

Jesus Under Pressure

Words are interesting things. Take the word "pressure" for instance. We put air in our tires and check the pressure. When we were students, we often said, "I work better under pressure." Or, dealing with many obligations, we say, "I am under so much pressure." Pressure can either work for us or against us. In our text today, pressure revealed the power of God.

Of course the Lord Jesus was the perfect God-man, and yet He experienced, on a human level, pressure. Isn't it wonderful to know that when we are pressured, He understands what it is to be pressured? If you're a mother, you know what pressure is, and fathers too, to a lesser extent. We experience pressure at school, pressure at home, pressure at our jobs, even pressure at church. If you are involved in some ministry in the Christian church, you will know all too well what it is to know strain and pressure as you serve the Lord.

Pressure in Jesus' life came from two sources. First of all, the repeated collisions that He had with the then religious establishment, the Scribes and the Pharisees. A second source of pressure to Him was the popularity He enjoyed among the ordinary people. Now of course, in our recent studies in chapter 2, at the beginning of it right through to verse 6 of this chapter we have been dealing with the collisions that the Lord Jesus had with the Scribes and the Pharisees - and of course it all climaxed in verse 6 of chapter 3 where we see the Pharisees going forth, and straight away they take counsel with the Herodians how they might destroy Him. They're going to kill Him for what they see as transgression of the law which, in effect, was just the transgression of their own tradition and interpretation of God's holy word.

But now the portion we're looking at this morning focuses on another pressure that was in Jesus' ministry: popularity - the other end of the scale, if you like, from opposition. There were great demands upon the ministry of the Savior because of His success, effectualness and His popularity among ordinary people. We're going to see this morning how this popularity added pressure, and how the Lord Jesus coped with such pressure. Our text is:

Mark 3:7-12

7 But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea

8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him.

9 So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.

10 For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.

11 And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God."

12 But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.

How Jesus Dealt with Pressure from the People

You can see how Mark traces the emphasis upon the crowd throughout this whole section of his gospel. Back in 2:2 he says, **"Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door."** Here in 3:7, **"And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him."** Again in 3:9, **"He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him."** In 3:20, Mark says, **"Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread."** Then in 3:32, **"And a multitude was sitting around Him ..."** And in 4:1, **"And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea, ..."** And then, in 4:36, Mark says, **"Now when they had left the multitude,"** they went across to the other side of the lake. In 5:21, **"Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea."** Again in 5:24: **"So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him."** So this is the period when Jesus is pressed by the great masses of people, the period of his greatest popularity.

I think we have difficulty grasping the size of this crowd. This was not just a few people, or a few thousand. There were literally tens of thousands of people, undoubtedly, in this crowd. They came from all over this country, from North, South, East and West -- from Galilee, from Judea, which began fifty miles to the south, from Jerusalem, the capital of Judea some seventy miles south of the Sea of Galilee, and beyond that from the land of Idumea, or Edom, way down in the southeastern desert, and from the region east of the Jordan River stretching out into the Arabian Desert, and from the west clear to the Mediterranean coast and up the coast to Tyre and Sidon, the area now in the country of Lebanon -- from throughout this entire area they came. They flocked out from all the cities to hear this amazing prophet who had risen in Galilee and was saying such startling things.

For many, this has been the symbol of Jesus' success, as it would be for many in evaluating a person today. Anybody who can get a great crowd following him is regarded as a success. We have all kinds of people who do that. We call them "stars" -- there are star actors, star athletes, star singers, star politicians, even star preachers -- various people who have attained what in our day is a mark of success.

But as you read this account through, you see that Mark's intention is to underscore the weakness of popularity, the empty, hollow worthlessness of being popular, and how much damage and danger popularity produced in our Lord's ministry.

It seems that all the people wanted was healing. Jesus wanted to preach. This is one of the pressures that popularity brings. It invariably distorts a message and emphasizes something secondary, making it paramount in the eyes of the people, so that they miss the point. Jesus healed the body to demonstrate what He could do with the spirit. But the crowd misunderstood that, and they pressed around Him so that He might touch those who were sick, and heal them -- so much so that our Lord had to resort to a stratagem to avoid being crushed, literally, by this crowd. That is how large it was.

Jesus does some practical things to deal with the pressure from people.

1. Step aside for a while.

We are told back in verse 6 that there was already a plot to destroy Jesus, and verse 7 says, "**But Jesus withdrew...**" He did not withdraw because of fear, but because of wisdom. Jesus had much more to teach and to do before He fulfilled His ultimate mission of dying for sins and being raised from the dead.

