



# Baptist Hour Messages

## ***A Deserter Who Made Good***

**August 1**

Today I want to talk to you about a coward who made good. None of us loves a traitor but all of us are proud of one, who having realized the failure of his life, has courage enough to come back and make peace with God and man.

In my Bible study not long ago I came across four or five verses seemingly not related to one another and yet the Holy Spirit managed to gather them together in my mind until I saw that they were so very closely related they formed a very interesting story. Read Acts 12:12, 13:5, 13:13, 15:37; II Timothy 4:11 for this Biblical success story.

Now if you are to follow me today you must use your imagination but I dare say I shall not do violence to the Word of God.

### **Repentant Backslider**

Here's the story of a backslider who repented and returned. John Mark was a favored nephew of his Uncle Barnabas. Barnabas was his mother's brother as best as we can determine. John Mark had come from a Christian home. His home was a place where the Jerusalem Christians gathered weekly to worship God. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that it was in an upper room in this very home where the last supper was instituted.

There's many a parable of life wrapped up in the story I have read to you today. For these four or five or six verses of scripture act as a peg upon which a story can be hung that would be as a mirror to many a man or woman's life.

Mark had witnessed the beginning of the Christian movement. We think he was present at the crucifixion of Christ. He had been stirred to the depths of his young soul.

One day he asked his uncle to take him along. Barnabas presented the possibility to his mother and to Paul, and soon full agreement was reached all the way around. And, I think, John Mark hurried to his friends where in typical boy fashion, he boasted to them that he was about to set out on a journey into the world. And all of John Mark's friends listened with envy. Then the day came for departure, with his pack on his back and carrying the extra burden of the older men, the three of them set out down the road and over the hill until they disappeared from the sight of all who had gathered to wave farewell. Soon they came to Joppa, boarded a ship and set sail for Cyprus.

On the way over John Mark stood at the rail of the ship and there dreamed dreams as young boys will do. He imagined that when the ship sailed into the harbor of Cyprus with all the flags flying, that there would be great crowds there cheering to welcome them. What a shock he received, for there was no one there who cared whether these three Jews came or went.

They came down the gang-plank and found their way through the city to the synagogue. By this time John Mark's mind had crossed the chasm of the loneliness of their arrival and was sure that when they came to the synagogue there would be a great crowd there to listen to the wise sayings of Paul the preacher. But instead, they did not find a great crowd, nor were they able to gather a great crowd during all the preaching that they did throughout the island of Cyprus.

The Cyprus visit was more or less a dismal failure so far as the adventurous-minded young John Mark was concerned, and the glamour he expected

never materialized. But they set sail for the mainland soon and when they landed there was no crowd there to welcome them either. When they had replenished their supplies they set out for the hills. John Mark for the first time in his life saw that terrible, desolate country far back in the Tarsus mountains, where the bandits lived and the outlaws made their camps, where wild beasts howled at night and caused the young man's skin to shiver with fear.

And one night listening to Paul as Paul sat before the fire, with his knees drawn up under his arms, and his face and heart burning as hot as the fire into which he looked, saying, "suffering as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ," John Mark felt he could bear no more of this sort of thing with a man who seemed to put preaching the gospel above personal safety. So he waited until the two men had gone to sleep and then got up and walked out into the darkness beyond the ring of the firelight where he fought the greatest battle of his life and lost.

### The Inner Battle

For there was one voice that said, "after all, John Mark, you are young. You have many friends back home, you owe your family something, don't be a fool. This man Paul will lead you out somewhere and you will die in some far-off city and your body will be thrown outside the city wall where the birds will pick the skin from the flesh. It isn't worth it. You go back home. Worship there in your mother's home but don't attempt this fool hardy thing. You can be a christian without paying this high a price."

But there was another voice that spoke. It said, "John Mark, you pledged me your all. You said, 'dear Lord, I'll go where you want me to go—I'll do what you want me to do, nothing will turn me back.' I need you, John Mark, don't fail me now. The world must know of Christ and you have been chosen to tell them. Now, John Mark, I am able to protect you from the wild beast as you continue your journey. The power of God is with you and you are fulfilling my will. Do not turn back. Do not be a coward. Don't desert the cause now!" But—that voice lost.

And in the morning when Paul and Barnabas awakened and looked for the young man, they discovered that his

blanket and his pack were gone and they knew he had faltered and failed.

Paul was unable to fully recover from that blow. He went on about his business but there was bitterness in his heart over a deserter. But John Mark was gay and light-hearted as he hurried back to the coast where he immediately booked passage for home. He landed at Caesarea or Joppa and set out across country as fast as his legs would carry him.

