

- THE BOOK OF MARK -

"As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed Him."

(Mark 1:16-18)



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For the Body of Christ

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The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

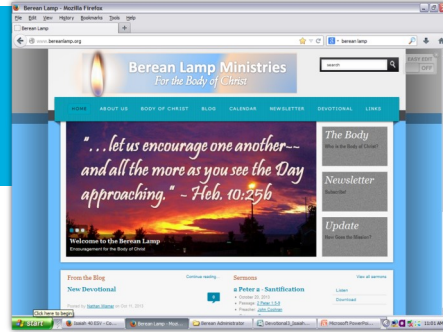


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the Gospel According to Mark

by Nathan Warner - Page 3

Word of Faith or Will of God? (A Scriptural Study)

by Nathan Warner - Page 4

How to be Steadfast in the Lord!

by John Mathews - Page 13

The Mark of Jesus

by Jane Titrud - Page 15

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The Berean Lamp Ministry seeks to:

1. Encourage and strengthen the Body of Christ by providing the means for each of its members to share their spiritual gifts with one another, rooted in the Word of God, thereby growing into deeper union with one another and with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).
2. Minister to non-believers; be a witness for Christ and a testimony to His Body in the world.

We would appreciate your help in contributing to the content and in spreading the work of this ministry. Thank you, and God bless.

- Pastor Scott Moller

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Introduction to the Gospel According to Mark

By Nathan Warner

“The Gospel According to Mark” is probably one of the least read Gospels, perhaps because it lacks the details found in Matthew and Luke while also lacking the Spiritual depth of John. Yet, the Gospel of Mark is very important to us and offers a more practical and action oriented vision of Jesus.

Well-established scholarship in the Church maintains this Gospel was written by the John Mark we meet in the book of Acts, which makes a great deal of sense as his family knew Peter and would thus have placed the young Mark in proximity to the Apostles and eyewitnesses, if not an eyewitness himself.

Who did Mark write his Gospel for? There are some interesting clues. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark defines common Jewish practices. This may give us clues as to his intended readers.

For example, in chapter 7, Mark takes some considerable time to explain the Jewish custom of washing before eating: *“The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)”* (vs. 1-4). Without this explanation, Gentile readers would have been at a loss.

Furthermore, Mark employs a number of “Latinizations” of Jewish locals and customs. For example, in Mark 15:16, he specifically defines the “palace” or “court” where Jesus was taken to be mocked as the Praetorium—the assumption is that his readers knew well what a Praetorium was: *“The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praeto-*

rium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort”

This leads many to believe he was writing a Gospel account to Roman readers and not Jews. This is further bolstered by the fact that Mark did not include a genealogy for Jesus in his opening, which would have meant little to Gentile readers unfamiliar with the Old Testament promises to David.

Another item of consideration is that Mark uses Roman methods of telling time in his narrative, not Jewish ones: *“At about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them”* (Mark 6:48b).

Unlike the Gospel of Matthew, which was likely originally written in Hebrew, the Gospel of Mark was originally written in Greek, suggesting an audience outside Israel.

And unlike Luke’s polished Greek grammar in his Gospel, Mark’s grammar is cruder and more focused on action than recording detailed exposition. This may perhaps point to Mark’s audience as “working class” and not leaders, aristocracy, or scholars.

And finally, we see that the consistent theme of identifying one’s suffering with the sufferings of Christ threads its way through Mark’s Gospel. This suggests that his readers may have been experiencing persecution for their faith. And if Rome was his intended audience, this fits with the times (the 60s and 70s) when persecution was hitting its stride.

We may conclude at this point that Mark was writing to Gentiles in Rome, yet he quoted Old Testament prophets as if his audience knew who they were. *“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet”* (Mark 1:2a). Why would he explain Jewish customs in detail but not even attempt to introduce Jewish prophets?

We cannot know for certain who Mark’s audience was or what their circumstances were, but we are his audience today, and it is interesting to see what he chose to add and what he chose to leave out in sharing the life of *“Jesus Christ, the Son of God”* (Mark 1:1b). May we all take the time to study “The Gospel According to Mark” and see what God has for us in it. Even so, Amen.

Word of Faith or Will of God?

(A Scriptural Study)

By Nathan Warner

“Being reminded, Peter said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.’ And Jesus answered saying to them, ‘Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.’”
(Mark 11:21-25 NASB)

This passage in the *Gospel according to Mark* is a difficult piece of Scripture for the Church. Throughout time, many have taken these words to literally mean that through Christ, the Believer has access to anything he or she desires – if they only have enough faith and believe sincerely that they will get it.

After all, it is not just here in Mark that Jesus says this, but He says something similar in

Matthew: *“everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”* (Matthew 7:8). Likewise in Luke: *“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’ And the Lord said, ‘If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and be planted in the sea”; and it would obey you”* (Luke 17:5-6).

It would seem from these passages that if we have enough faith, God will do for us anything we ask of Him. And entire church movements have been built on this idea, many where the heads of the movements bathe in luxury and wealth, claiming that it is all owed to their faith in their requests of God that provided their earthly splendor. Today, one such group is the “Word of Faith” movement, and they have many, many disciples and acolytes who genuinely believe that if they have enough faith, their problems will vaporize, their struggles will be rectified, their needs be met, and their lives enriched.

