

- ***READ II Timothy 4:6-11*** If you are someone who really enjoys hearing a good redemption story then the Bible is just the book for you! Time after time throughout this book of books we read of men and women who made some mistakes and did some pretty horrible things. However, those mistakes were not the ends of their stories because we see them bouncing back and getting their lives where they needed to be.
- When I think about some of the best comeback stories in the Bible, I think about people such as David, Peter, and Paul. David gave into his fleshly desires, took a woman not his wife for himself, had her husband killed, and then had the audacity to become incensed over the fictional story of a rich man stealing and killing a poor man's lamb. Peter vehemently denied that he would ever leave the side of his Lord, and yet he surely did deny Him even three times while deserting Jesus like the rest of the Apostles. Paul lived his life before Christ as a terrorist towards the Way of the Lord. He approved of Stephen's stoning and even did much persecution on his own. These men did horrible things, and yet David repented of his actions and lived out his days only for his God. **(II Samuel 11,12)** Peter stood before thousands on Pentecost and proclaimed the crucified Jesus as having been raised to the position of both Lord and Christ. **(Acts 2)** Paul turned his back on his old way of life, and gave it all to Jesus. He would say that it wasn't even he who lived, but it was Christ living through him. **(Galatians 2:20)**
- These are fantastic accounts of men who found redemption from the depths of sin and despair, and we have talked and will talk more about these men, and we will consider lessons from their stories that we can keep in mind that will help us to be more faithful to God. We will consider how we might be like them at times in our lives, and yet there are times when it might be difficult to relate to these men. After all...David was the anointed king of Israel who served the Lord as a prophet. Peter was a chosen Apostle of Jesus Christ who was filled with a full measure of the Holy Spirit. Paul, too, was an Apostle even after living as a terrorist to the church. Very few if any of us can readily relate to these men in where they came from and who they were, and therefore we feel as if we can't fully relate to their road to redemption.
- However, might I suggest that there is a man within the New Testament that we might well be able to relate to pretty well. We read his name just a few minutes ago, and I would like to consider his road to redemption this morning. Back in **II Timothy 4**, we read of Paul's instructions to Timothy in regards to care that he wished to receive while being in prison. In **v.11**, we read Paul telling Timothy that only Luke was with him, but that he desired for Mark to be brought to him, as well. This might not seem like anything out of the ordinary...unless we know the whole story of John Mark, where he had been, and what he had done. Let's use our time of study this morning considering the story of John Mark and the road to redemption that he walked in this life. We will set the scene by first considering as best we can his life's story from what we have recored within the Scriptures.

I. The Story Of John Mark

A. John Mark grew up in affluence.

1. We first come to read about John Mark in **Acts 12:12** after Peter is miraculously freed after being imprisoned by Herod. **Acts 12** begins with details of Herod's terror towards the Lord's people having had James the brother of John put to death. After seeing how much it pleased the people, we see him then going after Peter and committing him to prison until after the Passover when he would put the Apostle out before the people presumably for execution. **(Acts 12:3,4)**
2. However, after Peter's escape at the hands of an angel who freed him from being chained between two sleeping soldiers, Peter finds his way to the house of a disciple named Mary. Luke records for us that this woman had a son named John Mark. John was His Hebrew name and Mark or Marcus was his given Roman name.

3. We will notice from this verse that Peter came to this house while many disciples were gathered for a prayer meeting. It is a reasonable assumption to understand that John Mark's family doesn't seem to have been struggling financially. To be able to host a large group of disciples would demand space, and space wasn't something that the poor were in strong supply of. Where as Jesus seemed to have grown up with very little, John Mark was able to grow up with some degree of affluence.
- B. He came from a godly family.**
1. More importantly than that however, is the fact that John Mark grew up surrounded by strong men and women of faith in his life. We have already noted that John Mark's mother was a believer and that she was one who was devout enough to have other disciples in her home even during a time when the faith was under attack. She seems very much to have been strong in her faith, and we will see that this faith was also present in her son.
 2. Yet, she was not the only strong spiritual influence in John Mark's life. In **Colossians 4:10** Paul informs us that Barnabas was a cousin to John Mark. Barnabas, the son of encouragement as named by the Apostles themselves (**Acts 4:36,37**), must have been a phenomenal influence to have within the life of John Mark.
- C. He learned from the best teachers.**
1. To add to the great spiritual influences that surrounded him, John Mark also had opportunity to learn from some of the greatest spiritual teachers of the day. We have already noted that he was kin to Barnabas and certainly must have been built up by his encouragement, but we'll see in a moment that he spent much time with Paul. There is not way that Paul didn't give much time and effort seeking to strengthen and build up John Mark's faith during their time together.
 2. But what's more, we can also read in **I Peter 5:13** that Peter thought of John Mark as his son in the faith. If we want comparable language then consider that Paul referred often to Timothy as his own son in the faith, and we know the influence that Paul had upon this preacher man. What a great blessing and honor it must have been to have been taught at the feet of Peter and have him consider you as his son or daughter in the faith.
- D. He assisted in the work of Paul.**
1. With all of these things under consideration, it shouldn't surprise us to see that John Mark had grown into a young man who possessed a strong faith within himself that led him to join Paul and Barnabas in their ministry trips across the land.
 2. Back in **Acts 12:25**, we see that after Paul and Barnabas's return delivering aid to the disciples who were in Judea that they set off again to the ministry of the Gospel, this time with John Mark coming along to assist them as their helper (**Acts 13:5**).
 3. They first set off for Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (**Acts 13:1-4**) It was then in Salamis that they entered the synagogues of the Jews where they proclaimed the Gospel to those who would hear. The continued their way throughout the entire island as far as Paphos when they ran into trouble in the form of a Jewish false prophet magician by the name of Bar Jesus or Elymas. They had the opportunity to share the Gospel with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, but Elymus sought to stop their progress with him. Paul became fed up with the false prophet, and while filled with the Holy Spirit cursed the man blind. This act of authority and power caused the proconsul to believe and he turned to the Lord. (**Acts 13:6-12**)

