

My name is John Mark, and I wrote the *Gospel of Mark*, not the *Gospel of John*.

My book starts with the beginning of Jesus' ministry. I don't address the birth of Jesus, his childhood or his ancestry like Matthew and Luke do. But, I do reveal that Jesus is the coming Lord predicted by the prophet Isaiah more than seven centuries before the birth of Jesus. I also reveal that John the Baptist is the messenger sent to prepare the way for Jesus, the coming King Jesus. So not *all* the highlights but definitely the high points of his life. His life on earth, that is.

I knew Jesus and his apostles, but I was not an apostle. My wealthy family were supporters of the early church in Jerusalem, and my cousin was Barnabas, an early church leader. I deserted him and Paul on their first missionary journey, joined Barnabas on his second missionary journey, and later became an important helper of Paul's.

Although the *Gospel of Mark* never specifically reveals its author, it has traditionally been agreed that I, John Mark, wrote it. Many people believe I was the unidentified young man who fled naked on the night Jesus was betrayed,¹ as only the *Gospel of Mark* describes. Many experts believe that my good friend, Peter, helped guide the writing of my book.

Because my book is the shortest of the gospels, many experts believe it was the first gospel account written, and that the other gospel writers may have used it for source material. For instance, more than three-quarters of my book is also found in the *Gospel of Luke* and *Gospel of Matthew*. So, this episode will concentrate on some things found in my book, but not found in those two Gospels.

There are some striking points of emphasis in parts of my book. I often emphasize the healings and miracles of Jesus, the opposition of the Pharisees to the ministry of Jesus, and details that only Peter would have known.

After some background, my book begins with the first sermon ever preached by the best preacher who ever lived. Listen carefully, and you will hear the entire first sermon preached by Jesus. "The time has come and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the good news!"² That's the entire sermon! And, the best sermons for the next two thousand years will include this same message.

¹ Mark 14:51-52

² Mark 1:15

When you read my little book, you will notice that I sometimes show Jesus as preaching, sometimes healing people, and sometimes doing both. I sometimes show Jesus as doing something that many of you do not believe in. I show Jesus as casting out demons, quite a different thing than healing people from diseases. Watching a demon be cast out is something you never forget. Just listen to my account of Jesus' early activities in Capernaum: "And at evening, after sunset, they brought to him those that were diseased, and those that were possessed with demons. The entire city gathered at the door. And he healed many that were sick of various diseases, *and* cast out many demons."³ (long pause to change subjects)

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews who viewed themselves as experts in the Mosaic laws and how those laws should be followed. From the first, they did not quite know what to do with Jesus. He interpreted Scriptures differently than they did, was interested in following God's intent and God's heart, and hated the way the rules of the Pharisees imprisoned people's lives and hearts. It was not long before the Pharisees and Jesus started to clash, and the heavy artillery first came out because of a man who did not want to be noticed.

One Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in Capernaum. In the rock-clad synagogue...in the far corner was a poor, trembling man with a shriveled right hand. Poor, because he could not have a good job; trembling, because he expected the Pharisees to boot him out because of his deformity. Instead, the Pharisees decided to use him to try to trap Jesus. They watched to see if Jesus would heal him on a Sabbath, which would be a violation of their rules.

To his horror, the poor man heard these words "Stand up in front of everyone!" It was Jesus. Everyone was embarrassed for the man. Jesus continued, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil. To save life or to kill?" The entire room collectively held our breath. "Stretch out your hand." Everyone heard the command so now, everyone was embarrassed even more because the man clearly could not stretch out his hand. As the man tried to obey, the tension in the room broke into pandemonium. His fingers began to open, the ligaments stretched, the muscles expanded. He reached and reached and reached, and he was completely healed.⁴

From that day on, the Pharisees, the now embarrassed Pharisees, plotted how they might kill Jesus. They hated Jesus because he wouldn't follow their rules or give in to their authority. He was furious with them because of their pride and hard hearts. It would be almost three years later before they accomplished their goal of killing him.

The popularity and reputation of Jesus skyrocketed as he healed and preached. People came to be healed from all over Israel, and from faraway regions like Idumea, Tyre and Sidon. Yet, another factor that drove the hatred of the Pharisees; Jesus increasing popularity. They were so

³ Mark 1:32-34

⁴ Mark 3:1-6

angry, they even charged Jesus with casting out demons through the power of Beelzebul. They could not have made much of a worse accusation. They attributed God's work to Satan, which is a very stupid thing to do.

It seemed that as Jesus grew more frustrated with the Pharisees, he became more compassionate to the masses of regular people who followed him. Rather than speaking to them in complex, religious jargon like the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, Jesus spoke in simple parables. This allowed the people to understand as much as they were capable of. It also allowed them to remember Jesus' words so they could repeat them and reflect on them.