The problem is that in the personal lives of most Believers, this approach rarely proves to be true. There is much suffering in the Church. We suffer want. We suffer heartache and loss from which there is no return, regardless how fervently we ask God to undo what has happened. We suffer health issues that do not abate. And many Believers die early. What must we conclude from this?

“BLESSED is a man who perseveres under TRIAL; for once he has been APPROVED, he will RECEIVE the crown of LIFE which the Lord has PROMISED to those who love Him.”

(James 1:12)



Well, those that interpret the Scriptures to give us the keys to Heaven's storehouses through faith declare that your suffering or unanswered requests are a clear indication that you lack the faith necessary to receive them from God.

And so, you are stuck in a never-ending loop of trying to obtain the kind of faith necessary to obtain your requests—and when they don't appear, the answer is always the same: "You must have wavered in your belief!" ; "Clearly you did not ask in perfect faith!" ; "Obviously you must have doubted." OR they will accuse you of having sin in your life: "You have some hidden sin and this is preventing you from receiving what you ask for." As we'll see later, this is what Job's friends accused him of during his trial.

The leaders of the "Word of Faith" movement explain to us that these are the reasons why God has not given us what we asked of Him. And it must be true, because they have wealth and power and happiness and we don't, right?

And so we seek to strengthen our faith. They tell us: "Learn from this teacher the secrets!" ; "Read this book and follow the 7 steps

to prosperity!" ; "You must throw off the chains of doubt!"

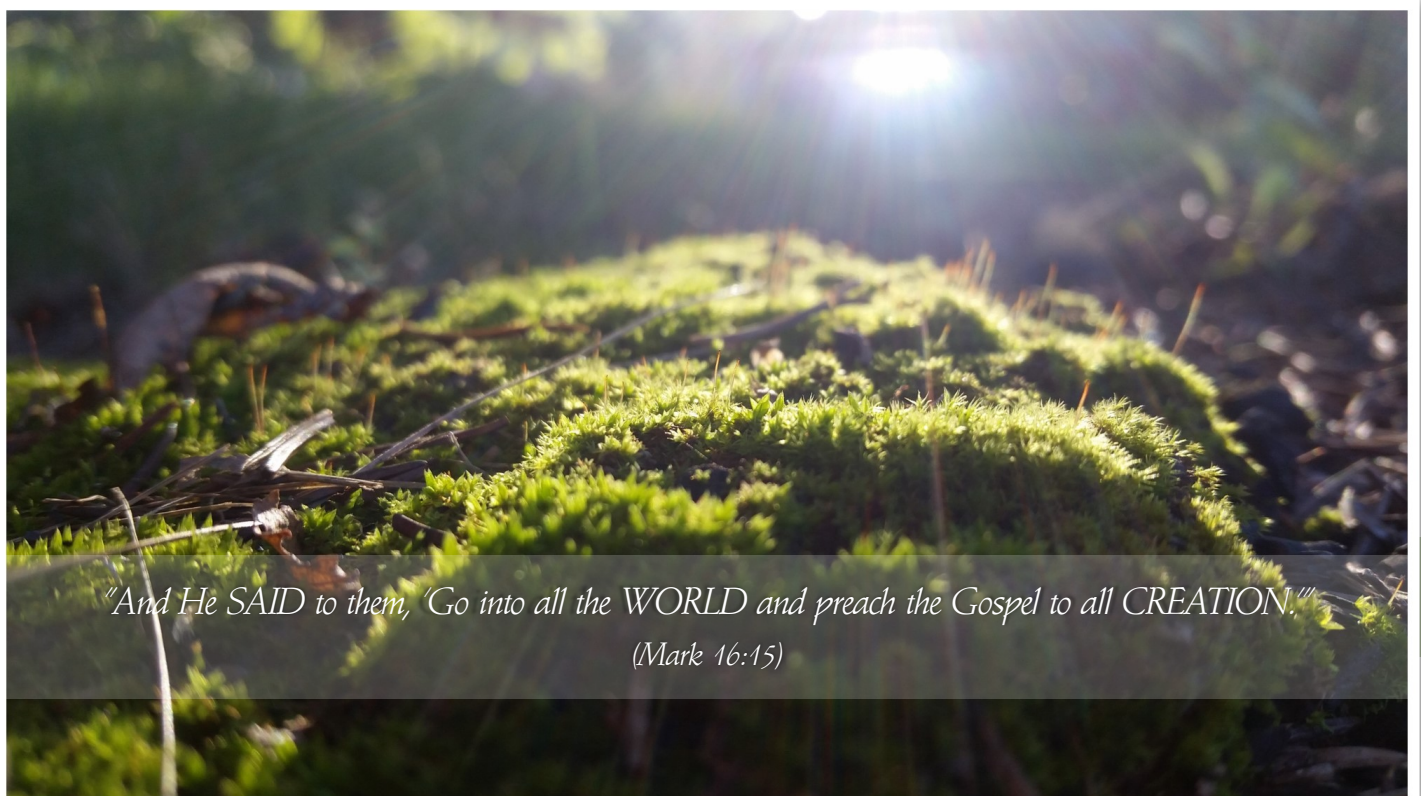
Some disciples of this teaching come to understand many years down this road, that this view of the Gospel is false, while others remain trapped in the slavery.