Into the city of Jerusalem, down the street to his mother's home where he rapped upon the door, knowing that in a moment's time she would throw it open, throw her arms about his neck and hug him and kiss him and welcome him. But when his mother did throw the door open and saw him, a look of alarm flashed across her face. "Son, what's happened," she cried, "where's Paul? Where's Barnabas? Are they dead? Have they been killed? What happened?" And John Mark was so taken aback he could hardly speak for a moment.

"No, mother," he said, "they are all right, I'm sure. But I left them in Pamphylia and came home."

"You did what?" she said.

"Why, I came home, mother, I had all of that that I wanted."

"Do you mean you deserted Paul and Barnabas? Do you mean, son, you turned your back?"

"Why, Mother!" he cried, "you act like you are not glad to see me at all," and as she turned her back to hide her tears she said, "I'm not so sure I am." And John Mark felt for the first time the stings of shame.

But, there was a girl down the street, perhaps her name was Sarah, whom John Mark was sure would be glad to see him home, even if his own mother wasn't. And so he quickly bathed and changed clothes and down the street he went to see her. And, believe it or not, even Sarah seemed to be greatly disappointed.

He had exactly the same reaction that night when the church gathered to worship. They seemed to avoid John Mark though spoke politely to him for word had spread like wildfire that he had deserted and returned home alone.

And when he heard the temple bells ring that night they were not quite as beautiful as he had imagined them to be and all of the things he had

longed for while away seemed to have lost their sweetness. Perhaps then he began to realize what he had done—he had failed his God!

### **Peace With God**

It perhaps was one night when the Lord's Supper was being observed when he sat there and listened to those familiar words being spoken again; when he remembered that this wine represented the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and this bread represented His broken body. Here was one who had been willing to make the supreme sacrifice for John Mark, and all the other John Marks in the world who are lost, sick, deserters, cowards, whatever they may be, and the young man could not stand it another moment.

He arose quickly from the bench, bolted to the door and out into the night where out yonder under some gnarled olive tree, on the side of a rocky hill he made peace with his God. And then taking up the burden and responsibilities which he had ac-

cepted and laid aside, he picked up where he had left off and started over with renewed vigor and he lived a life that became of such great service to God in the years to come that he was chosen to write the gospel according to Mark.

That's a success story if I ever heard one. It's a story of a boy who started to follow, who faltered, who failed and then who FOUND, and then who came back. Hearing this story, one could sing, "Oh! for a faith that will not shrink, though set by every foe, that will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe."

And so John Mark sang and prayed and went on to literally give his life in the service of the living God. He became profitable to the ministry. For as I read to you, it was not long before he joined his uncle Barnabus again and they went out to preach the blessed gospel of Christ. It was several years later when Paul wrote those famous words, "Bring John Mark with you. He's profitable to me for the ministry."

## ***From Riches To Rags***

**August 8, 1954**

All of us are familiar with the success story which is often described with the words, "from rags to riches." I want to turn the phrase around, and with the leadership of the Holy Spirit, speak to you on the subject, "From Riches to Rags." The Scripture is found in Matthew 21:10. In this verse we have the story of the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

The words "triumphal entry" are not quite as descriptive as they could be, for had you been there that day, I'm afraid you might have missed the whole point, and I'm afraid you would never have described it as a triumphal entry. For they brought a colt, and they laid their garments on its back, then Christ sat on the lowly animal.

In trying to picture this scene, what seems to be the most striking thing about it to you? Is it possible that the impressiveness of the scene has struck your attention? Is it possible that you have been impressed by the tremendous majesty of it all? No, I'm afraid that couldn't be true.

I wish you might read a description of the triumphal entry of Phillip of Macedon when he conquered some of the cities of Asia. I wish you could

read about the entry of Pompei into Rome in September of 61 B.C. where the parade was two days long. I wish you could have been present when Domitian came back into Rome, who required before this great occasion of his victorious return, a new road constructed and that it be completely carpeted before he should ride in upon his white steed. No, in light of this and other triumphal entries described to us in the books of history, I'm afraid this triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem would never match up.

### **Who Was There?**

Secondly, I'm wondering if you're impressed with the immense crowd that was there—the multitude of it. I realize the Scripture says a very great multitude was there, but I also realize that it was early in the morning—and I realize that there were many children in the crowd. I doubt whether the crowd would measure up to what you and I would call a multitude in this day and age. No, it isn't either one of those things that strikes me when I read about it.

Instead, the stark poverty of the scene is the thing that catches my at-