At this point, we might well be under the impression that John Mark is going to be a stalwart in the cause of the Gospel throughout the book of Acts, but we will see that this isn't quite the case at all because he soon after leaves this work of ministry.

E. He abandoned the work of Paul.

1. After the conclusion of their work in Paphos, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark put out to sea and came to Perga in Pamphylia. However, we read that this was as far as John Mark went on this ministry journey. Luke records in **Acts 13:13**, *"But John left them and returned to Jerusalem."*
2. There isn't much information given as to why John Mark left quit this journey, but Paul was under the belief that he *"deserted them in Pamphylia."* (**Acts 15:38**) Why had he done so? We can only speculate, but:
 - a) it is possible that John Mark wasn't too thrilled with the prospect of crossing the Taurus mountains which were coming up on their journey.
 - b) Or it could've been that he was realizing that this journey came with many other different dangers such as what Paul mentioned in **II Corinthians 11:23-27**.
 - c) It might be that John Mark wasn't happy that Paul had assumed the lead over his cousin Barnabas in this preaching and teaching trip.
 - d) It could've been possible that John Mark wasn't all that excited about the Gospel being taken to the Gentiles...maybe he was a part of spark that ignited the problems that we see coming to light in **Acts 15** concerning the Jews trying to bind circumcision upon the Gentiles.
 - e) Or it very well could've been that the events that took place in Paphos discouraged him because he saw first hand how some would stand up and oppose the Gospel.
3. We simply do not know for certain what caused John Mark to abandon this ministry journey, but we do know for certain that it greatly offended and upset Paul to the point that he refused to allow John Mark to join back up with the team following the events that took place in Jerusalem in **Acts 15**. After going to Antioch to deliver the words of the Apostles on the matter of the Gentiles and the Gospel, Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for some days. Following this brief stay, Paul tells Barnabas that he wants to go back and revisit the churches that they had previously been at and taught. Understandably, Barnabas, the son of encouragement, wants to bring John Mark along as a second chance. However, Paul is staunch in his opposition to this idea to the point that these two men end up going their separate ways. Again, we don't know why exactly John Mark quit, but it was enough that Paul refused to allow him to come along once again.

At this point...things don't look good for John Mark, and if this were the end of his story then we would have to say that a good taste isn't left in our mouths. However, we must be thankful, and surely John Mark is thankful, that his story doesn't end here.

F. Before his death, Paul commends John Mark as being useful to him in his work of the Gospel.

1. In the text we began this lesson with, we see the Apostle Paul requesting that Timothy come see him and that he wants John Mark to come along with him on this visit. These words are a sharp contrast to what we last saw of Paul's thoughts towards John Mark in **Acts 15**.
2. What happened to change Paul's perception of John Mark? We might not be able to say for certain, but it could be the case that John Mark was able to prove to Paul that he had matured and was more committed to his faith and the work of ministry after having gone with Barnabas to Cyprus. Maybe it was that John Mark excelled during his time with Barnabas? We simply do not know, but we do know that somehow things had been mended between these two disciples, and Paul wanted this man with him during his final days.
3. Oh...and you know there is this whole things about John Mark being an inspired writer of a Gospel account. Sure things might have looked pretty back for John Mark in **Acts 13 & 15**, but the road to redemption was a road that John Mark knew well.