How is it false? After all, the Scriptures we have read seem clear, don't they? When answering any difficult question, such as this one, we must look to God's entire Word to better understand the context of these passages. And we must look to the architect of our Faith, God's own Son Jesus Christ, Whom we are to emulate. And we must look to the Apostles of Christ as our examples of how to walk and what to expect in this life.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Did Jesus have access to the treasure stores of Heaven in wealth, health, and power? Absolutely! Why then did He suffer hardship, want, pain, and suffering? Isaiah describes Jesus this way:

"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender



"And He SAID to them, 'Go into all the WORLD and preach the Gospel to all CREATION.'"
(Mark 16:15)

shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as

for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53).

In the life of Christ on earth, we do not see

Sometimes We Stand Alone

“For my FATHER and my mother have FORSAKEN me, but the LORD will take me in.”

(Psalm 27:10)



someone like the leaders of the “Word of Faith” movement, enriched and blessed with earthly splendor. Instead, we see suffering, pain, and loss – we see delayed gratification – trials and difficulty now for future honor and glory. That ought to be the end of it.

But some will say that this life of suffering pertains only to Christ, and He suffered by sacrifice of Himself so that we could be given the power to not suffer in like manner. Well, the Words of Jesus Himself counter that point: *“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions”* (Luke 14:26-33).

The way of a cross was a one-way road of suffering and death. The Jews would daily have seen men dragging their crosses to their place of execution, from which there was no escape. When Jesus said this, they would have understood the cost of being a disciple of Christ was your life – the dedication of your life to Christ at the cost of everything.

The Apostle Peter also would advise us that *“since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”* (1 Peter 4:1).

The Christian cannot avoid suffering in this life, even by words of faith and belief. *“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 3:12).

THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLES

But if these words are not enough, let us look to the life of one of the greatest of the Apostles – the Apostle Paul – as a pattern for any man and woman of faith. Paul tells us we must follow his example: *“Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me”* (1 Corinthians 4:16). *“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1). So, what does that look like?

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

This is not the picture we have received of the Believer’s walk in the “Word of Faith” movement. Do they teach us to be content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, and difficulties for Christ’s sake? No, these are the very things they claim we can and should be delivered from if we only have enough faith. Paul’s declaration here has led some false teachers in the “Word of Faith” movement to claim he was not a true Believer in order to salvage their misguided beliefs.

WHAT DO WE MAKE OF JOB?

Paul’s declaration that God had a greater purpose for the suffering in his life points to the elephant in the room of the “Word of Faith” movement: The Book of Job. Job suffered the destruction of his entire life, his family, his reputation, his health, and more. Why? Why would God not listen to the faith-filled prayers of this righteous man? Because Job was at the center of unseen things transpiring in Heaven. What he suffered, he suffered for the will of God in a purpose that Job could not

have foreseen or comprehended.

Many a Christian today would nod in agreement with that swell guy Eliphaz when he told Job, *“Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproveth, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty”* (Job 5:17). Here, Eliphaz is suggesting that Job was experiencing the Lord’s discipline for some sin he MUST HAVE committed, and he should be glad God cares enough about him to discipline him.

In other words, it is your own fault your requests are not being answered. They drive this accusation home later: *“Is it because of your reverence that He reproveth you, that He enters into judgment against you? Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities without end?”* (Job 22:4).

Job’s friend Bildad jumped onboard the shaming of Job by suggesting that God rewards the good; therefore, Job couldn’t be in the right because God had stopped rewarding him: *“Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity, nor will He support the evildoers”* (Job

8:20). *“If you would seek God and implore the compassion of the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, surely now He would rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate”* (Job 8:5-6). Bildad was preaching the prosperity Gospel—that if Job would just “get himself right with God,” life would be great again.

It is true from an eternity perspective that God WILL judge the wicked and reward the just in the age to come, but we know that in the present world, God gives rain to the just and unjust, and prosperity and success are no measures of integrity. Job answered as much.

Eliphaz took his position further to suggest that Job’s affliction was judgment from God – because in his heart, Job must truly be a bad man. Eliphaz then proceeded to invent fanciful reasons why Job was being judged: *“Is it because of your reverence that He reproveth you, that He enters into judgment against you? Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquities without end?Therefore snares surround*



*Let me hear in the
morning of your
steadfast love, for
in you I trust.
Make me know
the way I should
go, for to you I
lift up my soul.*

(Psalms 143:8)

you, and sudden dread terrifies you, or darkness, so that you cannot see, and an abundance of water covers you.... Yield now and be at peace with Him; Thereby good will come to you” (Job 22:4-7, 10-11, 21).

Eliphaz is saying, “Job, clearly you’ve done something to deserve what is happening to you. Just admit this is why you’re being punished and God will restore you.”

None of this was the right way to handle Job’s affliction, and God was not pleased with them: *“It came about after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has’” (Job 42:7).*

We can learn from the book of Job that prayers of faith and sincere belief are not always answered, even when prayed by righteous men – and that neither sin in your life, nor a lack of faith is the cause.

Some will likely say that Job lived long before Christ granted us access to all things through His death and resurrection and the gifting of the Holy Spirit, so we cannot use his example. Yet, James tells us to look to him as an example: *“As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful” (James 5:10-11).*

Okay, so where does that leave us? How are we supposed to interpret the words of Jesus in Mark?