Second, to deal with pressure:

2. Stay with the direction God has given you.

It was a good thing that people wanted to be near Jesus, that they came from all these different places, and that they had heard all the things He was doing. Jesus was not at all displeased by that fact, and He was compassionate with them, and v10 says, "**He healed many.**" Matthew 12:15 also reports this, and there the Bible says, "**He healed them all.**" But Jesus knew He could not allow these people to crowd in on Him and crush Him, nor could He allow them to so captivate His time that He wouldn't be able to go anywhere else, so He told His disciples to keep a small boat ready for Him. Jesus never lost sight of His primary purpose, and that was to do the will of the Father. That's our mission, also, and we must not let anything distract us from it, not even good things.

You see, even though Jesus was attracting great crowds, He didn't come to be popular, because it would hamper His true purpose. He didn't come to BE served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He came to preach the good news (1:38) and proclaim the Kingdom of God (1:15). He came to call sinners to repentance (2:17).

The third thing Jesus did to deal with the pressure was,

3. Silence the negative voices.

Behind these diseases, the Scriptures tell us, were oftentimes the presence and the power of unclean spirits. Have you noticed how many times in Scripture these demons are called "unclean"? This is one of the ways you can recognize the presence evil spirits at work. It is unclean -- either morally or physically.

Mark tells us that when they saw Jesus they always identified him. They cried out, "You are the Son of God." And Jesus invariably silenced them and cast them out. Yet it was true. He was the Son of God. But Jesus would not permit that witness to come from these demons. What was His reason for that?

Jesus has complete authority over evil spirits. He told them not to make Him known, and I have no doubt, they had to shut up. It could be that these demons intended that men would believe Jesus was the son of their God, Satan himself. When evil spirits said, "He is the Son of God," people would associate Jesus with evil and with the devil himself. Therefore it is no accident that in just two more paragraphs you read of a delegation coming from Jerusalem who accuse Jesus of being possessed by a devil. That is why Jesus totally rejected this witness from the underworld that he was the Son of God.

And you too are going to hear negative, mocking voices sometimes. Sometimes even members of your own family will mock your faith or make fun of you for following Jesus. Many times today the media loves to poke fun at Christians and make them the butt of their jokes. All of these negative, mocking voices can distract us from following Jesus. I am not saying that all these negative voices are demonic, but they do add pressure to our lives, just as they did to Jesus.

What I want you to catch a glimpse of is the added pressure of not only having all these sick folk pressing in and rushing upon Him, jostling Him, pressuring Him to heal, but all of these supernaturally demon-possessed folk doing the same. Kent Hughes in his commentary captures the scene very well, he says: 'Putting it all together, the ill, the feverish, the crippled were pushing and grabbing at Jesus and falling over Him. The demonised were malevolently seizing Him up with howling His name in futuristic combat. The jaundiced Pharisees were watching His every move, waiting for their chance'. In other words, you can't underestimate the human strain that would have been upon the Lord Jesus in such a situation. It was so great that the Lord ordered for the disciples to get a boat so that He could go out from shore a little and the crowd would not press upon Him in such a manner.

Finally to deal with the pressure, we must also do what Jesus did:

4. Spend time alone with God and God's people.

Verse 13 says, "**And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.**" The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus "**went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.**"

The way the Lord Jesus coped with this pressure was to take it to God in prayer, to get alone with God, a quiet time in a quiet place up this mountain. Now I have to say to you that often, when I feel myself pressured in life in general or specifically in ministry, the tendency is to sidestep prayer and to think that, 'Well, I have more important things and more pressing things to do just at the minute, I can pray later, or tomorrow, or again at my convenience'. We see prayer as an extra pressure, an extra strain, when the fact of the matter is - from the example of the Lord - we should be viewing prayer as a pressure release, a way of getting rid of the strain and pressure of our lives.

In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said: '**Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**', and we often apply that to the unbelievers, but it is for us perhaps more even than they. Every moment of every day of our lives we are to keep coming to the Lord to unburden ourselves and to receive grace and mercy to help us in time of need.

'O, what peace we often forfeit!

O, what needless pain we bear!

All because we do not carry

Every thing to God in prayer'.

It's always right to follow the example of Jesus, and my prayer is that we will determine to do so. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "**Casting all your care on Him, because He cares for you.**" There's your boat that's kept ready for you, so that the pressures of this world will not crush you!