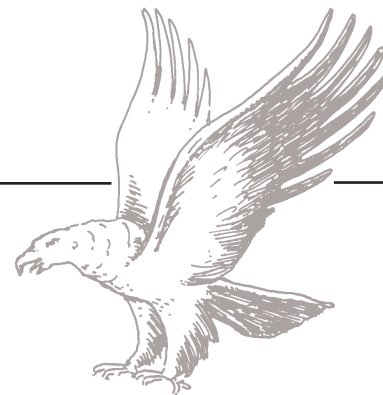


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



April 21, 2013

John Mark: An Ordinary Christian

John Mark is considered a minor character in the New Testament story. But a study of his life reveals remarkable details that should be an encouragement to all Christians.

“So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer” (Ac. 12:12-13).

John Mark is best known as the author of the Gospel of Mark. But the full story of how Mark came to that role reveals an important lesson for every Christian who views himself as too ordinary to accomplish anything significant.

As our text indicates, Mark was a resident of Jerusalem, whose mother was apparently well-to-do. She owned a large house—large enough to require the services of at least one servant girl—that was used as a meeting place for the disciples.

As an inhabitant of Jerusalem, Mark was likely acquainted with the occasional visits of Jesus to the city. We do not know at what point he became a disciple of Jesus, but a curious incident—recorded only in Mark’s gospel—hints that he was a disciple prior to the crucifixion. The account describes “a certain young

man,” clad only in a blanket, narrowly escaping capture when Jesus was arrested (Mk. 14:51-52). Commentators are generally agreed in identifying this young man as the author of the gospel.

Some years later, when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, they brought Mark with them. No doubt, this was Barnabas’ idea, since Mark was his cousin (Col. 4:10). When Paul and Barnabas embarked on their first missionary journey, Mark accompanied them as their assistant (Ac. 13:5). But the rigors of this work apparently proved to be too much for Mark, and he quit the group in Perga and returned to Jerusalem (13:13). The incident so infuriated Paul that he refused to take Mark along on his next journey (15:36-41).

We have no record of Mark’s activities for the next several years, but by the time Paul arrived in Rome, his reputation had been rehabilitated in Paul’s eyes. In letters to the Colossians and Philemon, Paul mentions Mark as being one of his companions in the work (Col. 4:10; Phe. 23). A few years later, as Paul

faced certain death, he requested that Timothy bring Mark with him when he came to Rome, “for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Mark must have made the trip, for Peter later writes that Mark was with him in Rome (“Babylon”) (1 Pet. 5:13). Later Christian writers tell us that it was there in Rome that Mark recorded the sermons of Peter that became the foundation of his Gospel (see David Alan Black, *Why Four Gospels?* Energion Publications, 2nd ed., 2010).

So what can we learn from the story of John Mark? Clearly, Mark was not cut out to be a pioneering giant of the faith, after the manner of Paul; his talents lay elsewhere. Always laboring in the shadows of greater men, Mark nevertheless did the best he could to assist his more famous brethren. In the process, he quietly developed a talent that enabled him to make an enormous contribution to the kingdom.

And in doing so, he gave assurance to other “ordinary” saints that we, too, can do great things for God, if we patiently study, grow, and work hard.

– David King