

# Truth for Today

*The Bible Explained*

---

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 30 October 2016

**No.** T0961

**Speaker:** Mr. George Stevens

---

## Problems Christians Face: Mark - Dealing with failure

*Are you classed as a failure? You never succeed!  
Your service falls short of all you believed!  
Though young and well favoured by God up above  
You still don't rely on His strength and His love.*

*Your gift you have squandered - alternatives sought!  
Forgetting the reason for which you were bought.  
Nothing accomplished! Nothing much gained!  
But thankful to Jesus that Glory's attained!*

*D'you think you are worthless and life lived is vain?  
Look to your Saviour and think of His pain.  
His toil was unstinting and yet He declared:  
"I have laboured in vain..." His feelings were bared!*

*Will you give it up or will you pursue?  
Will you find true joy in all that you do?  
Spend and be spent; store treasure on high  
Knowing your Master will always be nigh.*

*Learn by your failures and look to your call.  
Recognise service is different for all.  
By prayer and by study know God and His mind;  
Then, in His great mercy, His blessing you'll find.*

*Commit to the Saviour the work you have done!  
Acknowledge His grace in small victories won!  
And though the beginning by failure was marred  
The end will be glorious! Your prize, He will guard!*

(GE Stevens)

There are at least three ways of failing in the Christian life and they are all interlinked. These include shortcomings:

- in our personal relationship and walk with God;
- in our Christian service; and,
- in our more secular endeavours.

Failure in our personal relationship and walk with God is the result of sin within us.

- a. There is sin in our lives of which we are ignorant. We only become conscious of this as we mature in the Christian faith.
- b. There is that spontaneous sin into which we fall given certain circumstances. This kind of sin we must confess before the God who is faithful and just to forgive us (see 1 John 1:9).
- c. There is sin that is habitual and, being unable to control such ourselves, we have to ask the Lord Himself to deal with it.
- d. There are also sins of omission, where we forget or neglect to do what we should or had promised. These too have to be confessed privately and directly to God.
- e. There is the type of sin that we commit that injures others in some way. This has not only to be confessed before God, but those harmed must be approached also in order to put things right.

As the children of God, we have been born again (see John 3:3). We have a nature that seeks to please God. However, the principle of sin remains in us until we are glorified with Christ. The fact that we want to please God rather than satisfy ourselves displays the victory that we have in Christ. On the ground of the precious blood of Christ and our self-judgment, God is able to forgive our sins and maintain our practical fellowship with Himself.

We also fail in our more secular activities and may wonder why God has allowed these to happen. For example, a conscientious student may fail an important examination of some kind; a hard-working businessman may fail and be made bankrupt; or an ambitious athlete may fail to make the grade needed to qualify for championships. Such failures may cause us either to doubt God or to be guided by Him. The love of God always seeks the best for the good of His children. Failure in these things should strengthen our faith in Him. Is it not written: *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths”* (Proverbs 3:5-6)?

Today’s message really addresses failure in Christian service and focuses on the disciple John Mark who failed in his early service for the Lord, but became well respected by his fellows and by the Lord as he matured in the faith.

We first hear the name “Mark” mentioned in Acts 12:11-12 where we read: *“And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”*

The meaning of John is “Yahweh is gracious” which was the Hebrew name of this disciple. Certainly, the Lord was gracious to him in his development as a Christian. The meaning of the name Mark is unknown; but suggests a Roman influence in his life. Acts 12:11-12 show that his mother was an hospitable Christian who opened up her home as a place for the saints to pray. The fact that she is identified by the name of her son rather than her husband indicates that she may have been a widow. So John Mark would have had important family responsibilities. However, his mother was wealthy enough to have a home and employ at least one servant.

Colossians 4:10 shows us that Mark was sister’s son to Joses whom the apostles had called Barnabas. The name Joses reveals one “who pardons” and Barnabas means “son of consolation”. Barnabas was a Levite who clearly lived up to his name. He was of the country of Cyprus where he was a landowner. He was the uncle (if Young’s Literal Translation and the King James Version are correct) who was to play an important part in the life of Mark.

Although we don’t know exactly when Mark was converted, we do know that it was under the preaching of Peter because the Apostle, while with the church at Babylon (Rome), honours him as *“his son”* (1 Peter 5:13). That is to say, his “son” in the faith. We will hear a little more of this relationship later.

At the end of Acts 12, we read of Paul and Barnabas returning from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 12:25). Their mission to deliver a gift to the poor, hungry saints at the capital had been completed. This was about AD 46. In Acts 12:25 it is simply recorded that they took Mark with them. Evidently, this young man (if Mark 14:51 speaks of him) was respected as a Christian by then. How good it is to see faithfulness in Christians who are young. It is a time when their zeal, energy and skills may be well used for the Lord.

In Acts 13:1-5 we find a number of Christian prophets and teachers serving the Lord and fasting. They were then instructed by the Holy Spirit to separate Paul and Barnabas for a particular work the Lord had for them starting in Cyprus. Once they had arrived at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. The end of Acts 13:5 states: *“...They had also John to their minister.”* Here we see John Mark as an “attendant” to the preachers. This meant that it was his duty to wait upon them and provide for them the necessaries of life and perform other practical work under their direction.

It may have been that Mark thought these duties were menial. After all, they were the tasks given to many bondservants of the day. It brings us a lesson that has to be learned by every Christian for each should be a bondslave of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord’s bondservant is to be: humble, obedient, caring, encouraging, kind and gentle. He or she is to remember the principle that he who is faithful in little is faithful in much (Luke 19:17). But he or she is also to remember the exhortation found in Colossians 3:23: *“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”*

However, there may well be a more important part to Mark’s job because the Greek word for “minister” or “attendant” is used by Luke as he opens his Gospel. Luke 1:1-2 states: *“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word...”* The last phrase “ministers of the word” may be translated “attendants of the word”. As Mark lived in Jerusalem, then he was an eyewitness to events that took

place there, including those concerning the Lord Jesus. He would therefore have been able to provide the Apostle Paul and Barnabas with vital facts concerning the ministry of the Messiah.

