

## Do You Know Your High Calling?

A couple weeks ago I was substitute teaching in a class for severely mentally disabled children. The kids were young, six to eight years old. In the classroom were several paid staff who were each directly responsible for one or two specific children. The students were all autistic and self-absorbed, none had real language skills, maybe a few words they were able to get across and their behaviors could range from fairly passive to rather aggressive in a matter of seconds. It was a bit frightening I am sure being around them and not very rewarding because the kids were barely, if at all social. I was struck though by one young staff member who took the responsibility quite seriously of trying to connect with the children and love them as if they were her own. Countless numbers of people no longer know why they have been put on this earth by God, what sort of life they are to really live or the impact they are to make on the rest of the world. They simply don't see their lives as having a higher purpose than doing the normal things people do to get by...making money, putting meals together, relaxing. Today we are going to look at someone who is rarely mentioned in average church discussions, a rather unknown who took a long time figuring out his purpose and the point of his life. The big idea for today is: discover your high calling and embrace it. Christ, raised from the dead gives your life extraordinary purpose.

One of the earliest missionaries was John Mark, also known as Mark. His mother was a well-known Christian living in Jerusalem. After Paul and Barnabas returned from a missionary journey to Crete and parts of southern Asia Minor, they decided to bring Barnabas's cousin, John Mark with them. **When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.** (Acts 12: 25 NIV) Although Paul and Barnabas had a very productive and fruitful second missionary journey, John Mark, for some unknown reason dropped out and returned home midway through the trip. **From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.** (Acts 13: 13 NIV) If that was all you knew about this, you might think John Mark had perhaps a medical emergency or maybe he needed to go help his mom or take care of some financial issues back home. But apparently it was infuriating to Paul that John Mark left them. It was not an excused absence. **Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.** (Acts 15: 37-40 NIV)

It is hard to fathom just exactly what was so wrong about John Mark leaving Paul and Barnabas early on the missionary journey, but it was maddening enough to Paul that he was fed up with John Mark. If you have ever failed badly at something because you didn't try your best, ever wrecked your reputation due to your own negligence or bad behavior, you may know something of John Mark's humiliation at being rejected by Paul. Did his mother, a key leader in the church at Jerusalem feel shamed by his actions? Was he the object of scorn in the Christian community? Did John Mark have a tough time looking people in the eye after this? I was fired from a campus job at seminary, and it was pretty rough facing my classmates for a while after that. Many have committed suicide after being publicly humiliated for their crimes or bad behaviors. Others have slid into depression, alcoholism, and drug abuse. I remember reading about a celebrity whose private sex tape was published online and she said she wanted to kill herself. Public failure is a source of terrible psychological destruction. The same is true when just a few people you care about know of your bad behavior.

John Mark went on with Barnabas and together they brought the Gospel to Crete and other parts of the world. His faithfulness and courage under pressure led to a new reputation he developed. By the time the Apostle Peter wrote his first letter to the believers in Asia Minor, John Mark was already a trusted co-worker, respected and known in the Christian community. But what about Paul? Did John Mark ever reconcile with Paul? Listen to Paul's own statements. **My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)** (Colossians 4: 10 NIV) Then later this. At the end of his life while languishing in prison under a death sentence, nearly everyone had abandoned Paul to his fate. Only Luke, the writer of the Gospel was still with him. Notice in particular what Paul says about John Mark. **Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.** (2 Timothy 4: 11 NIV) You are not made for failure when you put your faith in Christ as Savior. You are designed for perfection and the Lord will stop at nothing to bring you there. Neither failures nor outright sin will prevent your Savior from making you right. The glory of God is in us, and the Lord shall make us right and He does through salvation His death on the cross brings us..

Let's go back a few years in John Mark's life, to a time when he suffered a great humiliation. The disciples had gone with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Him but of course they failed. They fell asleep and didn't put much effort into the praying. Their lack of spiritual fortification that time of prayer could have brought them turned out to be devastating. Someone was also with the group that we miss, maybe the disciples didn't know we was lingering nearby. When the Jewish authorities came to arrest Jesus, this happened. **A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.** (Mark 14: 51-52 NIV) Not exactly this young man's best moment! Any guess who this might have been? His humiliating flight at the arrest of Jesus is mentioned only by one author in the Bible, John Mark. Got an idea how he knew about this when no one else did...not the other disciples, not Luke, not Paul? It is because it was John Mark himself who fled naked into the night. A broken-hearted and despairing young man lost his way.

Now let us turn to something quite intriguing and often forgotten in all the times the first day of the week after Jesus was crucified and His dead body was placed wrapped in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea has been discussed. Three women, two older moms and one much younger woman who had a horrific past of being possessed by seven demons but joyfully received freedom when Jesus cast them out of her, were on a terrifying journey. The disciples had fled because they were terrified of being associated with Jesus and suffering the same fate Christ had. The woman had just as much reason to be scared as they tromped off to anoint the dead body of Jesus with spices. They certainly did not want to be seen going to the tomb so when the sabbath was over, early in the morning, Mary Magdalene and her two friends made their way there under cover of darkness. **When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"** (Mark 16: 1-3 NIV) Notice the chief concern of the women and it is a significant one. How will we get to the body of Jesus with the huge stone in the way? They weren't afraid of the soldiers who were assigned to guard the tomb probably because they didn't know any had been posted there. They were ordered there on Saturday when the women were at home. But that stone...that was an issue.

Have you ever noticed that we too often fuss about matters rather than believe God will see us through them, show us how to deal with them or take care of them Himself? Where is our faith that God is in control, that He has our good planned? It is rare to find someone who has faith in God all the way through, who refuses to fret because she or he believes God is good and almighty and full of love. The women got to the burial site and to their utter amazement the stone was pushed away from the tomb. But more stunning than that was who they saw there. **But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.** (Mark 16: 4-5 NIV) Did you catch that? It was a young man and all we know about him is what he was wearing. Does that sound familiar? The only other time the Greek term translated "young man", "neaniskos" was used by John Mark in his gospel, was to speak of himself fleeing the authorities and all we were told of him was what he was wearing, or to be more precise, what he stopped wearing. Who do you suppose this young man was? It was of course John Mark. Later the women met an angel and another angel and then Jesus Himself, but the first one they saw at Jesus' tomb was John Mark. Why was he there? My best guess is he heard the commotion the guards raised in Jerusalem when they came back telling of how the body of Jesus was gone from the tomb. John Mark excitedly raced to the tomb before the women got there because he remembered what Jesus said to the group in the Garden of Gethsemane before He was arrested and then crucified. **But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.**" (Mark 14: 28 NIV) It was true! Christ was risen! Can you imagine the joy in his heart when John Mark saw it was so? He told the women, **"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"**(Mark 16: 6-7 NIV)

We never know what part we play in God's plan until after we see it worked out with us. John Mark certainly didn't when he ran from the soldiers naked. He was probably in his mind just a loser. And when he gave up on Paul and Barnabas, he may have thought God had nothing left for him. Christ, raised from the dead changes everything for you. He brings you a supernatural transformation that is literally limitless in its scope. Jesus raised from the dead means you live, even if it seems you die a thousand deaths of failure, wrecked plans, and bad mistakes. I am amazed by how many people give up on their dreams without turning to Christ to work in them and through them. I imagine John Mark gave up on ever seeing Jesus alive again, let alone in Galilee. Here is the Big Idea for you today. Just like John Mark, discover your high calling and embrace it. Christ, raised from the dead gives your life extraordinary, lasting purpose.