Mark and all who believed on (put their trust in) the Lord Jesus could have the remission of those sins.

John Mark's First Missionary Tour

When I said first missionary tour you probably are thinking of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary tour. Actually, John Mark had an earlier one. Jerome, the 4th century AD Church Father, wrote an interesting book called *The Lives of Illustrious Men*. In this book, he gives a short biography of the Apostle Peter. He says: After having been bishop of the church at Antioch and having preached to the Dispersion [the Jewish Diaspora] – the believers in circumcision, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia – pushed on to Rome in the second year of Claudius (1994: 3: 361). The second year of Emperor Claudius was the year AD 42.

Peter sends an epistle back to the churches which were established on this missionary journey as a follow-up letter. The letter was carried by the good services of his partner on that journey, Silvanus (I Pet. 4:12). As mentioned before, he sends John Mark's greeting along with the letter. The implication of this passage is that John Mark was along on this missionary journey as Peter and Silvanus's disciple and helper. This tour probably lasted a year or two (AD 41-42). John Mark would have been about 29 or 30 years old at this time. He continued with Peter in Rome for a short period of time.

Jerome goes on to say: Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter wrote a short gospel at the request of the brethren in Rome embodying what he had heard Peter tell (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 8; 1994: 3: 364).

Eusebius makes a similar statement. Again, quoting Papias, he writes, Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed Him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them (*Ecclesiastical History* 3:39:15; LCL 1: 297). John Mark, at about the age of 30, wrote the first recorded life of the Lord Jesus as he heard from Peter. I'm sure on their missionary journey John Mark heard Peter recount the stories of Jesus over and over again to different audiences. By the end of the journey he knew them well, and the Holy Spirit directed him as he penned the Gospel of Mark (II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Pet. 1:21).

The early believers that composed the church in Rome were of Jewish heritage as well as proselytes (Acts 2:10). Since Peter was an apostle to those of the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9), John Mark's gospel would have a Jewish perspective and it presented the Lord Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

John Mark in Alexandria, Egypt

The city of Alexandria in Egypt had the largest Jewish population outside Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel. Philo, a First Century AD Jewish philosopher, living in the city, said that the Jewish population of Egypt was about one million Jews and a large portion of them lived in Alexandria (*Flaccus* 43; 1993: 728).

The New Testament says nothing about John Mark's ministry in Egypt. Yet we have Jerome's account of what happened after John Mark wrote his gospel. Jerome states: 'So, taking the gospel which he himself composed, he went to Egypt and first preaching Christ at Alexandria he formed a church so admirable in doctrine and continence of living that he constrained all followers of Christ to his example. Philo most learned of the Jews seeing the first church at Alexandria still Jewish in a degree, wrote a book on their manner of life as something creditable to his nation telling how, as Luke says, the believers had all things in common at Jerusalem, so he recorded that he saw was done at Alexandria, under the learned Mark (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 8; 1994: 3: 364).[6]

While this passage is not inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is very instructive. Notice two things about the church in Alexandria. First, they were 'admirable in doctrine. John Mark made the teaching of the great doctrines of the Word of God a priority in the church in Alexandria. This was a principle that he had learned while he was in fellowship in the Jerusalem assembly. Acts 2:42 says, And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ♦ He also instructed the people in the Hebrew Bible as well as the epistle of James[7], I Peter and the Gospel of Mark. He also taught them what he had learned from Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem. The second thing that is mentioned about this church is that it had ♦continence of living, ♦ apparently applying what they learned from the Scriptures to their own lives. Jerome goes on to records that the believers had 'all things in common' (cf. Acts 2:44). John Mark had seen this modeled by the church in Jerusalem and he was able to instill this in the church in Alexandria (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Perhaps one example he used was his cousin Barnabas who sold all that he had and laid it at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:36, 37; see also *Lives of Illustrious Men* 11 [Philo]; 1994: 3: 365).

John Mark instructed the assembly in Alexandria and instilled in them the pattern of church polity and practice that he had seen modeled in the Jerusalem assembly.

The final thing to notice about Jerome's description of John Mark is that he was a 'learned' man. He was a student of the Word of God and devoured all that Peter and the other apostles taught from the Word of God. John Mark's initial ministry in Alexandria was from AD 42-44.

John Mark apparently went up to Jerusalem for the Passover (recorded in Acts 12) which coincided with the beginning of the famine in AD 44 that lasted until AD 48 (Shea 1992: 2: 772). More than likely, John Mark brought with him grain and foodstuff from Egypt for the believers in Jerusalem. Interestingly, Egypt was the Breadbasket for Rome, noted for its grain and other foodstuffs.

After Peter's miraculous escape from prison toward the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Luke records that he went to another place (Acts 12:17). Unfortunately Luke does not tell us where he went. He could have gone to Antioch-on-the-Orontes, or even back to Rome, where Peter describes himself as a fellow elder [not the first pope] among the elders in the church in Rome (I Pet. 5:1).