Moving to Acts 13:13 we read: *“Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”* So the team had travelled all the way across Cyprus and then took a ship to Perga which is in present-day Turkey. There Mark departed from them and returned to Jerusalem.

There is a good deal of speculation that surrounds this departure of Mark. The only facts we have relate to Paul refusing to take him with him on a future missionary journey. This suggests that Mark's commitment to the work was not complete. This is a major problem among Christians today. Many feel they are called to do a specific work for the Lord; but are frightened to make a full commitment to it. All sorts of excuses may be made; but generally these boil down to four main ones:

- Fear;
- Family relationships;
- Business commitments; and
- Other personal interests.

Most of these take up time. However, the Christian man who truly has Christ as his priority (his Chief Love) will *“redeem the time”* (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5). The force of the word “redeem” is to “buy up”. In other words, service for the Lord will cost the Christian some form of sacrifice.

We don't know the reason for Mark's leaving the work and returning to Jerusalem; but whatever it was, the Apostle Paul had not approved of his departure. He saw it as a form of desertion. In his eyes Mark had failed! This event must have put a strain on the relationship between Paul and Barnabas because of the family links between Mark and Barnabas (see Acts 15:36-41). How often negative emotions are roused between Christian colleagues when family members become the subject of judgments. The conclusions are often prejudiced in the favour of the relative.

This tension becomes most apparent prior to Paul's second missionary journey. In Acts 15:36-41 we read: *“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.”*

The seed of contention was sown between two earnest servants of the Lord because of Mark's previous failure. The Apostle Paul would not risk a recurrence of that failure. The work of the Lord was too important to him. Paul recognised that Mark could only be accepted after he had recognised his previous fault and repented. Only then could he be more devoted to the Lord.

On the other hand, the gentle disposition of Barnabas, added to the ties of relationship, influenced him in his desire to have Mark reinstated. Barnabas must have been grieved that the apostle would not give Mark a second chance. He and Paul disagreed so severely over the matter that they were literally “torn” from one another. The efforts of Barnabas as an advocate for Mark had failed. Mark himself must have been greatly disappointed that Paul would not accept him for missionary service. Furthermore, he must have blamed himself for the enmity which he had caused between two of the Lord's most faithful servants. This occasion must have been a pivotal point in the life of Mark. Would he quit or endure? On the positive side, the event provided Silas an opportunity to serve with Paul.

Many youngsters have left churches because leaders have rejected their proposals for serving the Lord in some way. If scriptural reasons were given for the rejection, then they were wrong to leave. If, however, no sound scriptural reasons were given, then they may have had some limited grounds for leaving. However, it must be said, the only legitimate reasons for leaving a church are if it is tolerating:

- immorality within its ranks;
- false teaching on the Person of Christ; or
- false teaching on the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

In the rest of the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit of God concentrates on the labours of Paul. He remains silent as to the activities of Barnabas and Mark. It may well have been that Mark wrote the Gospel bearing his name during this time because Paul's attitude towards him clearly changed in the intervening years (see 2 Timothy 4:11).

About AD 61, Paul, writing to Philemon, mentioned Marcus as one of his fellow-labourers along with Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Philemon 1:23). Mark had obviously proved himself as a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, Paul accepted him as a "*fellow-labourer*", that is to say, "a wrestler with him" in the service of the Lord. In context, the word suggests skill and strength in Gospel outreach, in confirming the churches and in comforting others.

Mark then seems to have gone to Asia Minor for a while because he is also mentioned by Paul in a letter to Timothy prior to his own death in AD 66 or 67. He wrote: "*Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry*" (2 Timothy 4:11). Here is praise indeed! The word "*profitable*" means "fitted for use" or "easy to use" He was meet for Paul's use but, more importantly, he was fit for the Master's use. The young man who had been unprofitable at the start of his service for the Lord is now commended by the apostle who had rejected him a decade or more before.

How good it is to see that a young Christian who was so deeply hurt during his early service for the Lord did not give up. In fact, the disappointment seems to have made him more determined to come up to scratch. With the support of Barnabas and, later, Peter, he continued and grew in the faith. I mention Peter because he was the spiritual father of Mark. It may be that you know of someone who was converted under your preaching - one for whom you can pray and seek to teach. The Lord will always complete the work that He starts; but He also employs His servants as a means to do so.

Over time, there was a firm fellowship between Peter and Mark, which culminated at Rome. Early Church writers consistently ascribed to Mark the task of interpreting for the apostle and of having written his Gospel as a result of their communications. It is interesting to see that the Lord called Mark to write the Gospel that speaks of the Son of God as the Perfect Servant. What joy and assurance He has brought to those who have read the Gospel he wrote under the Spirit's guidance!

In conclusion, we can see that the church needs families prepared to support the testimony of Jesus. Leaders like Paul who, by the grace of God, have wisdom and discernment in difficult situations are essential to the church. Such people are steered by true love both for the Lord and the saints. It also needs Christians with a gentle and caring spirit like that of Barnabas, those who are able to draw near to those hurt in order to encourage and help. Spiritual fathers like Peter are needed by the church in order to promote spiritual growth - especially in young converts. Finally, youngsters with the grit and endurance of Mark are needed in order that the work of the Lord continues.

Well might each one of us ask, "How is my local church doing?"

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.