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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Golden Text—*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.—Phil. 4:13*

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

Approach to the Lesson
Just as a Master-artist can, with a few bold strokes, so depict a human countenance that we can recognize it at once, so has the Holy Spirit, in a few brief passages in the New Testament, outlined for us the characteristic features of the life and ministry of John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, the one-time wealthy Cyprote-Levite (Acts 4:36). Mark was the son of Mary, a rich woman of Jerusalem, who had a house large enough to be used as a prayer-meeting place for many of the church in that city (Acts 12:12). He was, as we say, born with "a silver spoon in his mouth." Used to a life of ease and comfort, he found it hard, later on, to accept the trials and difficulties that were inseparably linked with missionary service; so after a short experience in that line he returned to his mother, much to the disgust of Paul, who later refused to give him a second chance to make good, but in after years recognized him as a true servant of Christ. His stoic should be a source of encouragement to others who, because of early failure, might feel unworthy to be trusted again. The God who enabled Mark to succeed, when he launched out with his uncle a second time, stands ready to strengthen every earnest soul, no matter what vacillation may have been evidenced in the past.

The Historical Setting
Of Mark's birth or death we know nothing, although tradition says he became an outstanding missionary to Egypt, where he founded what is known as the Coptic Church, and that he there laid down his life as a martyr for the Gospel's sake. It is generally supposed that he himself is the young man mentioned in his Gospel who was close to Jesus when He was being led away by the soldiers from Gethsemane, and who fled when they sought to arrest him, leaving his cloak in their hands. Just when he wrote the Gospel we cannot be sure, but it was evidently one of the earliest records of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He was Peter's companion at one time and probably wrote in conjunction with him.

Verse by Verse
Acts 12:12—"The house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." Many suppose this to have been the same house in the upper room of which the disciples gathered for prayer, while waiting for the coming of the spirit. Whether this be true or not, it is evident that Mary's home was a large house and that Mary herself was a woman in comfortable circumstances. How little she realized that in years to come her chief claim to remembrance would be the fact that her son was chosen of God to write one of the inspired records of the Saviour's life!

Verse 25—"Barnabas and Saul took with them John, whose surname was Mark." Probably Barnabas and his companion were entertained in his sister's home and so had opportunity to note the desire of Mark to have a part in the work of the Lord. They arranged to have him accompany them on their return journey to Antioch, thus giving him an opportunity to learn something more of what was involved in full-time service for the Lord.

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Thornhill Signs For Incorporation

A petition seeking the incorporation of Thornhill as a village has been signed by more than the required number of citizens, a meeting of ratepayers learned last week.
L. G. Jackson, chairman of the petition committee, said the document would be forwarded to York County Council for consideration during the fall session.
Thornhill, with an area of 695 acres, would have an estimated population of 900 after incorporation.
While some opposition to incorporation was voiced, the majority were in favor of immediate action. J. W. Carter, Department of Municipal Affairs, answered questions on the effect of incorporation and said decision rested with the taxpayers themselves.

Acts 13:1—"They, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost." This is said of Barnabas and Saul. John Mark was not as yet conscious of the divine call, but accompanied them in order to assist in any way in which he was capable.

Verse 5—"They had also John to their minister;" that is, as their attendant. Unquestionably there were many responsibilities he could take upon himself, particularly in regard to temporal things, which would relieve the older men and leave them free to prosecute the great work of evangelization.

Verse 13—"John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." Was it an attack of homesickness that led the young man to leave the work and return to his mother? Or had he become discouraged and felt himself unfitted for such service? We do not know, but from Paul's attitude toward him, later on, it seems clear that he, at least, felt that John Mark had proven himself an untrustworthy servant.

Acts 15:36—"Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached." This was the proposal for a second missionary journey, having in view, primarily, the establishment in the truth of those already saved; but for Paul it proved to be, to a very large extent, another pioneering campaign reaching out to many places hitherto untouched by the Gospel.

Verse 37—"Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark." Desiring to give his nephew another opportunity to prove himself as a servant of Christ, Barnabas proposed that the young man should accompany them again. No doubt, family affection played a considerable part in this decision, but it was also, as later events proved, the leading of the Lord, who is ever gracious and would not reject Mark because of his former unfaithfulness.

Verse 38—"But Paul thought not good to take him with them." Himself prepared to go to any lengths for the Gospel's sake, Paul had no patience with one who did not seem to realize the importance of the great work in which they were engaged. He therefore sternly refused to agree to Barnabas's proposal.

Verses 39, 40—"Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." Unable to agree on this matter, the two eminent servants of Christ parted company, so far as we know, never to labor together again. Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas, who had already become highly esteemed by the brethren, as his companion, and so started off on his second missionary tour. The Antiochian church seemed to side with Paul in the controversy, for they commended him to the grace of God as he left them. We do not read of any commendation for Barnabas. In after years, Paul wrote kindly and approvingly of Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:6), and when in prison at Rome asked Timothy to bring Mark with him, saying, "He is profitable unto me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). See also Colossians 4:10.

The Heart of the Lesson
It is a great mistake to suppose that, because one has failed once, in some particular aspect of Christian life and service, he has proved himself utterly unfit for a position of trust and confidence. Mark's early failure and later successful service have been recorded by the Spirit of God for the comfort and encouragement of all who, either through timidity or lack of determination, have turned aside from the path of wholehearted devotion to Christ. It was Mark the one-time unfaithful servant, whom God took up in grace and inspired to write the Gospel which portrays Christ as the faithful servant of God in this world. Peter had a special affection for Mark and speaks of him as his son (1 Pet. 5:13), which may mean that it was he who led him in early days to become a follower of the Lord Jesus.

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