JESUS WAS A SERVANT OF HIS FATHER’S WILL

The thing to understand is that Jesus was not on earth for Himself or His own aggrandizement or comfort. He was here in service to His Father. While He had access and power over all things, He did nothing apart from the will of His Father. Even though the Father had *“given all things into His hand” (John 3:35).*

Jesus said, *“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).* *“I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him” (John 5:43).*

Jesus was completely committed to His Father’s will for His life on earth: *“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will’” (Matthew 26:39).* *“Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner’” (John 5:19).* *“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak” (John 12:49).* *“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works” (John 14:10).*

Further, Jesus taught that those who keep God’s will are those loved by God: *“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21).*

“I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here” (John 14:30-31).

In contrast, the “Word of Faith” movement can be summed up easily as those who have faith in their own will for their life.

“IN MY NAME”

So, we have seen that we are to live as servants of our Father’s will and to obey His commandments. A nice way of saying this is that we are to “abide in His name.” After all, Jesus said repeatedly that He had come in His Father’s name: *“I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him” (John 5:43).*

In the old days, to bear someone’s name was to bear their purpose and character and to partake in the inheritance of that name. If you bore the name of a Levite, then abiding in that name would be to fulfill the duties of that house – to be a priest, regardless of your personal wishes and desires to be a blacksmith or

a ruler. That was the will of the fathers. If you bore the name of a house of Judah, to abide in that name would mean to fulfill your duties as a ruler, regardless of whether you wanted to be a priest or a court jester. That was the will of the fathers.

Similarly, when a woman married into a family, she took the name of her husband and she adopted the character of his house as her own, with its responsibilities, duties, and reputation. She would “abide” in the name of her husband. The Church is the Bride of Christ and she bears the name of Jesus as her name now – she has “married into” the household of God and she must adopt the character, legacy, heritage of that name as her own.

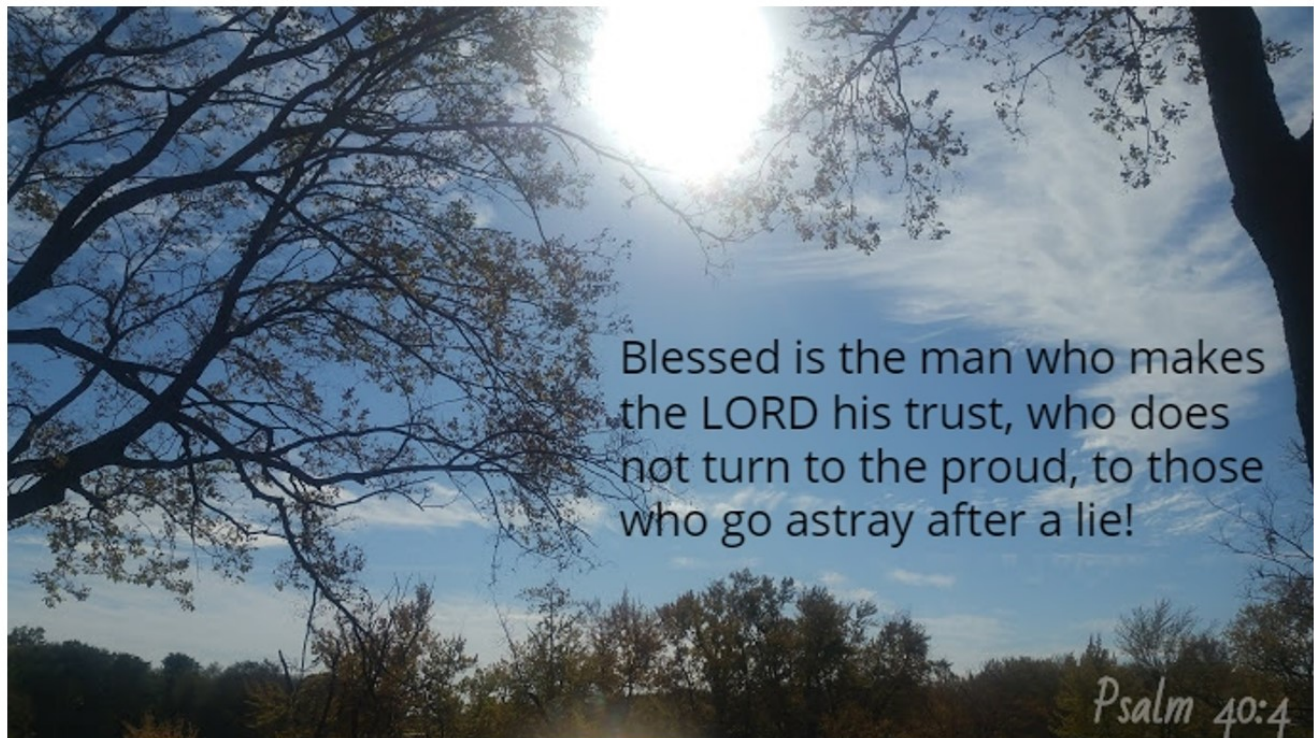
We see here that just having the name tagged onto your name is not enough. You must abide in the name with its meaning and purpose to achieve glory in the administration of your duties to it.

