

# Introducing . . . The Gospel of Action

Mark; Selected Scripture

## Introduction

Today we will begin a new series. We will be racing through the Gospel of Mark, or as I call it, the “Gospel of Action”. I think, you will find this a very appropriate title as we get into this gospel.

### **A popular question of application of scripture – How does the Bible apply to my life?**

Before we begin our study of Mark, however, it would be an injustice to jump into chapter 1, verse 1, without answering a question that I am hearing more and more often. It is a question that has to do with application and may be one that you have asked.

Perhaps you go to the Bible and the questions that race through your mind are, “What is God trying to say to me? What is He trying to do through the pages of scripture in *my* life? I can learn what happened then, but what does it mean to me today?”

These are some of the most popular questions today, and are all a question of application. And because, as we move into the Gospel of Mark, I want it to move into our lives, I will take the time to answer that question today. I will begin by giving three things that application is not and follow that with three things that application is.

### **What application is not!**

1. Application is not just accumulating knowledge.

Facts are very stupid things, if they are left alone. In fact, history records that some of the most brilliant philosophers were literally, ignorant when it came to the true meaning of life. If I am to apply the scriptures, I must do more than simply add a few more facts into the old “noggin”.

2. Application is not just illustration.

I may study the Bible or hear someone speak and learn a way that someone else handled a problem, by way of illustration. That does not help me in handling my problem though, does it? Application is not just simply illustration.

3. Application is not just making comparisons between then and now.

I could preach and prove that the problems you are having today are not new problems. People in biblical times had them too – in Corinth; in Ephesus. That, however, would not help with your problems, would it?

These three things are good in themselves, but if they are not in some way taken one step further, then application falls short. So, application is not just accumulating knowledge or simply illustrating or making comparisons.

One of the most desperate needs in the life of every believer, I think, is to have a willingness; an ability; a desire to make the Bible the truth in their lives. So, let me give three things that application is.

### **What application is!**

1. Application is focusing on the truth of God’s Word.

This is where we begin. Understand that we begin with the truth, the propositional truth, of Jesus Christ in His Word. That is the start.

2. Application is making a biblical truth a personal truth.

This is the next step and it is desiring to learn the same things that the people in Corinth or in Ephesus learned during biblical times. Application is making these biblical truths personal.

3. Application is making a personal truth a practical truth.

We have one more step to go, however. It is not enough to simply show the student what to do; that is, in making a biblical truth a personal truth, but we need to show the student how to do it; that is, make that personal truth a practical truth. So, I start by studying God’s word and making it personal. Then I make it a practical or literally, a practiced truth. In other words, I put it into practice. *That* is application.

We cannot say that we have applied the scriptures or even that we have learned the Bible, until we put the Bible into practice. So, with true application, you

learn the truth, which you can do on your own as an individual priest before God, and you not only make that truth personal by asking the Lord to make it live in your life, but you take the next step and say, "Lord, tomorrow at 8 a.m., I'm putting what I'm learning into practice."

### **Barriers to genuine application of scripture**

Now let me give some barriers that will arise against genuine application. If you make the statement, "Lord, I want to apply Your Word," realize that some things are going to happen. You are going to enter a battle that you never before knew existed. The reason for the battle is that this kind of application produces small changes in your life, and one small change after another leads to a changed life. So, there are going to be some barriers.

1. First, you are going to face the barrier that we could call, "differences of opinion".

We have people running around today looking for the manual; that is, the black and white answers to all of the problems. This Bible seems to be telling me that I should put something into practice in a particular way and yet, someone says it should be done another way, and another person says it should be done in a third way. So, I will just forget the whole thing, thinking, "Why bother? These people are the scholars and they cannot even agree."

When former President Harry S. Truman ordered the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, the press interviewed clergymen in America. They asked the clergymen, "Was it right?"

It was fascinating that some clergymen felt strongly that it was one way, while other clergymen felt strongly that it was the opposite way, and the majority of the clergymen felt strongly both ways.

You are not going to find an agreement on all of the points. You are not going to find that everyone agrees with everyone else.