John Mark in Antioch on the Orontes

Barnabas and Saul went up to Jerusalem at the beginning of the famine in AD 44 and brought relief from the Church in Antioch. When they finished delivering the money and goods, they returned to Antioch and brought John Mark with them (Acts 12:25). John Mark ministered in Antioch for three years (AD 44-47) in which time Barnabas and Paul had opportunities to observe what his strengths and spiritual gifts were. As they observed him, it would appear that he had the serving gift of helps (I Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7; cf. II Tim. 4:11; I

Pet. 4:10). John Mark was always ministering to and serving, other people and he did not care who got the credit for his labors. Other people were his priorities. He exercised his spiritual gift of helps in order to build up the local assembly in Antioch.

William McRae, in his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, says that the person with the gift of helps has the unusual capacity to serve faithfully behind the scenes, in practical ways, to assist in the work of the Lord and encourage and strengthen others spiritually (1976: 47). He goes on to say, A person with this gift will loathe the limelight but be the backbone of an effective church (1976: 47). By exercising his spiritual gift, John Mark caught the eyes of Barnabas and Paul and this led him to a greater sphere of service.

The Missionary Journey with Cousin Barney and Paul

The Holy Spirit separated Barnabas and Saul to the work to which He had called them. After fasting and praying, the saints in Antioch laid hands on Barnabas, Paul and probably John Mark and sent them on their way in the year AD 47.

Barnabas and Saul realized they would need help for this endeavor. They had seen John Mark engaged in the Lord's work and exercising his serving gift of helps in the assembly in Antioch and thought he would be the ideal person to take along. At the age of 35, John Mark joined them on his second missionary journey.

Dr. Luke described John Mark as an assistant. (Acts 13:5). The Greek word is *hupereten*, which is translated 'under rower'. Paul would use this same word in I Cor. 4:1 when he writes: Let a man so consider us, as servants (*hupereten*) of Christ and stewards (*oikonomous*) of the mysteries of God. ♦ Some have speculated that Luke was a ship's doctor which would account for his uses of this and other nautical terms. The word picture is that of a large vessel, called a trireme vessel that plied the Aegean Sea. This kind of ship had three decks of oarsmen, or Under-rowers. These were freedmen, not slaves, who had volunteered for this job. They were seated on the three decks underneath the main deck and could not see where they were going or what was going on around them. They were to row by faith and not by sight (cf. II Cor. 5:7). In order to do this, they had to trust the captain on the top deck to take them safely to their final destination. The captain had a drum at his side and the drummer would beat out the strokes. Boom, then they would take a stroke. Boom, then they would take another stroke. The only thing the under-rowers listened for was the beat of the captain's drum and not that of any other ships around them. The word-picture is clear: John Mark was an under-rower, listening to the drumbeat of Barnabas and Saul and doing what they requested.

Their first destination was the island of Cyprus and the harbor of Salamis that lies to the south-west of Seleucia, the harbor for Antioch. The first place the Word of God was preached was in the synagogues of Salamis (Acts 13:5).

They went through the island to Paphos ♦ (13:6), the capital of the island, visiting the Jewish communities as well as relatives of Barnabas, and probably distant relatives of John Mark, preaching the gospel to both Jewish people and Gentiles on the island.

The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, came to faith in the Lord Jesus (13:12) and most likely sent the three missionaries to Perge in Pamphylia so they could take the Via Sebaste to Pisidian Antioch, the home of some of the proconsul's relatives. Sergius Paulus could not leave his administrative position in Paphos in order to share the gospel with his relatives; so he sent the three missionaries instead. At Perge, John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem (13:13).

Scholars have had a field day trying to figure out why John Mark departed and returned to Jerusalem. Some have suggested he did not like the change of leadership because Paul had taken charge instead of John Mark's cousin, Barnabas. So loyalty to his cousin was the issue. If one observes what happens after, Barnabas did not seem to have a problem with the change. Others have suggested that John Mark did not like the Gentile emphasis of the missionary journey. John Mark was a disciple of Peter, who was a missionary to the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9). Others have suggested that John Mark returned to Jerusalem to take care of his mother (Cf. Matt. 10:37, 38; Luke 14:26). Perhaps Paul had the words of Jesus that John Mark had already penned in mind: Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first (Mark 10:29-31). I think an underlying reason might be that John Mark had been there and done that. ♦ If we accept Jerome's implied statement that Peter visited Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia along with Silvanus / Silas between AD 41-42 and John Mark was with them, perhaps he had experienced (promised) persecution during the journey. This lack of courage to face more persecution led to unfaithfulness and John Mark's departure from the journey. Whatever the reason, Paul was very upset with John Mark's lack of faithfulness to the work of the Lord (Acts 15:37, 38). Paul would later write that faithfulness was mandatory for the Christian life in I Cor. 4:2. Moreover it is required (demanded) in stewards (*oikonomois*) that one be found faithful (cf. also Paul's example, I Tim. 1: 12).