As the Son of God, Jesus abided in His Father’s name and did nothing apart from the will of His Father. As Christ’s Bride, we are to abide in His name and do nothing apart from His will and character. Unlike Jesus, we are sinful creatures and so our abiding is never perfect. We often act out in our own will and in our own name. But this is not how God the

Father is raising us to be.

When we ask for something “in” the name of Jesus, we are not simply tagging His authority onto our request as if that opens doors for blessings from heaven. We are asking for something that is in harmony with the character and nature of Jesus – something in line with His commandments and His Word. Jesus was selfless, self-sacrificial, and completely devoted to the will of His Father at the expense of Himself. Never once do we see Jesus asking for a home, private caravan, wealth, influence, or anything like this – apart from the will of the Father (i.e. such as the donkey, which was to fulfill prophecy). Nor does He ask for relief from grief, sorrow, pain, or want. He endured what the Father had placed before Him to accomplish, fixing His eyes on eternal glory. So too, we are to be “*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Hebrews 12:2).

And so we can better understand the context of the passage in the Gospel of Mark by examining Jesus’ words in John’s Gospel: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to*



the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:12-15). “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another” (John 15:15-17).

“In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father” (John 16:23-27).

What we ask for, we must ask in the name of Jesus, understanding Who He is, abiding in His name as our name – as the Bride of Christ—in His character and purpose, which was to obey the will of the Father completely at the expense of Himself. Thus, our relationship to Christ is shown when our own will and desires fall completely out of the picture, “*for whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50).*

Jesus’ half-brother James would refer to our own will as wrong motives: “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3).*

Now, it is not wrong to ask God for help, and to share your desires and dreams with Him, but we should always follow Jesus’ example in prayer by saying, “**yet not as I will, but as You will**” (Matthew 26:39b)—This is to “ask” in the name of Jesus.

We should pray for what we feel we need,

yet we must submit ourselves to the will of God in our lives and what those outcomes are, which often are not what we think we want or need. Our true focus should be to ask for those things that are in accordance with the will of God. But, like Paul and Job, we do not always know what His will is for us in our lives, and we must wait on Him and pray for His will to be accomplished in our lives.

James drives home the arrogance and danger of the “Word of Faith” movement, which truly is to have faith in your will: “*Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:13-17).*

As the Bride of Christ, our focus becomes the will of God in the world as we look ahead to Christ’s return and His eternal glory that we will share. We do not ask and request for things that are not “in His name.”

Paul exemplified this, for he says, “*after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition” (1 Thessalonians 2:2). “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Timothy 1:8-9).*

And after suffering for the Gospel, may we be able to say with Paul, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).*

Even so, Amen.



*"For WHOEVER wishes to save his LIFE
will lose it, but whoever LOSES his life for
MY sake and the GOSPEL'S will save it."
(Mark 8:35)*

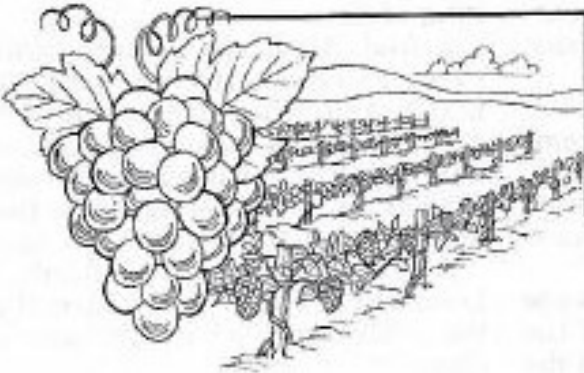
By Natalie Warner

How to be Steadfast in the Lord!

By John Mathews

As a farmer, each year I get to experience the growth of a plant. From the time the seed enters the ground to the time you gather the fruit, you learn many interesting facts.

In Mark 4, Jesus gives the famous parable of the sower telling how a farmer went out to plant his field. Later, He tells sort of a continuation of it. In verses 26-29, He says: *“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come”* (KJV). In order to understand this passage better, we need to know what He is referring to when He says “Seed”.



As God had me meditating on this passage in the past month or so, He brought to mind the point Jesus makes when explaining the parable of the sower earlier. He says “The sower soweth the word”.

In this passage, Jesus tells us what happens when we sow the Word of God in our life. He says that by sowing God’s word, that is how His kingdom is manifested on earth. He says the kingdom of God is like a man casting seed (God’s Word) on the ground.

So, when we pray: *“Thy kingdom come ... on earth as it is in Heaven”* (Matthew 6:10) what we are praying is that people would sow God’s Word. But, what does it mean to “sow” the word? If you think about it, when we just read God’s Word, often it goes in one ear and

out the other, and five minutes later we have no idea what we just read. While reading is important, in order to plant God’s Word into our hearts, we must meditate on it. When we spend time to just think about it, that is when it becomes embedded in our lives, just like how a seed is embedded in the ground. As it says in Joshua 1:8: *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.”* Sowing God’s Word is not merely having your brain temporarily registering the words, but making them embedded in your life, by spending time on them.

It goes on to say that he sleeps, and rises, going about his daily routine, and the seed springs forth on its own. However, like with a seed in the garden, you don’t plant the seed, and it begins to grow right off the bat, it is a gradual process. As it goes on to say: it first brings forth the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. It shows us this gradual process. And then, as soon as the fruit is ready, he gathers it.