In the Bible, in fact, try studying Romans 14. It is in that chapter that Paul says we need to make up our minds as to what we are going to believe. Decide if it is right for you to eat meat, while it is not right for another individual to eat meat by studying the Bible, knowing what God is teaching you, and being willing to live by it. So make up your mind.

One of the most tragic things today that has ever happened to the church is that the people who sit in

the pews have given all of the rights of thinking and decision making to someone who stands behind the pulpit.

You are going to find a barrier of application in a difference of opinion among believers. Just try raising children, for example. Ask the question, "Should I spank them or should I not spank them?"

If you go to the book store, you will find numerous books on the subject of spanking children. Someone will tell you how hard to spank them, while another will tell you not to spank them. You are left as confused as ever.

However, the confusion does not negate the responsibility of application in our lives. We are still responsible to apply what God teaches.

2. Secondly, another barrier to application that we will face is pressures in our culture.

The world has a mold, so when I find something in the Bible that sounds a little revolutionary; a little radical, the first thing I think is, "Wait a second! I can't do that! Imagine what they'd think!"

The pressure of the culture that we live in today shapes our lives.

A fascinating article was shared with me by a man in our church. The statement was made that the Bible is not intended to be influenced by our culture, the Bible is intended, by God, to produce a culture.

The further away from God we get, the further away from the first century Christians we get. Our lives will become more revolutionary; more radical when they match the Bible.

3. A third barrier to genuine application is conflict between our prejudice and biblical truth.

This is the individual who says, "Well, I know God said it, but I've always done it this way. For thirty-five years, I've been doing it this way. Don't bother me with the facts."

This is the individual who says, "I've always headed in this direction and I'm not about to change now."

Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing in the Bible that is "up for grabs". You cannot treat the Bible like you are going to treat the salad bar at the restaurant this afternoon. You will go in and pick an item because you like it and another item and you will

leave out the ones that you do not like or do not find appetizing.

You cannot do that with the Bible. It is all,

*. . . profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, . . . so that [you] may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)*

## Introducing the Gospel of Mark

Now, with the necessity of application as a background, I want to simply introduce to you the “Gospel of Action”. Over the next few weeks, as we study this gospel, I want to see it move into your life and mine.

You cannot help but be changed when you study the life of Jesus Christ. It would be tragic to go through a study that gives the account of the life of Jesus Christ and come away unchanged; uninfluenced.

Today, we will discuss some brief introductory notes to the Gospel of Mark. Then, in our next discussion, we will begin our exposition. We need to begin by answering a few questions that will help us apply.

### To whom and when was it written?

We will first answer the questions of to whom and when was the Gospel of Mark written.

It is fascinating that the first century years between AD 60 and AD 70 were probably among the most difficult years in the history of the Christian church. During these ten years, a man was ruling in Rome and the book of Mark was written to the believers in Rome. The ruler’s name was Nero, and he was a maniac. In fact, a persecution was about to begin.

One night, in a drunken stupor, Nero torched a building in Rome. The fire spread and before the next few hours were past, the city of Rome was literally burned. Rather than take the blame, Nero had to find someone to nominate. He looked at this strange new group of people called Christians, and nominated them to take the blame. Thus began the great persecution under Nero that would ultimately take the life of the apostle Paul. Thousands of Christians who had come to Christ, would taste death in the coliseum in the mouths of lions and at the hands of gladiators.

So, Mark is writing to a group of Christians who are perhaps, even meeting in the catacombs by this time. They have a lot of questions.

You will find that Mark does not tell a lot of what Jesus said. If you were hiding in the catacombs, you would not want a long sermon. You would not want to know what Jesus said, but, “What would Jesus do? How would He react?”

So in this gospel, there is more of what Jesus did than in any other gospel, even though it is the shortest of all the gospels. Mark leaves out many of the parables and most of the discourses and gets right to the miracles; right to the action that Jesus Christ was doing.

This is, in fact, the first account. The Gospel of Mark was written before the other gospel accounts. I am afraid to say that, as I have studied the commentaries, many of the older commentators would consider the Gospel of Mark to be sort of, the runt of the litter. It was the smallest and they paid it the least amount of attention. Yet, Mark was dynamic in his gospel account.