Paul and Barnabas' second Missionary Journey

Paul and Barnabas spent at least two years in Galatia preaching the gospel and planting churches (Acts 13:14-14:25). Upon their return to Antioch-on-the-Orontes, they gave to the sending church a report on how God had answered their prayers for Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:26-28). Paul also writes an epistle back to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) because he was flabbergasted that they had departed from the truth of the gospel so quickly (Gal. 1:6), because some were saying circumcision was essential for salvation. The same issue arose in the church at Antioch and the leadership of the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem in order to consult with the apostles and elders on this matter (Acts 15:2-29). The Jerusalem council declared that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved and sent a letter back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas stating this fact (Acts 15:30-35).

Paul wanted to return to the churches in Cyprus and Galatia so he could follow-up on this divisive and heretical issue of circumcision for salvation. He suggested to Barnabas a second missionary journey. Barnabas thought it was a good idea and wanted to take John Mark with them.

The text seems to imply that John Mark had left Jerusalem and was residing in Antioch again. We are not told when he returned to Antioch or what the circumstance was that brought him back to the city.

There was a strong dispute between Paul and Barnabas over whether to take John Mark on this second missionary journey or not. In the end, they decided to go their separate ways and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas went to Galatia (Acts 15:36-41) in AD 49.

A budding young musician, with his violin case under his arms, asked an elderly New Yorker how to get to Carnegie Hall. The gentleman looked at him and said, 'Son, it's very simple. Practice ♦ practice ♦ practice! ♦'

John Mark had at least one setback in his walk with the Lord. At one point in his life he had a problem with faithfulness to the Lord's work. His mentor, Barnabas, always the encourager, worked with him in this area of his life while they were in Cyprus. The Apostle James had written, But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only (1:22). John Mark took that to heart and practiced, practiced, practiced faithfulness.

Scripture is silent on the activities of John Mark for the next ten or eleven years. When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians (AD 56), he mentioned Barnabas and seemed to indicate that he was still alive and actively ministering the Word of God, but we are not told where he was or what he was doing.

The *Acts of Barnabas* described Barnabas and John Mark's ministry throughout the island of Cyprus and also Barnabas' martyrdom and burial (Roberts and Donaldson 1994: 493-496). After, John Mark recounts the burial of Barnabas, the John Mark in the account returns to Alexandria in Egypt for a second time, along with several of the brethren from Cyprus in order to minister the Word of God in that city. Historically, this is plausible, but Scripture is silent; so it is uncertain.

John Mark in Rome

The next time we see John Mark in the Scriptures he is in Rome with the Apostle Paul who was under house arrest and awaiting trial before Nero in the years AD 60-62. John Mark was approaching the half-century mark for his age!

Paul, writing an epistle to the church at Colossae, sent greetings from several brethren who are with him in Rome, including John Mark. He instructs the believers in Colossae to welcome John Mark if he comes by the city during his travels (Col. 4:10). John Mark apparently was planning a trip to Asia Minor, perhaps to help Timothy in the work in Ephesus, or continue to Alexandria again. Along with the letter to the church, Paul sends a personal letter to Philemon, the patron and possibly an elder in the church at Colossae. At the close of the letter he send greetings from Epaphras, (John) Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Philemon 24). One gets the impression that John Mark was known by the saints in Colossae and particularly Philemon. It is conjecture, but Peter, Silvanus and John Mark, could have visited Colossae on their missionary journey some 20 years before when they went through Asia (I Pet. 1:1). This would account for John Mark's greeting and their knowledge of him.

Unfortunately the Scriptures do not recount the reconciliation between Paul and John Mark. Did John Mark approach the Apostle Paul and ask for forgiveness and admit he was unfaithful to the Lord's work? We can only conjecture that Barnabas worked with John Mark on his faithfulness (I Cor. 4:2) while they were ministering in Cyprus, and somehow Paul got word that John Mark was again faithful to the Lord's work.

Come to Rome

Paul was released from house arrest after appearing before Nero and soon went on a fourth missionary journey. Early Church historians say he journeyed to Spain. Scripture tells us that he ministered on the island of Crete, and was in Macedonia and Asia Minor and well as Corinth and Nicopolis. He was re-arrested and landed in prison in Rome in AD 67. This time Nero was not as nice as the first time they met at Paul's first defense (II Tim. 4:16).

Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, who was engaged in evangelistic work in Ephesus and tells him, 'Get [John] Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry (II Tim. 4:11). At age 55, John Mark is still playing second fiddle!!! The word *ministry* (*diakonia*) stresses not the office but the service rendered. Mark had

demonstrated his power of organization and practical usefulness, so Paul felt that Mark was just the man he now needed in Rome (Hiebert 1992: 78). Plus, he was still exercising his spiritual serving gift of helps. John Mark was modeling Biblical greatness. The one who is the greatest is the one who is the servant (*diakonos*).

The Death of John Mark

Jerome records that John Mark died in the 8th year of Nero's reign and was buried in Alexandria (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 8; 1994: 3: 364). The 8th year of Nero's reign was AD 62. This statement creates a seeming chronological problem. When Paul was released from house arrest, they would have gone their separate ways: Paul to Spain and Crete and John Mark to Asia Minor, possibly on his way to Alexandria, Egypt for a third time. John Mark would have died soon after their departure according to Jerome's account. I find it hard to believe that Paul was not informed of the death of his friend, even while in Spain, Crete, Macedonia or Asia Minor. After Paul was rearrested he called for John Mark to come to Rome with Timothy, thus indicating that he was very much alive in AD 67. More than likely, Jerome did not accurately record the date of John Mark's death.

Applications

What can we learn from the life and ministry of John Mark? There are at least six lessons we can learn from this true servant of the Servants of God.

First, playing second fiddle may not be all that bad. In light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, it really does not make any difference who gets the credit for the work done in this life. You see, the Lord keeps the record books! In that day, our individual works are made manifest, even those things that somebody else got credit for even though we did it, those things that you did and nobody even saw you do, those things that were quietly done with no fanfare, they will be openly rewarded by the Lord (I Cor. 3:11-15; II Cor 5:10; Rev. 22:12). What matters in this life is that the Lord Jesus gets the credit because what we accomplished for Him was done by His grace and through His strength (Eph. 6:10). A principle that Jesus set forth in the Sermon on the Mount applies in this situation. What is done in secret will be rewarded openly (Matt. 6:1-8, 16-18). Sometimes it may be in this life, but for sure it will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Second, John Mark modeled a servant's heart. He always had people as his priority and was serving them. This was a lesson that he learned when he penned the words of Jesus in Mark 10: 42-45. You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and there great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant (*diakonos*). And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave (*doulos*) of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served (*diakovathanai*), but to serve (*diakonasai*), and to give His life a ransom for many. ♦

When Paul was in prison for a second time, he called for John Mark because of his reputation of service / ministry (*diakonia*). John Mark was great in the eyes of God because of his servant's heart. Do we have a servant's heart, or are we living for ourselves?

Third, never underestimate what a young person can learn spiritually. Someone once said, Lessons are more caught, than taught. ♦ John Mark had godly influence as a young person and saw the Lord working in the early church. He saw God answer prayer and people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus. He had parents who set a godly example of service for the Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21), examples and lessons that he would use later in his ministry. Do young people, or children for that matter, see their parents on their knees

praying for family and friends, the local assembly and a lost and dying world that needs to hear the gospel? Do they see them studying the Word of God and reading it in family gatherings? Do they see their parents involved in the local assembly, setting an example for the young people to follow? Our young people are the next generation to carry on the Lord's work. What kind of example are we setting for them?

Fourth, Jerome points out that John Mark was learned in the Scriptures. Are you listening carefully to the preacher / Bible teacher and studying the Word of God on your own?

Fifth, John Mark was exercising his spiritual serving gift of ministry / helps and was using it to build up the Body of Christ, the Church (I Cor. 14:12). Do you know what your spiritual gift is and are you using it to build up the Body of Christ? The list of spiritual gifts can be found in Romans 12, I Corinthians 14 and I Peter 4:10, 11.

Sixth, none of us are immune to failure in the Christian life. It is important to note where John Mark's lapse into unfaithfulness falls in the chronology of his life. He has already gone with Peter on a missionary journey, written the gospel of Mark, planted a church in Alexandria, and spent three years working with the Apostles Barnabas and Paul in the growing church at Antioch. He had been walking with the Lord for at least seventeen years and engaged in full time work for at least seven years. At the age of 35 he has a temporary lapse into unfaithfulness to the work of the Lord. What does John Mark do? He could have bagged the Christian life completely, but he does not. We are not told the details, but we can assume that John Mark confessed his sin (I John 1:9) of unfaithfulness to the Lord. Most likely his cousin, Barnabas, worked with him in this area of his life (Gal. 6:1). John Mark Practiced, practiced, practiced, learned the lesson of faithfulness and went on for the Lord. Do we get discouraged when we fail and contemplate throwing in the towel and not make the effort to live the Christian life? Or, like John Mark, do we recognize our problem, confess it to the Lord, get help from a mature Christian and go on for the Lord?

There is much to learn from this servant of the Servants of God who enjoyed playing second fiddle. He was good at this difficult, yet unglamorous task. Might we take these lessons to heart and apply them to our lives.

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