

Bring Him

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2 Timothy 4:11

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

Have you ever felt like you were in over your head? You got yourself into a situation, and had no idea what to do? Or maybe you know exactly what to do but feel overwhelmed by the amount you must do.

One mother cleverly expressed her exhaustion in their family Christmas cards. The front had a picture of their three children and the phrase, "I like to give homemade gifts for Christmas..." The inside of the card read, "Which one of our kids would you like?"

Sometimes life gives you more than you think you can handle. A young man by the name of Mark felt that way. It was a historic moment; it was the first cross-cultural mission trip in human history. Paul and Barnabas, called and commissioned by the Holy Spirit and the church at Antioch, took the Gospel outside the Middle East, the land of Israel, and preached to both Jews and Gentiles. They traveled from city to city, which was not unusual. Jesus had done this. The apostles had done this but never outside of predominant Jewish communities, unless you count Jesus' quick trips into Gentile Decapolis and Philip's excursion into Samaria, which both were part of old Israel. This time, it was to predominant Gentile cities that these two pioneer cross-cultural missionaries traveled.

Before they left Antioch, no doubt someone suggested that they take Mark, John Mark with them. He was the nephew of Barnabas, and I'm sure that as today if a young man shows a keen interest in the Bible and the ministry everyone concludes he must be called to preach. Many saw promise in Mark and decided that he should accompany Paul and Barnabas as a journeyman. They thought he would be of great service to the apostles helping them with the lesser, menial chores so they could be more devoted to the ministry. Well, it was settled, and off went the triumphant trio, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark.

But it wasn't long on the journey that things went south for Mark. They came to their first stop, the island of Cyprus, only 16 miles from their headquarters in Antioch. Cyprus is a beautiful large island in the Mediterranean Sea. The early missionaries made their way along the coastline preaching in the Jewish synagogues arriving finally at Paphos. There they met a problem. We'll let Luke tell the rest of the story.

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:6-12)

This would seem, to me, a victory, a real breakthrough. But for John Mark, it was too much. We read in verse 13, "Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem."

Maybe he was only homesick; perhaps he didn't like such up and close contact with the devil. I don't know what his problem was except to say that there was some weakness, some problem in Mark that he couldn't cut it. He felt overwhelmed and willing to travel back home alone than to go on with his uncle and Paul. He did so and left Paul and Barnabas in the lurch.

But this is not the conclusion of the matter. Paul and Barnabas traveled from Cyprus up to present day Turkey and preached from one major city to another. Up to this point everything had gone well, no persecution, no problems, many people had been converted, but on this leg of the trip Paul was stoned but miraculously raised. Finally, the trip over and back in Antioch, the elders of the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, not just to give a mission report but to defend the faith against Jewish teachers who were corrupting the Gospel, demanding Gentiles become circumcised and follow the law of Moses. Once that issue was settled, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and brought Mark with them and there they remained for a while ministering to the church there.

We then read in Acts 15:36-41:

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

This is the same Mark that Paul, many years later nearing his martyrdom, asks Timothy to go and pick up and bring with him to Rome. What happened to Mark on that first missionary journey that caused him to leave Paul and Barnabas and not finish the mission trip? What happened that

made Paul not trust Mark? And what changed about Mark that many years later Paul says of him that “he is useful to me for ministry”?

I. Mark’s Failure

Why did he cut and run? Why did he go back home to mom? Let’s conjecture. This isn’t necessarily the answer, but let’s think.

A. Perhaps Mark’s Failure is not Altogether His Fault.

Maybe it wasn’t God’s will for Mark to go. Have you ever thought about that? The Holy Spirit never said to “Separate to Me Barnabas, Saul, and Mark for the work to which I have called them.” No, He said, “Separate Barnabas and Saul.” Could it be possible that God knew Mark wasn’t ready for this and he would do exactly what he did—turn tail and run back home?

Why do I think it’s a possibility that this is not altogether Mark’s fault? Because I’ve seen it over and over again—people have this great desire to thrust upon others what they think God’s will is for them. Have you seen that happen? I don’t know what it is about us that delights in helping people see the will of God, as if we have a direct line from God and know exactly what God wants them to do. I’ve seen people called into ministry, not by the Lord, but by mom, or grandmother, or some well-intended church member. Pastors are notorious for making this egregious mistake.

Many men are in the pulpit today because their pastor called them. It’s really sad when you see a pastor steer his son into the ministry when God hasn’t called him. There are many people standing in pulpits, having a preaching ministry, when God didn’t call them but daddy did. It’s not fair to them. They’re doomed to fail because it wasn’t the will of the Lord.