### How was it written?

Let me give a few comments on how the Gospel of Mark was written. I have already mentioned how fast he seems to live. Twelve of the sixteen chapters in this gospel, begin with the word, “and”. It is as if Mark takes a quick breath and keeps going. It says, “And this happened also.”

Mark’s favorite word in this gospel, in fact, is the little Greek word, “eutheos,” which means, “immediately; straightway”. He was always interested in what was happening *now!* So he used the word “immediately” over and over again.

I can just imagine Mark as a parent. He might say, “Son, do your homework. You finished yet?”

Do you know someone who is that kind of parent?

I can almost imagine Mark as a child – if he lived like he wrote. His favorite statement to his parents was probably, “Are we there yet? Huh? Huh? Are we there yet?”

My wife Marsha related a story to me that she heard over the radio. A dad was taking his son to the grocery store. That is a trip in itself! I seldom shop with my wife, but I never shop with my boys! Just yesterday, in fact, Marsha went shopping with the boys to get a couple of pairs of shoes. They went to

one store that had a small play area in the corner with children's toys. Benjamin began playing with the toys, while Seth started jogging down the aisles shoving shoes off the display racks onto the floor – not my son!

The story that Marsha heard Dr. James Dobson tell on the *Focus on the Family* radio program was of a man who was in the grocery store with his little boy. The boy was just a terror. Have you ever been in that situation? He was pulling at everything; he was screaming at the top of his lungs. The father remained very calm and was saying, "John, that's okay. We'll be out of here in no time. Just keep calm, John. No sweat. No problem."

A lady, who was shopping in the store also, overheard him on several occasions as she passed in the aisles. She admired the way this dad was handling his son. So, at the checkout lane, she said to him, "Sir, I just want you to know, I'm impressed with the way you handled your son, John; the way you were calmly talking to him."

He replied, "Lady, his name is not John. My name is John!"

I just imagined this guy who lived with the word "immediately," in his mind. Everything had to be done *now!* In fact, Matthew only uses this word "immediately," seven times. In Luke, it is only found twice. In Mark, however, the word is used forty-two times! It gives the idea, when you read this gospel, that the speed just begins to accelerate as he writes to these believers.

## A Portrait of John Mark

Now let me give a portrait of John Mark himself. We will look at several references and fit together all the different pieces to the puzzle in order to arrive at just who John Mark is.

1. The first references that give us information about John Mark are Acts 12:25 and 13:5.

We will start at Acts 12:12. This is when Peter has just been miraculously let out of prison. You may remember that an angel knocks off Peter's bonds, opens the prison door, and lets him out.

***And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.***

This implies that perhaps, John or John Mark, had a Roman father. He was known as Mark, which was

his Jewish name. However, John was a Roman name. His mother's name was Mary, which was also a Jewish name. Perhaps he had a Roman father who had been converted from among the ranks of the Romans. So, John was his Roman name and Mark was his Jewish name.

Evidently, the house of John Mark was a haven for the apostles and the disciples. They were having a secret prayer meeting in his home to pray that God would let Peter out. They did not know how God would do this. Notice what happens in verses 13 and 14.

***When he [Peter] knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl name Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.***

The fact that they had a servant girl implies that John Mark's family were perhaps, wealthy.

You would expect this group to respond with, "Praise the Lord! Our prayers have been answered!"

However, look at their answer in verse 15a.

***They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" . . .***

They answered, "Are you crazy?!"

I love this prayer meeting. They had faith as they said, "Lord, let Peter out."

"He's out!"

"Are you nuts?!"

They eventually let Peter in.

These verses imply different elements of John Mark's home. Some have conjectured that his parents, being wealthy, actually had the home where the last supper was observed. Some even think that the parents of John Mark owned the garden that we refer to as Gethsemane.

Now turn to Acts 12:25 and then, we will continue to chapter 13. Notice what happens in verse 25.

***And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.***

This was the chance of a lifetime for this young new believer. Look at Acts 13:2-5 to see what happens.