This shows us the laws of the harvest:

1. You reap what you sow
2. You reap more than you sow
3. You reap in a different season than you sow.

When you plant a seed of anything, that is the fruit you will get. If you plant good seed, like God’s Word, you will reap good things, and as it is said in Job 4:8b:

“They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.”

This leads to the second law; you reap more than you sow. If you plant an evil thought, action, or whatever it may be, when the harvest is come, you will reap what you sowed and a much larger amount than you sowed. As Jesus said earlier about the plants in the parable of the sower, it would *“bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.”* Not only does this concept apply to sowing evil, but also with planting seeds of righteousness. As it says in Galatians 6:8: *“For he that*



soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” In addition, you do reap in proportion to the amount you sow. In 2 Corinthians 9:6: “*He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*” When you sow the Word of God in your life, and do it consistently, it will move from your mind to your heart. And if something is in your heart, it will be reflected in your actions and words. As it says in Mathew 12:34: “*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*”

The final law of the harvest is that you reap in a different season than you sow. This is the one that most people don't like (myself included). In the physical realm, we generally sow in the spring and reap in the fall, even if we want the harvest sooner. So, in the spiritual realm, when we start to plant God's Word in our heart, we want the fruit NOW! But that is not the way God works. He makes it so you need to continue in His word. As it says in Galatians 6:9: “*Let us not be weary in well doing:*

for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” So often we grow weary. When the fruit is not immediately growing in our life, we begin to think that it isn't working, or something isn't right, and we tend to think that our effort is in vain and we just kind of stop. But, as it says in 1 Corinthians 15:58: “*Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*”

We don't need to understand how this process works. To restate Mark 4:26-29: “*So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*”

Author's note: It is fascinating to do a word search in scripture on the words 'sow' and 'reap'. You will find many rich passages in God's word on this subject.



The Mark of Jesus

By Jane Titrud

Even a casual reading of the Gospels shows that they are not all the same. One reason is that each one works to portray a particular aspect of the nature of Christ using details from the life and ministry of Jesus to support it. Since there are different aspects of Christ, the Gospel accounts vary accordingly. That is why commentators sometimes refer to “the Jesus of Matthew,” “the Jesus of Mark,” or “the Jesus of...” whatever Gospel they happen to be addressing.

Mark’s Gospel, for instance, portrays Jesus as a willing servant ready and eager to obey the call of God upon His life even to the point of death. Few, however, consider what the Bible tells us about the man who wrote this Gospel and how Jesus worked in Mark’s life to prepare him to serve in this capacity. This too is part of the story of how this Gospel came to be. It is just that one must look for details about Mark’s life in Scripture outside of this Gospel and put the various pieces together.

None of the Gospels tell us anything about Mark’s life except for maybe one thing. Some think that the “*certain young man*” mentioned near the end of *The Gospel According to Mark* (Mark 14:51-52) is the same person who later wrote this Gospel. The setting here is the Garden of Gethsemane. After Judas betrayed Jesus to a multitude who was sent by the chief priests, scribes, and elders to arrest Him, the

Bible tells us that everyone left Jesus and fled (Mark 14:50). It then goes on to say: “*And a certain young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked*” (Mark 14:51-52, NASB 1977). If everyone had already fled the scene, the thought is that this may have been a firsthand account. This, in turn, would seem to make Mark an early follower of Jesus. Yet, there is no way to tell for certain.

Scripture makes its first direct reference to “*John who was also called Mark*” in Acts 12:12. The reason for the double name is evidently because “John” was his Hebrew name and “Mark,” or “Marcus,” was a later Greek addition.

We learn from this verse that John Mark’s mother, Mary, had a house large enough to accommodate several people who had gathered there to pray for Peter’s release from prison. Peter must have been familiar with the place, for after he was led out of prison by an angel, he went straight to it, seemingly knowing where everyone would be. Mary also had a servant girl named Rhoda who recognized Peter’s voice when she came to answer his knock on the door of the gate (verse 13). Peter must, therefore, have been a frequent visitor and somewhat close to Mark and his family. Since Peter referred to him as “*my son*” in 1 Peter 5:13, many additionally conclude that he was the one who originally led Mark to the Lord. Peter was also the likely source of much of the information contained in Mark. This close as-

“You YOUNGER men, likewise, be subject to your ELDERS; and all of you, clothe yourselves with HUMILITY toward one another, for God is OPPOSED to the proud, but gives GRACE to the humble.”

(1 Peter 5:5)

sociation between the two, in turn, supposedly gives apostolic authority to Mark's Gospel account.

We find reference again to John Mark at the end of Acts 12 in connection with Barnabas and Saul: "*And Barnabas and Saul [note the order of the names] returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark*" (Acts 12:25). Their mission had been to bring a contribution from the church in Antioch to the church in Jerusalem to relieve the effects of a severe famine that had come upon the area (Acts 11:27–30). When it came time to return to Antioch, Barnabas and Saul decided to take Mark back with them likely in part because Mark was Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10).

Back in Antioch after some time had passed, the Holy Spirit specifically said to set Barnabas and Saul apart [again, note the order] for a special work He had for them to do (Acts 13:1–5). So, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit they set sail for Cyprus (v. 4). This first destination may have been chosen because Barnabas was a Levite of Cyprian birth (Acts 4:36) and had some connections there. They

took Mark with them once again even though he had not been specifically called to this type of work as they had been. The thought was that he could at least be a helper. "*And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John [Mark] as their helper*" (Acts 13:5).