We must be careful when people ask us about life-changing decisions. We have to be very careful. I find it quite wise to not always answer those questions, even when you think you know the Lord’s will. Even if you think you know what God’s will is for that person and they’ve come and asked you and you tell them, you have not done them a service but a disservice. The reason I say that is because in the process of coming to understand what God’s will for you is, God teaches you much about how He works in your life. When you answer that question, even though you believe you have the mind of God in that matter, you have just shortchanged that individual from learning how God speaks to them, how He directs their lives. You have really done them a disservice. Be very slow about telling people what God’s will is for them.

This is possibly the scenario that happened with Mark.

B. Mark was Young and Immature.

We say this with no conjecture. This is fact. And it's amazing that even in this service today we have prayed for our young people. I want to say to you, young people, that I have no desire to speak ill of your youth. But Mark was young. He was probably a late teenager or in his early 20s at this time. If he wasn't called to go on this missionary trip it was certainly true that God did call him for ministry. Our text proves that point. "Timothy, go get Mark for he is profitable to me for ministry." God had used Mark in the ministry years later. He was called.

But there's something about being young that often causes us to run ahead of God. It's called zeal. Youthful zeal. What is zeal? It's an enthusiasm that's almost like an impulse. It causes you to roll up your sleeves and get to it; it causes you to create action. And that's a good thing! I've realized over the years that God calls young people to do certain things and that's because old people won't do them. They've lost their zeal. That's a problem.

Something happens as you get older, let me warn you. As young people, we all have that zeal of youth, it's part of your youth, but as you get older you become susceptible to the temptation of cynicism. You begin to question everything and doubt that anything will work anymore because you've seen so many failures. Finally, at some point, you become so cynical that you say, "This is just the way it is," and you get used to life exactly that way. You lose your zeal because you don't believe it makes a difference. You don't believe you can be an agent of change.

I'm asking you, don't lose your youthful zeal! Always believe that God can do the impossible! Please don't lose that.

But, also remember that youthful zeal often lacks wisdom. You often run ahead of God, and I think this was part of Mark's problem. But I believe he had another problem, also attributed to his youth.

C. Self-Centered.

There is something to be said about the teenage years and even the 20-something group that tends to be bold in being narcissistic than previous generations. Narcissism is a sophisticated way of saying a person is very vain. If there has ever been a narcissistic generation, it's the millennial generation today.

For example, who invented social media? It wasn't some retired person who had nothing else to do to pass time. No, it was college students. This is the me-generation if there has ever been one. Look at social media!

Someone wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper:

I haven't got a computer, but I was told about Facebook and Twitter and am trying to make friends outside Facebook and Twitter while applying the same principles. Every day, I walk down the street and tell passers by what I have eaten, how I feel, what I have done the

night before and what I will do for the rest of the day. I give them pictures of my wife, my daughter, my dog and me gardening and on holiday, spending time by the pool. I also listen to their conversations, tell them I “like” them and give them my opinion on every subject that interests me... whether it interests them or not.

And it works. I already have four people following me: two police officers, a social worker, and a psychiatrist.

It’s sad that we live in a time where you determine your self worth by the number of followers you have, but that’s where we are, and that’s part of youthfulness. It’s part of being young—everything is about you.

Recently, I heard that there are many young people who are leaving Facebook because there are too many older folks on it now. It’s not all about them anymore.

Mark had a problem; he was so self-centered that he could not sustain the labor. When it was too difficult, in self-interest, he went back home.

But Mark’s not the only one who made a mistake.

II. Paul’s Failure

Paul made a mistake at the beginning of that second journey. He decided John Mark shouldn’t go because he didn’t stick with it and tough it out during the first missionary journey. Barnabas made the decision that he should go. You could say it was because it was his nephew but I think that’s just the gift of Barnabas. Who was it that looked for Saul of Tarsus when nobody would have anything to do with him? It was Barnabas who found him out and stuck with him and defended him. That’s just the ministry of Barnabas, “The son of consolation/encouragement,” as his name is called.

It’s kind of scary when you say the Apostle Paul made a mistake. But here’s the problem:

A. Paul Allowed His Feelings About Mark to Disrupt His Relationship With Barnabas.

But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. (Acts 15:38)

Paul did not trust Mark and Paul was a very rigid man. There is something to say about rigidity, taking a position and sticking with it if you believe you are right. That’s a commendable thing. But, however, often we take a position but instead of defending the position we defend our pride in taking the decision. You may be right, but what’s right is not fueling your discussion with someone, it’s your pride that you’re right.

Someone said, “The strongest words are usually used in the weakest arguments.”

But you say, “Mark made a mistake. Paul was right. You don’t want to take him out there again and then he leave you in the lurch once again and you’re stuck with all of the things you were counting on Mark to do plus your own work.” Yes, but here’s where I think Paul really failed:

B. Paul Failed to Temper His Judgment With Mercy.

Aren’t some things black and white, Pastor? Aren’t there times when we have to stand for truth black and white? Yes there is. But, dear friends, when you’re dealing with people there is no black and white. There is right and wrong but how you deal with people when they are wrong is not cut and dried.