***While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they [the church] sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.***

John Mark had evidently, been invited along to be a helper of some kind. He may have been a cook or someone to take care of the books and the bags, but I think, as some have conjectured, Barnabas and Saul brought this young man along to help with the teaching.

John Mark had been a believer; had been raised in a home that had been a haven for the disciples; had heard accounts of Jesus Christ’s life. Perhaps he had taken care of the young people during the meetings that Paul and Barnabas held. We do not know. But he was literally given the opportunity of a Christian lifetime to travel with Paul and Barnabas! Can you imagine that chance?

2. Another reference that gives us information on John Mark is Acts 13:13.

Something strange happened when John Mark went on this trip with Paul and Barnabas. Look at verse 13.

***Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem,***

We are not sure what happened. However, the word “returned” that Paul will use in referring to Mark is the Greek word, “apostasia,” which means “to apostatize,” or literally, “to depart from the faith”.

Evidently, John Mark had come along so far and something happened. We do not know what. Perhaps it was jealousy because Barnabas had started out as the head of this trip. It referred to them as Barnabas and Saul. But notice, it turns to “Paul and his companions,” after Paul’s name change. Maybe John Mark, in his youth and with his ambition, was jealous of the fact that Barnabas was no longer in control.

Perhaps, it was seeing the persecution. Maybe it was in this that John Mark realized, “Hey, this

missionary trip is not what I was expecting. I thought it was going to be seeing the distant lands and taking photographs and all of that.” It was much more than that and perhaps he discovered that fact.

We do not know why, but John Mark turns back and goes home.

3. Turn to Acts 15:36-40 for additional information about John Mark.

Notice what happens in verses 36 through 38.

***After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted [apostatized] them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.***

Evidently, Mark had literally, deserted them. Continue to verses 39 and 40.

***And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him . . . But Paul chose Silas and left . . .***

Paul and Barnabas split while in this small Antioch church. Paul said, “Not a chance,” and checked John Mark off.

Barnabas, however, had a little compassion, as he was known to do. It was Barnabas who had introduced Paul to the new believers. No one else would touch Paul. Others said, “Hey, this is the guy that was out there stoning people; separating heads from bodies.”

Barnabas was so compassionate that he took Paul in and introduced him to the believers. Barnabas was the “son of compassion” and had compassion on John Mark, as well. So, Barnabas said to Paul, “No, I want to give him another chance.”

Paul said, “Not me. Huh-uh. I’m taking Silas and we’re gone.”

So that is what happened.

4. For the next eighteen years, we will not hear of John Mark again. Turn to Colossians 4:10 for the next piece of information that we hear about him.

Eighteen years had gone by with no word of Mark. But notice what the apostle Paul says in Colossians 4:10. I love this.

***Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);***

Paul gives his personal recommendation to John Mark. Something had to have happened. It drives me crazy to try to figure out what happened over that eighteen year period.

5. Let us look at another clue about John Mark. Turn to II Timothy 4:11, where he is mentioned again.

Notice what Paul says in this verse, during the later part of his ministry.

***Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.***

Evidently, only three people were faithful to Paul while he was a prisoner at Rome. Guess who was one of the three? John Mark.

6. Now, I think the next informative verse will help us understand what happened during those eighteen years of silence about John Mark. It is a very slim clue, but turn to I Peter 5:13.

In some way, Mark had proven himself during that eighteen years. Apparently, Mark had grown up. Somehow, Mark, the deserter, had become a faithful companion in the persecution. What had happened? Look at I Peter 5:13, where the apostle Peter is writing.

***She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.***

You may remember that Timothy was the son of Paul, which meant that Paul disciplined Timothy. Paul invested his life in Timothy's life; Paul wrote letters to Timothy; Paul took it as a personal concern to see that Timothy grew up.

Evidently, the apostle Peter had done the same thing with the disciple John Mark. As a result, he had developed, over the years, a man who would become the pastor at the church in Alexandria. John Mark, who had once deserted and thrown in the towel, over this period of years, had somehow, by the grace of

God and the work of another man, given himself to Jesus Christ, regardless.