One day, Jesus decided to teach his followers a new lesson, so he took them back to his hometown of Nazareth. On the way there, his followers talked among themselves about the joyous celebration they expected from his hometown. They got just the opposite. His hometown took offense at Jesus because he was acting too big for his britches. Their familiarity with him brought contempt. Their lack of faith was so astounding that Jesus did not do many miracles for them. Denied miracles because you are too familiar with somebody or something, even God... Ever happened to you? God doesn't answer 100% of prayers that you never pray.

About half-way through Jesus' ministry, something horrific occurred that changed his behavior. John the Baptist had been in jail for about a year and a half, since near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Herod Antipas had jailed John the Baptist because he had been openly critical of Herod's marriage to Herodias, the former wife of Herod's brother, Philip. Herodias wanted to kill John, but Herod Antipas kept him alive because he knew John to be righteous and holy, and because the people considered John to be a prophet.

On Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for the entire party. Herod was so thrilled by it all, that he promised, with an oath, to give her whatever she asked. Based on her mother's command, the daughter asked for John's head... on a platter. Herod was aghast, but did not want to break his oath in front of his guests, so he beheaded John.

Jesus chose to avoid retaliatory measures by Herod due to the increase of his popularity, and to avoid the growing hostility of the Pharisees, *and* to avoid the crowds so he could teach his disciples. He started moving from a predominantly public ministry to a predominantly private one. One measure he took was to travel outside of Herod's domain of Galilee.

Jesus led his followers far north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. This region was not in Israel, and most of the inhabitants were not Jewish. He wanted to keep his presence secret so he could spend private time with his close followers, but his reputation for healing preceded him. A Greek woman came to him and begged him to heal her demon possessed daughter.

Jesus turned her away, saying that he had come to serve the Jews. She refused to leave, and said that she would be satisfied to have only the crumbs that fell from the tables of the Jews. Her faith (to himself, in admiration of her). Because of her faith, Jesus immediately healed her

daughter. By doing this, he ensured that he would need to leave that area soon if he was to have any privacy.

He traveled back to east side of the Sea of Galilee in the area known as the Decapolis. He continued to heal people, and even took the occasion to miraculously feed a crowd of four thousand men, along with the women and children, who had been following him for days with little or nothing to eat.

As his ministry started drawing to a close, Jesus continually tried to show his disciples how to be more dedicated to his cause. Once, he said to them, "For he that is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to me, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward....If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out: it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than have two eyes and be thrown into hell."⁵ The disciples were always learning about the seriousness and danger of sin. They were constantly learning how to serve, and how not to be self-centered.

But they were tired of serving, they wanted to be served. It was a huge ego problem for Jesus' followers. Many of them followed Jesus believing he would lead the Jews to overthrow the Romans and become a great nation as they were under King David. Many followed Jesus hoping to share in the plunder and honors that would surely follow after that happened. Even his closest followers expected him to establish an earthly kingdom. They could hardly believe their ears when Jesus said things like, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a servant of all."⁶

As the life of Jesus drew to an end, he gave the Pharisees one more opportunity to overcome their fawning dedication to their hundreds of man-made rules. One of their experts tested Jesus by asking which of the commandments was most important. He had no choice but to agree with the answer since Jesus gave him the top two from the Law of Moses: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first. And, the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself."⁷

If only the Pharisees could have just understood his answer. They would have been freed from their spiritual bondage, and would have been able to accept Jesus as their long-desired Messiah! Instead, they took it as another challenge, which led Jesus to condemn their hard hearts. It led them to condemn Jesus to death.

I was well acquainted with other wealthy Jews and the Jewish leaders, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. That's why I was able to give so many details of the night of Jesus' death. You see, I would have had the relationships to personally listen in at the house of Annas and

⁵ Mark 9:40-41, 47

⁶ Mark 10:44

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18

before the Sanhedrin, or to learn the details from others who were there. It might even have been my influence that allowed Peter to enter the courtyard where he denied Jesus.

When you read my account, you will learn the details of the last night of Jesus' first life. He was seized at Gethsemene on the Mount of Olives, dragged across the Kidron Valley ravine to the house of the high priest where Peter denied him, tried before the high priest, before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, before Herod Antipas, and condemned to death by Pilate. I tell you about how the soldiers mocked and beat Jesus before taking him to his place of crucifixion.

I write about how Jesus died quicker than Pilate expected, and how Joseph of Arimathea risked his reputation and position by going to Pilate and boldly asking for the body of Jesus. When Pilate learned from his centurion that Jesus was dead, he gave the body to Joseph. This was also a bold move on Pilate's part since he might have expected the followers of Jesus to use the body to stir up trouble. He must have known and trusted Joseph to act honorably, which he did. Joseph wrapped the body in linen cloth and laid it in a tomb prepared for himself, and rolled a stone over the entrance to bring the story of the life of Jesus to an end. And that was the end... of Jesus' *earthly* life, that is