Does that mean I’m advocating compromise and advocating mixing black and white into indefinite grey? No, I’m not! But the way you deal with people concerning that which is black and white must be done with mercy and mercy is never black and white. Mercy is mercy. It’s merciful to those who are on the black side or on the white side; on the side of evil or on the side of right.

Paul was right. There are times, after someone lies to you repeatedly, you have to say, “I can’t believe you anymore.” That is judgment. You can’t live without judgment. All of life requires you to discern and ascertain people’s character and behavior and you do have to make judgment calls. But I’m simply saying that when you make that judgment call, temper it, mix it with mercy.

I’ve tried to live by a motto for many years now: “If I am to err, let me err on the side of mercy rather than judgment.”

That’s what I believe James 2:13 says.

*“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”
(James 2:13)*

What does he mean here? He means this—God judges. God is the judge. He will judge all men and he will pronounce a judgment about us. James is saying God will judge you with mercy if you do the same or He will judge you without mercy if you have not granted mercy in your judgment.

The most merciful thing I believe you can do when somebody sins against you or when they sin at all is try to understand why a person makes the decisions they make. That doesn’t mean they were right or that it excuses the behavior or conduct but mercy says, “There’s got to be a reason you did this. There’s got to be an explanation. There’s got to be something inside, whether it be pain or hurt or frustration or anger, it’s not just because you wanted to do this, there’s a reason you got to this place. There’s a reason you’ve come to this point in your life where you would behave in such a manner.” Mercy says, “We’ve got to find that out so we can help.”

You're still discerning and rendering a judgment. You're not saying what they did wasn't wrong, you're not excusing it, but at the same time you want to come alongside them and understand why they did what they did so you can address the Gospel to their hearts.

Beloved, I want to say to parents, this is how you rear your children. They have to be disciplined. One of the problems of our age, this me-centered age, is that we have forgotten discipline. Children should be disciplined. Do you know what I mean? It doesn't mean I send you to your room or "I'm counting to 10." It means discipline.

If you love your children, you will discipline them. You will correct them. You will instruct them. You don't just turn your head and ignore the improper conduct. But at the same time, in your judgment, in your discipline, there is mercy. There is mercy not anger.

This is the way we deal with one another. Paul did not temper his judgment of Mark with mercy. He was not willing to give him another opportunity. Thank God there was a Barnabas around.

There's Mark's failure, there's Paul's failure, but now I want to deal with God's success.

III. God's Success

"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry."

Let me caution us and say that this is not a plea to compromise with evil or that sin should never be corrected. We tend to go to one extreme to another. We want to either bring correction with no mercy, or we want to show mercy with no correction. We can't seem to find the high ground in the middle; we're always falling in a ditch on one side or the other.

Paul is not falling into either ditch. Look at the verse that precedes our text.

"for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica . . ."
(2 Timothy 4:10)

The aged Apostle knows when a man has forsaken Christ and the Gospel and he knows there is no restoration without repentance. He was not afraid to call it as he saw it. "Demas has forsaken, not just me, but God. He has turned his back on the Gospel and gone into the world." Paul is not compromising the truth.

The difference is—this is key—that the older Paul is more willing to let a man prove his repentance than the younger Paul. The younger Paul was not willing to give Mark the time to prove his repentance. "You've messed up, we don't have time for that, people have to hear the Gospel, we've got to go." The older Paul learned that you've got to give a man the opportunity to learn he is repentant.

I feel like Paul learned three things over his lifetime and ministry.

A. God's Patience.

God is a very patient God. One of the things about sanctifying grace that amazes me is that it's patient. He was patient with me before I was saved, when he could have killed me and sent me to hell and been just and holy in doing so. I thank God for His long-suffering during those 26 years. But, man, during these last 30 years? In sanctifying and conforming me to Jesus, He has *really* been patient. Extremely patient.

Look at the night when Jesus was arrested. The night begins at Passover when He tells the disciples, "Listen, one of you is going to betray Me." While they're trying to figure out who the betrayer is, He says, "All of you are going to forsake Me this night." Peter, of course, responds, "Not me. I'll die with You before I do that." Then He tells Peter, "Before the night's over you're going to deny Me three times."

Then, after the meal, He takes Peter, James, and John to the Garden of Gethsemane and says, "I need you to pray because I'm feeling such a sorrow, like I have never felt." Nor has any man since. "I feel like I'm going to die tonight. I feel like My heart is going to burst with pain. Will you just watch and pray? Will you pray for Me?" He prays and comes back and what does He find them doing? Sleeping.