Who could better understand the bitter taste of denial than the apostle Peter? Who, more than anyone else, would have been more compassionate to a young man who had thrown it in; who had run; who had deserted, than one who had done it himself?

This is precious. Peter had taken John Mark under him and calls him, "my son".

## **Application – Marks of Maturity**

I will close with several principles of application. Let us call them, "the marks of maturity". In the lives of Peter, Paul, and Mark, we can discover some things that the Lord has been doing. These marks of maturity are simply one word for each man. I did not discover these; they are not original. Yet, I think you can discover these for yourself and make them personal by knowing that as you live for Jesus Christ, He is constantly at work and you are constantly learning.

1. Peter, I believe, learned compassion.

Peter was the kind of guy who had his sword ready. If someone got out of line, they would lose an ear. If someone said something about Jesus Christ; if they turned their back, they were in trouble.

Peter was the impetuous one and yet, in his later life, he somehow developed a sense of compassion. He would take someone who had checked out and disciple him.

Twenty years earlier, Peter would probably have checked John Mark off too. He did not, however, and I believe the element of compassion had been growing in the life of the apostle Peter.

2. Paul learned forgiveness.

Paul had checked John Mark off. Paul had said, "I don't want anything to do with John Mark. He deserted me in Perga. He turned back. He's no good for the cause. I'm taking someone else."

Yet, in his later years, we find that Paul has forgiven John Mark and even recommends him. Paul had to swallow his pride; swallow the words that he had said earlier, and say, "John Mark is useful to me for service."

I think God had taught Paul forgiveness.

3. What about Mark? I think the symptom of maturity that we can see in his life is endurance.

At the first sign of struggle, John Mark was gone; he left; he checked out; he threw in the towel; he was through. Yet, by the grace of God, we find the Lord building a characteristic; a mark of maturity in his life that you and I need desperately; that is, endurance. No matter what happens; no matter what difficulty occurs; no matter what the trial, we should say, "I am going to continue living for Jesus Christ."

Now, to wrap all of this up, I want to give one short sentence for you to remember. As I have studied the life and the portrait of John Mark, one sentence comes to mind, and it is this,

*God gives second chances.*

I am so glad He does, aren't you? If you are hearing this today, and you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, God is giving you another chance to accept Him. If you are hearing this today, and perhaps a difficulty, a trial, a strain has been too much and has caused you to take a step back in your Christian life, God *never* checks us off. God is *filled* with compassion. He is *filled* with forgiveness. God *ALWAYS* gives second chances.

I read a story, this past week, about a young man named Butch O'Hare. He was in the cockpit of his little fighter, during World War II, bearing down on the planes of the enemy and was able to knock five of them out of the air into the Pacific Ocean as they headed toward the *Lexington*, his home base ship. By this time, his comrades had arrived and finished off the rest of the nine Japanese planes that were attacking their carrier. Butch was the first aviator to be personally awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by the President of the United States.

A year later, Butch O'Hare would die in aerial combat. However, his friends and family from his hometown of Chicago would not forget him. As a result, the next time that you fly through the O'Hare International Airport, remember Butch. It is named after him in remembrance of the fact that he gave his life for his country.

This story, however, really begins before 1942. It begins in the 1920's; the "Roaring 20's," in Chicago, during the days of Al Capone and his colorful associates. One of these associates was named "Artful Eddie". He was the fast man's lawyer. In fact, it was by his skill and finesse that Al Capone and his gang members were kept out of prison many times. He became a rich man in business with Al Capone.

However, a day came when Artful Eddie went to the authorities and told them he was going to squeal on the mob. The authorities were skeptical. Why would this wealthy man squeal on Al Capone? He convinced them by saying, "The only reason I'm doing this is because something has happened in my life and that of my wife. We've had a son born into our home, and I want to clear the family name of the stain created by the mob."

So, Artful Eddie squealed. The mob remembered and, two shotgun blasts later, Artful Eddie was dead. His plan worked, however. His son was accepted into the US Naval Academy and went on to win a Congressional Medal of Honor from the President of the United States. Edward "Butch" O'Hare was a son who was given a second chance by his father.

God, our heavenly Father, always gives us, His children, second chances.