Together they proclaimed the Gospel throughout the whole island of Cyprus. Near the end of their evangelistic tour, however, things began to change (Acts 13:6–13). They found a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus (a. k. a. Elymas the magician) (v. 6) who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (v. 7a). The proconsul summoned Barnabas and Saul [again, note the order] hoping to hear the word of God (v. 7b), but Elymas opposed them (v. 8). Saul, who was by this time also known as Paul, was then filled with the Holy Spirit and dealt mightily with Elymas, even rendering him blind for a time (v. 9, 11). Having witnessed that the hand of God was upon Paul, the proconsul thus became a believer (v. 12). And, from this point on, Paul became the more prominent one in the ministry. One can see this via the change in the order of their names



*"The TIME is FULFILLED, and
the KINGDOM of God is at
HAND; repent and BELIEVE in
the GOSPEL."
(Mark 1:15b)*

as they are henceforth listed, that is, if the other names are even mentioned at all. Note for example verse 13: “*Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John [Mark] left them and returned to Jerusalem*” (v. 13a). The emphasis here is clearly placed upon Paul. Other examples of this switch in order occur in proximity to this verse as well. See, for instance, Acts 13:42, 43, 46, and 50. In the next chapter, Paul is even called the chief speaker (Acts 14:12).

This is the context that speaks to the question of why Mark decided to leave Barnabas and Paul and return to Jerusalem. Moreover, it does not take too much imagination to put the appropriate pieces together. Cyprus was home turf for Barnabas, and Mark was family. This was not the case when it came to Paul, which may have caused some friction between the parties. Mark observed the new prominence given to or achieved by Paul and may well have harbored some resentment on behalf of his cousin over this situation. In truth, Paul was merely acting under the direction and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Mark could easily have taken the situation as a put-down or power grab. One can also imagine how such a thing as resentment would have created a major stumbling block with respect to the work of God and any future working relationship between Paul and Mark until the sit-

uation was properly resolved. This explanation at least fits the narrative.

From Paul’s perspective, he considered Mark’s leaving a big deal. For when Paul later wished to return to the cities where he and Barnabas had proclaimed the Word of the Lord to see how the new converts were doing, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along with them again (Acts 15:36-37), but Paul vehemently objected. He objected on the grounds that Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work (Acts 15:38). “*And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord*” (Acts 15:39-40). It is easy to understand how Barnabas could be more sympathetic to Mark under the set of circumstances proposed here. Mark was family. However, the issue had evidently not been settled yet in Paul’s mind. The last we read of Mark in the Book of Acts, therefore, is not good. Likely Paul thought he still had some underlying problems with the flesh that needed to be resolved.

Nevertheless, we find Mark listed along with Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke as fellow workers with Paul in *The Epistle of Paul to Philemon*, which Paul evidently wrote years later during his first Roman imprisonment (v.

*“For EVEN the Son of Man did not COME to be served, but to SERVE,
and to GIVE His life a RANSOM for many.”*

(Mark 10:45)



24). Thus, Mark was not only back to serving the Lord but doing so successfully alongside Paul. Plus, Mark was likewise mentioned under similar circumstances in *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* as being one of a handful of fellow workers for the kingdom of God who were from the circumcision and who proved to be an encouragement to Paul (Colossians 4:10-11).

Later still, Paul refers to Mark in his second letter to Timothy, which was written during his second Roman imprisonment, under conditions that were not nearly as bearable as the first. By this time, everyone had deserted Paul except Luke, and he pleads with Timothy to come to him soon (2 Timothy 4:9-11). He also asks Timothy to pick up Mark and bring him with, “*for he is useful to me for service*” (verse 11). A great change must, therefore, have taken place in Mark’s heart.

Being called “useful for service” may not seem like a commanding accolade. Nevertheless, it signifies that God had dealt with Mark until he was useful for service unto the Lord. This would include a call to compile what we now know of as *The Gospel According to Mark*. As the reader will recall, this Gospel depicts Jesus as one who was willing and ready—even eager to serve God under any circumstances in which He was called, up to and including the point of death. This was certainly not characteristic of the Mark depicted in Acts 13. This Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas and shirked the work he had come to do as a helper. Imagine, therefore, this Mark trying to write an accurate account of Jesus before the grace of God had changed him to where He could appreciate Jesus’ attitude of heart. By this time, however, Mark had been changed and molded by the gracious and loving hands of his Savior.

The greatest significance of this story is that it applies to all Christians. When a person first gets saved, there is a definite change that takes place in the heart and life of the Believer. Such a one is a new creature in Christ to be sure (2 Corinthians 5:17). Yet, that does not mean that he or she has achieved a kind of human perfection. The flesh is still with us and can tempt us back into old ways of thinking and behaving.

Mark’s story is a testament to how fleshliness harbored in the heart of a believer can

threaten to destroy a person’s usefulness for service unto the Lord. At the same time, it shows how God often uses the circumstances of life to expose hidden elements of the heart so that He can effectively deal with them. It illustrates, moreover, how much Jesus loves His own and works to restore them when they fail. Sometimes repentance and newly acquired humility even lead to incredible blessing, as they did in the case of Mark. It was the Mark of Jesus—that is, the Mark restored and reformed by Jesus—who was ultimately the author of *The Gospel According to Mark*.

