

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Adult Bible Class Studies

29th October 2006

Read: Mark 1: 1-15

An Introduction to the New Testament

No.8, Mark – The Gospel of the Servant

The four Gospels give us an inspired history of the *Life of Christ* – a history that stretches from His incarnation to His ascension to heaven. It is a section of the NT, therefore, that should hold the greatest interest and fascination for the believer. Since we have in this Gospel history the record of the entrance of the Godman into this world, all that He did while He was here in the days of His flesh, and then His exodus from this world – then the first four books of the NT should receive our devoted reading, study and attention.

As noted, each Gospel presents Christ to us within the framework of a certain aspect of His person and His work. The first three Gospels view the Saviour mainly from the aspect of His humanity, thus they are called the *Synoptic Gospels*; yet each of the three follows a particular line of approach, centred on Christ's offices as the Godman and Mediator. Last week we considered Matthew and note that it is the Gospel of the King. Today we come to take an overview of Mark's Gospel and as seen already, in this book the focus is mainly on Christ's office as the Prophet.

In keeping with the emphasis on Christ's prophetic office, *Mark* places great stress on the activity of Christ, as distinguished from His words or His discourses. Indeed, where any of Christ's discourses are employed they are illustrative of the acts or incidents with which they are connected. In this respect *Mark* differs from *Matthew* and *Luke* and even more so from *John*, in which an opposite method is used – the acts or incidents recorded are for the purpose of illustrating the discourses. Thus, *Mark* is the Gospel of action, revealing Christ as one constantly on the move, continually going about as the Prophet and Servant of Jehovah.

AUTHOR

A word needs to be said about the author of this Gospel. The name *Mark* is of a Roman origin, also being rendered *Marcus*, Col 4: 10. But who was this man, Mark, whose name is given to this Gospel? The question is asked because there is no person by this name among the apostles, so the writer of this book did not have the apostolic credentials.

The orthodox and traditional view of his identity is that he is the John Mark, mentioned a number of times in the NT; and the son of a certain Mary, a believer in Jerusalem, Acts 12: 12; and a close relative of Barnabas, Col 4: 10 where it is said of Mark or Marcus – “*sister's son to Barnabas*.” He was a close attendant of Barnabas and Paul on their journey from Jerusalem to Antioch, Acts 12: 25; and then on part of their first missionary journey, Acts 13: 5 & 13. He became the subject of dispute between Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15: 37-39; yet later appears in Paul's epistles as a valued servant of Christ – Col 4: 10, Philemon 24, & 2 Tim 4: 11. In 1 Pet 5: 23 Peter refers to him as his spiritual son.

All of this information shows that Mark was closely associated with the Apostles and their ministry, such close association meaning that he received the gift and the authority to write this Gospel. There is much evidence concerning other NT men, who were not actually apostles, but who had great gifts and authority due to their close association with the Apostles – men like Stephen, Philip the evangelist, Barnabas himself and Silas. Obviously from Peter's words (1 Peter 5: 23) he and Mark were very closely identified; and this is the reason why many eminent Bible scholars are of the opinion that Peter contributed heavily to the penning of Mark's Gospel.

ANALYSIS

It is always good to analyse the Scriptures and seek to have a structure for study. Often the structure of a book is built around a key passage or a key verse; and the key verse of this Gospel is ch.10: 45. This verse falls into a two-fold division, supplying a two-fold analysis for *Mark*.

1. SERVICE

“*The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.*” The word “minister” means *to serve*, thus Christ came into this world to serve; and this is, as already noted, the great theme of *Mark* – it is the Gospel of action, and Christ is constantly presented in ceaseless toil and service.

Moreover, this theme in the first part of the key verse – *service* – is especially true of the first section of *Mark*, namely chs 1-9. Study will show that in these chapters Christ is in the north in Galilee, exercising His ministry. In *Mark* there are about 18 distinct miracles recorded with reference to other miracles wrought in groups. The interesting detail is that all but one of these miracles are recorded in the first nine chapters; thus the emphasis is certainly on action, service and ministry in the first section of the book -- “*The Son of man came... to minister.*”

Along with this detail about the miracles is another fact worthy of attention – in the first section of the book where the theme is service, Christ is seen in confrontation with Satan & the forces of darkness. In these first nine chapters there are many references to this matter of demonic activity. Note ch. 1: 13 – early on Mark takes us to the wilderness to see Christ in conflict with Satan; and then the very first miracle recorded is that of the casting out of the demon in the synagogue in Capernaum, v.v. 23-26; see also v.v. 32-34, & 39. Go through these first nine chapters and this confrontation with the powers of darkness will be seen all the way through. The lesson is clear –

any service for God and His kingdom is going to be resisted fiercely by Satan. Going forth to labour for the Lord will bring us into collision with the powers of darkness, Eph 6: 10-18.

Incidentally, it is of great interest to note a certain detail about this demonic activity: *Mark* shows that it is all centred in the northern regions in Galilee. All of the references to demonic activity are in these first 9 chapters – there is not one reference to such from ch.10 onwards. The last 7 chapters are centred on the south and on Jerusalem – and it is in this fact that the absence of reference to demonic activity is explained. For one thing Jewish orthodoxy was concentrated in the south, so that there was still the influence of a strong creed though there was much apostasy and deadness. But in the north of the land there was not the same depth of religious profession due to being separated from the spiritual centre in Jerusalem. Thus, there would have been little religious feeling in the north with Satan able to operate freely. Moreover, in the south and especially in Jerusalem there was the Temple with its emphasis on the sacrificial system and the atonement. Again, while there was much apostasy, yet the Jewish ceremonial system with its focus on the shedding of the atoning blood provided spiritual protection from the powers of darkness. Note – John’s Gospel is mainly centred in Jerusalem and there is not one reference in John to demonic activity. Surely this detail is of great significance and reminds us of the great truth encapsulated in Revelation 12: 10 & 11.

2. SACRIFICE

This is the theme of the second part of the book, from chs 10-16. As noted, these chapters are centred on the south – on Judea and Jerusalem. There is still confrontation in these chapters and much of it, but with men – notably the religious leaders. However, these chapters show the development of the second part of the key verse: “*to give His life a ransom for many.*” This is of course the supreme work of the Servant of Jehovah – working out the salvation of men, presenting to the Father the perfect sacrifice for sin, arising from the dead, ascending to heaven and sitting on the right hand of God to intercede as our great High Priest, and reigning over His Church with all power and authority, ch. 16: 19-20.

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