So what can we learn from John Mark's story? Again, there are some Biblical characters that seem out of our league in regards to where they have been and what they have done, but John Mark was just a regular disciple who made mistakes, but bounced back and there are some great lessons that we can learn from his story of walking the road of redemption.

II. What can we learn from John Mark's story?

A. A good start doesn't guarantee a finished job.

1. From the onset we see John Mark having every advantage that anyone could ever have in regards to a life that would lead to a strong and founded faith. He seems to have grown up without much need. He had strong role models of faith in his mother and his cousin Barnabas. He spent time learning under well respected men of faith in Barnabas, Paul, and Peter. He even had opportunities to accompany faithful men in the work of the Gospel...and yet we see him quit before the job was completed. We even see his actions having adverse affects on others which was just additional salt in the wound.
2. If John Mark's story should teach us anything then it should be that we can't expect for a good start or a good spiritual background to be all that is needed in order for our faith to be seen through to the end. There are many of us who have a lot in common with John Mark. Many of us grew up in well off households where we did not have to worry much about needs. Many of us grew up in homes where we had strong spiritual influences who sought to steer us in the right directions in our faiths. Many of us even had great teachers who shared with us the great knowledge and faiths that they possessed so that our knowledge and faith would be firmly founded and strengthened.
3. However, each and every one of us also have in common with John Mark that we are susceptible to stumbling if we are not on guard and aware of the dangers of spiritual downfall. We could've grown up with all of the spiritual benefits available that could be imagined, yet if we do not make a concerted effort to remain strong and diligent in our faiths then we could suffer the fate of John Mark in **Acts 13:13**, and this leads us to our second takeaway...

B. Disciples make mistakes.

1. While we might not know the details of John Mark's decision to leave the ministry of the Gospel with Paul and Barnabas, we can pretty certainly conclude that his actions could be deemed as a mistake on his part. I can't imagine that Paul would've reacted the way he did in **Acts 15:38** if John Mark had a legitimate reason for leaving their sides in Pamphylia. I think we can safely say that John Mark made a mistake.
2. I think we can all also say with some certainty that we have made mistakes at times in our lives as disciples. Maybe I'm sitting here thinking about my own John Mark moment where I deserted my faith and made some foolish mistakes. If that's what I'm thinking then I can take a number and get in line because that line is pretty long, and it includes people like John Mark, David, Peter, and even Paul. Disciples make mistakes, but we have to recognize that those mistakes don't have to define us because...

C. Those mistakes can be corrected and overcome.

1. This is the true beauty of John Mark's story...it truly is a story of redemption and finding the way back to where it is that we need to be. John Mark had everything in the world going for him. He had a great family, great teachers, and a great opportunity...and yet he simply blew it. He absolutely blew it and brought about the ire of the Apostle Paul. John Mark could've allowed this mistake to be his ruin. He could've responded to the request of Barnabas to go to Cyprus by saying that he simply wasn't fit for ministry. He could've allowed for his past actions to hinder his progress in the future, but we must be so thankful that this doesn't end up being the case within his story, and it doesn't have to be the case with us either.

2. As I mentioned, many of us have had our own John Mark moments. We have made mistakes that could've completely derailed our faiths to the point where we are no longer useful in the kingdom in any sort of capacity. We could've allowed the past to define our future. However, there are many of us that found redemption just as John Mark did. Many of us found strength in the Lord, and decided to make something of the tremendous blessings afforded to us in this life. Because of those decisions many of us sit here today in this place as useful members of the Lord's body. Thanks be to God for the road to redemption that so many of us have walked within our own lives and for the grace that we have found in our Lord.

As I mentioned at the onset, if you are looking for a good book on people walking the road of redemption then you can't go wrong reading the book that so many of us are holding even this very moment. Redemption pours from its pages, and we can learn so much that can help to encourage us as we find redemption within our own lives. Many of us have walked that road ourselves just as John Mark did, and we ought to ever be thankful to God for the strength to walk that road with Him as our guide.

PRAYER *Our most righteous and merciful Father in heaven...we approach you with hearts that are overflowing for Your patience and mercy for we certainly are a people who are in great need of them. We are thankful for the stories of redemption that are contained within Your Word, and we hope and pray even now that they will encourage us as we journey through this life. We are thankful for the redemption that so many have found through faith and obedience to Your Son in all things. You are worthy to be praised for the lives we now live in Him. However, we also want to pray for those who might need to walk that road in their own lives. We ask that You might prick their hearts to search for Your grace and mercy. May they come to You humbly laying their broken lives before You, and may they find that mercy to live for You moving forward. You are a loving Father who hears our prayers, and we thank you so much for the ability to approach You in this way. We are thankful for Jesus, and it is by His power and authority that we offer these words up to You...amen.*