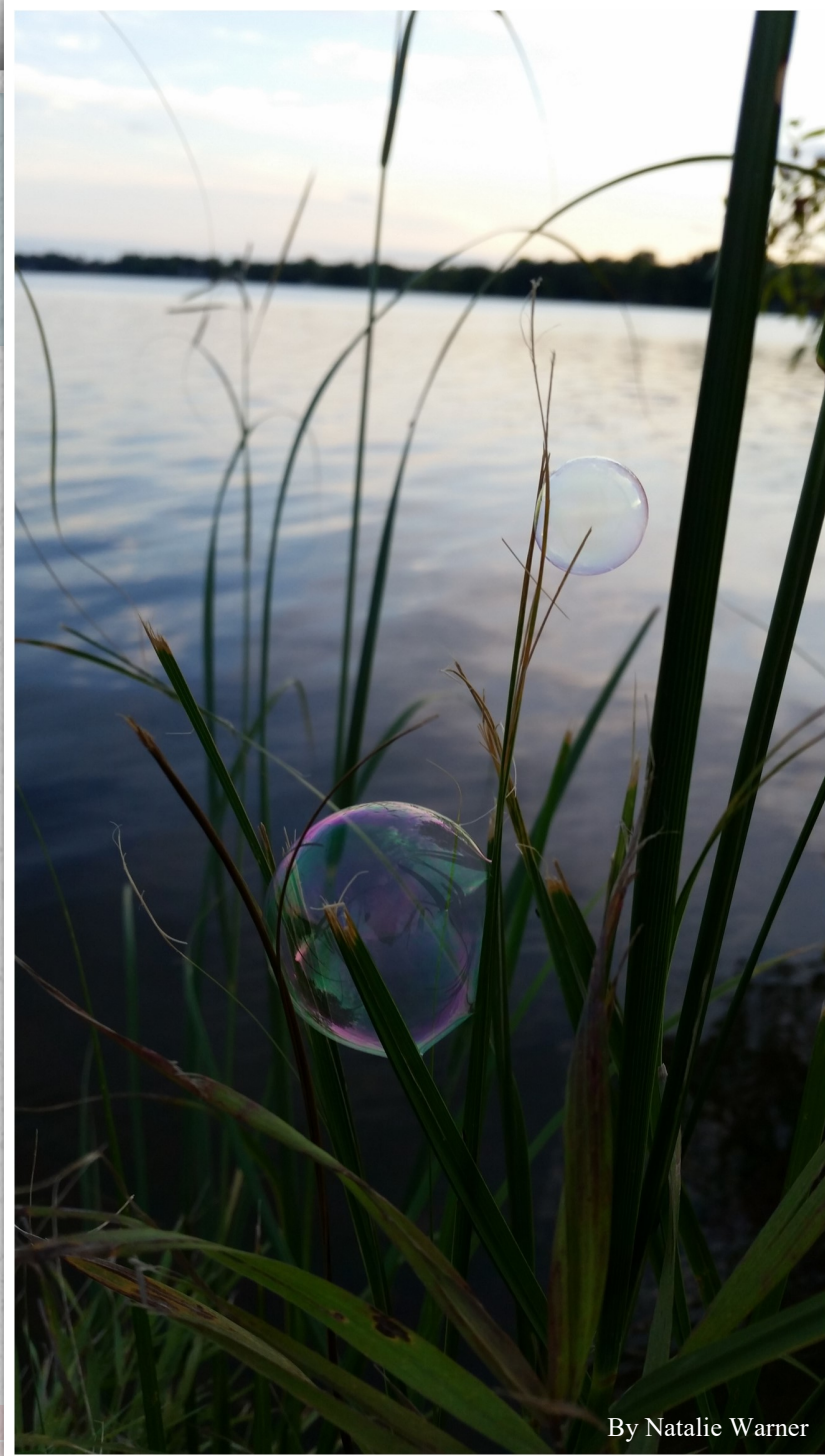
At an earlier point in time, Mark may have taken pride in the fact that Peter had been a very close friend and spiritual mentor to him. This may have even been part of the problem with respect to his relationship to Paul. He may not have considered Paul part of the “in crowd.” Now, however, consider the following verses from Mark’s Gospel in accordance with the story of Mark’s life presented here:

“But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give is life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45). *“And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’”* (Mark 8:34-37)

Consider also the following passage from Mark’s spiritual father, Peter:

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Amen, Lord Jesus. Work your gracious work in all of us.



By Natalie Warner

"Yet YOU do not know WHAT your life will be like TOMORROW. You are just a VAPOR that appears for a little WHILE and then VANISHES away." (James 4:14)

January-March 2020 Newsletter Theme
THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS-DEUTERONOMY

Submission Deadline: January 26

Publish Date: February 4

Themes to think about in the Books of the Law:

What is the purpose of the Law?

What are the sacrifices about?

Why is there a focus on Holiness?

Why is there a focus on mediation through Levitical priests?

What is the point of the Book of Leviticus? Why do you think that this book in the Bible?

What is the point of the Book of Numbers? Perhaps one of the least read books of the Bible, what is the point of this book?

Why does God order the census of Israel in Numbers?

What is the point of the Book of Deuteronomy?

What are point of the sermons Moses gives Israel?