

Characteristics of the Ministry of St Mark.

Saint Mark began his preaching in a young age, so he did not initially start on his own but in the company of some of the Apostles. He had trained with the seventy disciples who Jesus Christ sent two by two, he continued preaching after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus and the coming down of the Holy Spirit upon him and the rest of the disciples. His home was the first church, and the starting point of the preaching of salvation.

St. Mark believed that he was invited by God in every place he reached to deliver the gospel of salvation and the message of faith in Christ the Savior. Thus he was universal in his preaching and was not confined to a specific region. In addition to preaching in Egypt and Africa, he also preached in Lebanon, Antioch, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Venice and Rome.

Through his ministry, St. Mark progressed in several stages in depth and extent. This is how a growing servant should be, led by God from one stage to another. And going from strength to strength (Ps. 7:84), and from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18).

According to some traditions, in the first stage of St. Mark's evangelism, he accompanied St. Peter the Apostle in his ministry in Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding areas. The people of the city of "Byblos" on the Mediterranean coast in Lebanon claim that St. Mark is the preacher of their city.

The next stage was that St. Mark accompanied Saints Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor. The book of Acts describes him as a servant with them (Acts 13:5), meaning that he was their assistant, and some say that he served in baptizing the new believers. It appears to be that he contracted a fever while in Perga in Pamphylia in Asia Minor and was unable to continue the journey with them, so he returned to Jerusalem.

He continued the ministry there, and attended the council that was convoked in the year 50 regarding the subject of the convert Jews (Acts 15).

After the Council of Jerusalem, St. Mark moved to a new stage in the ministry. It started with an incident that may seem to be sad on the outside. There was a difference in opinion between Paul and Barnabas on taking Mark with them, as they prepared for the second missionary journey. Paul preferred that he and Barnabas go alone, while Barnabas preferred that they take St. Mark with them as they did in the first journey. The matter ended such that they parted their ways (Acts 15:39) so Barnabas took Mark and went across the Mediterranean to the island of Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and set out to move through the land to Asia Minor to give support to the churches. This situation, which seems on the outside that it created division, is in fact normal growth of the ministry. The difference in opinions in the ministry is always bound to happen, it does not cause harm, but rather enriches it. And God is always able to transform all events for our benefit and edification. As long as the goal is the glory of God and building the kingdom, all things would be to the benefit of the church. The Holy Spirit can work with all gifts and talent, and in all circumstances, to serve the message of salvation.

It is necessary to clarify a big difference between two cases in the ministry. The first case, when the difference of opinions happens with love, humility, and a common goal, which is for the glory of Christ and the expansion of his kingdom. This is when the difference becomes fruitful and useful in opening new horizons for the ministry and the growth of the kingdom. The second case is when the difference in viewpoints stems from pride, stubbornness, or personal interests. In the absence of spiritual awareness, fighting takes place. Bias, divisions, and conflicts emerge, which all lead to trouble and pitfalls in the ministry. If we apply these rules to the situation of Paul, Barnabas and Mark, we will find that their case was of the first type. This brought out blessings and great benefits in expanding the geographical foot print of evangelism, without any conflict or divisions.

It seems also that, the idea of Paul and Barnabas embarking on another missionary trip together, **it might be wrong to insist on repeating previous ministries in the same form and substance.** Perhaps what works for a particular stage in the service is not suitable for a later stage. And the success of a method at some point does not necessarily mean that we use the same method in a later stage. Additionally, what might be appropriate for a person in a certain phase of his life may be less appropriate at a later phase. As time goes by in our lives, many changes take place in our personality, view points, experience, and conditions around us. At that point, it becomes more appropriate and better for us to develop and grow our roles, expand our vision, and progress to broader horizons and more specialized endeavors. Additionally it might be better to serve in a new fashion that may be different in form but deeper and far-reaching in substance.

It is clear that God had planned for the benefit of St. Mark's life and growth. It is also evident that our beloved St. Mark had a pure and zealous heart filled with the spirit of humility and the spirit of discipleship which are among the most important elements of growth. He benefited from the spiritual experience of Barnabas and his fatherhood, and also kept being on very good terms with St. Paul the Apostle and great evangelist. He continued to assist Paul in the ministry as described by the Apostle Paul himself on several occasions (Colossians 4:10-11), (Philemon 24), and he described St. Mark as being useful for the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

St. Mark believed that he was working in the harvest of Christ, anywhere and with anybody. He was always prepared to cooperate, to sacrifice, and to employ all his talents in serving the church anywhere. He did not withdraw himself from helping St. Paul the Apostle with the excuse of being busy with the new ministry in Cyprus, Egypt, and Africa. But rather, he took heed of this and did not neglect that.



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