He awakens them but notice how He does it. He doesn't use harsh words. He doesn't call them fools or unspiritual sloths. He actually is concerned for them. "Your hour of temptation is coming and if you pray you'll be able to withstand the temptation. You'll be able to make it through it. Pray, man, pray!" He goes off and comes back and guess what He finds the three doing? Sleeping.

What does He do? He lets them sleep. Then, when that crucible moment came and Jesus was arrested, what does Jesus ask His captors? "Let these go." And the Bible says at that moment they all forsook Him and fled. He is long-suffering. Patient. Where were you when Jesus needed you to stand up and testify on His behalf and you were silent? Did He write you off? Did He say "Your chances have come and gone, you're finished. I'll find someone else"? No. He is patient.

B. God's Compassion.

He literally does not do what we do when someone sins. We get mad, sometimes we lose every sense of reasoning and just want to retaliate. But He doesn't do that. He has compassion. I think one of the most compassionate moments of Jesus' life is in Matthew 14. He had received word that His cousin John the Baptist had been murdered. Jesus was and is a man, just like we are, He loved John much and He was sorrowful. He was hurting and wanted to go out in the wilderness, be alone, and grieve. But the multitudes followed Him.

"And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick." (Matthew 14:14)

Do you know what those folks wanted from Jesus? Do you know why they were following Him? They weren't following because they loved Him for His own sake, they didn't think He was the most wonderful person and they were just so attracted to Him because of great affection in their heart for Him. No, they wanted Him to do something for them. That's the only reason they were following Him. Yet, in His moment of grief and sorrow, He forgets about His own grief and begins to heal them. That's our Jesus. He has compassion for you. He understands your needs and He cares for your needs.

Some of you are thinking, "Oh, I'm glad to hear this because today I need God to touch my body, I'm not feeling very well." I want you to know that might be a need but it's not your greatest need. Your greatest need is Jesus Himself.

"Oh, I'm glad Jesus meets our needs because right now I'm financially on the ropes." That's a need, I understand, but that's not your greatest need. Your greatest need is the compassion of Jesus to open your heart to see Him in all of His grace, goodness, glory, and power. He is compassionate.

C. God's Commitment.

God has made a commitment to His people. Turn to Romans 14:4. This is a powerful verse and I never saw this until the other day. I can't tell you how many times I've read this verse but the other day I saw something I've never seen before.

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." (Romans 14:4)

Do you see that? I knew this verse but that phrase, "Indeed, he will be made to stand," jumped out at me the other day. God has made a commitment to every one who is His—you are going to be made to stand for God is able to make you stand. Let's bring this back to our text.

Here is Mark. He failed Barnabas, he failed Paul, he failed the mission, he failed the lost Gentile sinners, he failed God. But what happened so that decades later when Paul is getting ready to die he would write a letter to Timothy and say, "Please, get Mark and bring him to me because he's beneficial to me for ministry"? What happened to Mark? God was committed to Mark to make him stand.

There have been times when I have fallen and wondered, *Maybe I'm not His at all. Or Maybe now He won't love me the same.* But somehow, someday, I got up. The wounds I incurred in my fall are healed, the scars are gone, and I'm still standing. That's what God did for Mark. Mark blew it, but God in His patience, compassion, and commitment to Mark, would not let Mark go. He did not turn loose of him. He didn't put him in the corner with a dunce hat and say, "No, I can't use you anymore." Mark was God's project and God made this man beneficial to the Apostle Paul in his hour of need. That's God.

How is it you are still here and among us? Were there not times when you admitted to yourself that you would not go on? Have you not thought “I will not make it”? Yet with time you arose out of your bitter failures and said to yourself, “I will arise and go to my father’s house”? Have you not declared, “I will fight again; I will not lay down and die”? And here you are. What is that? God’s commitment to you. He’s not finished with you yet.

Do you feel overwhelmed by your sin? Then fly to Christ knowing you will find refuge in a God who is patient, compassionate, and committed Himself to you and your eternal, everlasting perfection. God is committed to it. This is the Jesus you ought to embrace and know.

Dear friend, have you not yet met this Christ? Have you not yet experienced this compassion? Have you not experienced His patience? I pray this morning you have. I pray something has gone on here during these last couple of hours that has made you aware that God is committed to save and perfect you. Perfection doesn’t happen quickly. It takes a lifetime, whether it’s 10 years or 50 years, but no matter the course of time, God will not give up on you. He will not give up on you.

In conclusion I ask you this question: Why have you given up on God?

No, pastor, you’re mistaken. I didn’t give up on God, I’ve given up on me. No. You’ve given up on God’s commitment to you. You are His work. You are His project. You are His labor. And He who has begun a good work in you will not cease, stop, or finish until He’s completed it.

“Bring him. Bring him! He’s useful to me for the ministry.” The same God who worked in Mark is working in you. Amen.