

'Follow Jesus in 2024'

Intro to Follow Series – Dec 31st 2023

Intro:

[Image]

Q – Who here has ever traveled with little kids? Who has never had the joy of traveling with little kids?

E.g. [Show Pic of Family on Plane] – I remember 1 journey we took from N.I. to USA:

- For the first 10 hours everything went well
- In the last 15 mins it seemed like everything went wrong – bumpy landing, bathroom, blueberries, bags
- One man walked into our world & said 'Follow Me' – he had compassion / ability / authority

[Need]

I wonder as you look back on 2023, what kind of journey you have had?

- Some of you may have walked through seasons of struggles & storms / sickness or suffering

I wonder as you look ahead to 2024, what kind of journey you will have?

- Some of you may be facing challenges or uncertainty, you may walk through trial or times of testing

[Subject]

Over the next 6 months we are going to journey through the book of Mark – 'Follow'

And no matter where you are on your journey, or where you will find yourself in 2024, every single week – one man = Jesus, wants to walk into your life & say follow me!

[Text / Preview] Today I'd like to walk us through a number of selected texts to show us:

- **Audience – that Mark wrote in to / Author – who Mark was / Argument – His bottom line**

I. Audience = Roman Christians

- **Terrible Time [to be a Christian] ...** 63 – 67/68 AD, Christians in the great city of Rome, capital of Roman Empire
- **Tyrannical Leader [Nero is on the throne!]** ... Evil Dictator ... Ruled from 54-68AD ... Put Paul & Peter in Chains ...
 - "The time would one day come, when men would call their sons Paul or Peter and their dogs Nero, but at this time in this place, the dog is on the throne & the greatest of saints, the Apostle Paul and Peter are in chains for Christ."
- **Targeting Christians [Persecuting / Playing Sport with their Lives / Putting to Death] ...** E.g. Pic of Christians prayer
 - After the fire of 64AD – began to persecute Christians
 - Began to play sport with their lives – stories of Nero dressing Christians in animal skins & throwing before lions
 - Even put them to death – stories of crucifying Christians, lining streets to light night sky as he drank @ palace

"The second persecution [the first being that directed towards the Jews in the early 40's AD], both actual and barbaric, occurred under Nero in Rome. Seeking a scapegoat for the fire in Rome – a fire that the Roman historian Tacitus blames on the order of Nero himself – the emperor fastened the blame on Christians and subjected them to the most gruesome horrors. The backdrop of persecution in Mark was the program of Nero, under who Christians experienced their first official persecution." Edwards

- **Tempted to Quit [Asking – Is following Jesus really worth it?]**

"It is quite likely, however, that in the tumultuous situation in Rome in the late 60's CE, followers of Jesus Christ were sorely shaken and filled with doubt. Was all this suffering they were going through 'normal'? How should they respond? Would it not be better just to give up? What exactly does it mean to follow Jesus? Follow him where? How will all this end? In all probability, Mark was writing to provide answers to such troubling questions." Abe Kuruvilla

- **MTR – Have you ever been tempted to quit?** You may not be facing persecution but you as you stand for Christ you may find yourself increasingly under pressure ... peer pressure to bow to the culture, pressure to go with the flow / conform

II. Author = John Mark

[x10 Ref's to Mark in NT / Col 4:10 = Barnabas's Cousin / Acts 12:12 = Mother has home in J'em, perhaps Upper Room?]

- **Magnificent Opportunity, but Messes Up!**

- Acts 12:25 – Starts journey with a magnificent opportunity
- Acts 13:4-5 – Selected by Paul & Barnabas to join them on their first missionary journey
- Acts 13:13 – Starts to waiver in his faith & deserts the mission [A.D. 50] [cf. 15:38 – ‘deserted’]
- [cf.] Mark 15:38 – Striking personal testimony of sprinting from Christ’s side just to get away

- Angers Paul!

- Acts 15:36-39a – Paul did not want to take Mark on 2nd Miss. Journey because he had not continued with them
- E.g. “He’s useless” – I wonder did Mark feel like a failure
- MTR = perhaps you have messed up you feel like a failure

- Receives a Second Chance [from Barnabas]

- Acts 15:39b-40 – Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus & gives him a 2nd chance
- E.g. Billy Graham Film ‘A Second Chance’ – right around that time, lady in Chicago, comes to Belfast = 2nd chance
- MTR = Perhaps you need to hear this today, God is the God of 2nd chances, can offer you grace & help you follow again

- Knows the Grace of God & Christ’s Continuous Call to Follow Him!

- Sometime later Mark comes to Rome (perhaps AD 57-60)
- Philemon v 23-24 – described as a co-laborer with Paul, whilst he is in his 1st Roman imprisonment (AD 60-62)
- 1 Peter 5:13 – described by Peter as ‘my son Mark’ ... in Babylon (code for Rome)
- 2 Tim 4:11 – called for by Paul, described as being ‘useful for my ministry’ during his 2nd Roman imprisonment (AD 67/68)
- Tradition = Mark wrote the 1st gospel, which inspired Matthew & Luke
- Tradition = Mark evangelized Egypt & became the 1st bishop of Alexandria
- MTR – Jesus loves to walk into a journey when all going wrong & say ‘follow me’ – compassion / ability / authority

III. Argument = Follow Jesus

[Mark writes into the lives of the Roman Christians & says ‘Follow Jesus’]

- Follow the Person of Jesus [1:1-8:26] [In Galilee]
- Follow the Call of Jesus [8:27-10:45] [‘On the Way’]
- Follow the Faithfulness of Jesus [11:1-16:8] [In J’em]
- Jesus = the ultimate servant, following his Father all the way to the cross / Mark’s call = follow Jesus just like that
- E.g. Bob – following Jesus no matter what

FOLLOW

JESUS THROUGH THE BOOK OF MARK







(D) TEMPTED TO QUIT

"It is quite likely, however, that in the tumultuous situation in Rome in the late 60's CE, followers of Jesus Christ were sorely shaken and filled with doubt. Was all this suffering they were going through 'normal'? How should they respond? Would it not be better just to give up? What exactly does it mean to follow Jesus? Follow him where? How will all this end? In all probability, Mark was writing to provide answers to such troubling questions."

ABE KURUVILLA

(A) MAGNIFICENT OPPORTUNITY, BUT MESSES UP!

Acts 12:25 - "When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark"

Acts 13:4-5 - "The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper."

Acts 13:13 - "From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem" Acts 13:13 [cf. 15:37 – "deserted"...]

(B) ANGERS PAUL!

"36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.' 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 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.39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company."

ACTS 15:36-39A

(C) RECEIVES A SECOND CHANCE!

"37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them ... Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord."

ACTS 15:37, 39B-40

SECOND CHANCE



(D) KNOWS THE GRACE OF GOD & CONTINUAL CALL OF CHRIST TO FOLLOW HIM

Philemon v 23-24: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers."

1 Peter 5:13 - "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark."

2 Timothy 4:11 - "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

(3) ARGUMENT = FOLLOW JESUS!

Follow the Person of Jesus: Mark 1:1 - 8:26 [in Galilee]

Follow the Call of Jesus: Mark 8:27 - 10:45 ['On the Way']

Follow the Faithfulness of Jesus: Mark 11:1 - 16:8 [in Jerusalem]