

THE PRIORITY OF THE SERVANT

Mark 1:35-39

Someone once asked Tom Landry why he had been so successful as a football coach. He said, "In 1958, I did something everyone who has been successful must do, I determined my priorities for my life — God, family, and then football."

As we have followed Mark's narrative in this chapter, we saw the Lord call His first disciples, v. 16-20. We have also watched Him at work preaching in the synagogue, v. 21-22; casting out evil spirits, v. 23-28; and healing many that were sick, v. 29-34. We have been watching Jesus go about His Father's business.

As we have followed Jesus through these events, we have seen the preaching and the power of the Servant. Today, we are going to examine The Priority Of The Servant.

These verses reveal the priorities that moved the heart of the Savior. This brief glimpse into one early morning quiet time reveals what was important to the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to look at these motivating factors because what was important to Jesus should be what is important to us.

Let's join Jesus in His quiet time and learn what stirred His soul. As we see His passions revealed, let's ask the Lord to create within our own hearts a love for the same things.

35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

36 And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him.

37 When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons

I. JESUS MADE A PRIORITY OF PRAYER (Mark 1:35)

Remember what the previous day was like for Jesus? It was the Sabbath day. And that day had demand so much from Jesus. After preaching in the synagogue, Jesus was confronted by a demon possessed man. Jesus cast out that evil spirit. He leaves the synagogue to go to Peter's house, presumably for lunch. When He arrives, Jesus finds Peter's mother-in-law sick with a fever. Jesus heals her. When sundown comes and the Sabbath is over, all the people in Capernaum bring their sick and those possessed with demons for Jesus to heal them. He does this, no doubt meeting people and helping them way into the night. It had been a wonderfully tiring day when God did amazing things.

But now watch carefully what Jesus does. A late night does not prevent Jesus from an early morning meeting with His Father. We are told that Jesus rose up "**a long while before daylight.**" Jesus headed out the door, without anyone knowing it. It wasn't that He was unhappy with the accommodations at Peter's house and wanted to check into the Marriott Capernaum or something—no, He knew of

something even more important than sleep, and that was communing with His Father. Jesus removed Himself from other distractions and relationships so that He could concentrate on His relationship with His Father.

This is not the only time we will find the Lord Jesus involved in a time of prayer and communion with the Father. In fact, His ministry is marked by times of protracted prayer. The Gospels picture Jesus praying no less than 25 times. Mark records Jesus praying at three different occasions: here, in chapter 6 after feeding 5,000 people, and before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the first two instances, huge success in public ministry had just been accomplished. Both here and in chapter 6 Jesus prays and then sends Himself and His disciples in a different direction, removing them from the immediate crowd and popularity.

It may have been a constant temptation to Jesus to take a short-cut and fashion a popular movement. But Jesus was not about popularity or doing what others demanded of Him. He was about one thing—fulfilling the Father's mission of dying on the cross for our sins.

On Wednesday nights we have been studying Isaiah's prophecies concerning the Messiah. This coming week we will look at the third of Isaiah's servant songs in Isaiah 50. Listen to what this prophet said about Jesus Christ 700 years before He came:

“The Lord God has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned.”

Communion with the Father was one of the marks of the Messiah. .

The fact that Jesus prayed raises some interesting questions.

What did Jesus pray about? – Jesus went out to pray that morning after a day of powerful ministry. I am sure that He took time to thank the Father for His blessings, His presence and His power. I am sure that He prayed for the people who had been healed. He must have prayed that they would see beyond the miracles and be saved. He must have prayed for His disciples, that they would be men of God. He must have prayed for Himself. He desired the Father's blessings and power. Surely, Jesus went out that morning to seek the Father's will for the direction of His ministry. There must have been many items on His prayer list that morning.

Why did Jesus even need to pray? – He was God in the flesh, after all. We need to remember that Jesus was God in human flesh, but He did not come to this world to live as God, He came to live as a Spirit-filled man. Jesus prayed because He lived His life in total dependence on the Father. Jesus prayed because He wanted a totally unhindered fellowship with the Father. Jesus wanted the Holy Spirit to be able to flow through His life in absolute freedom and power. Thus, Jesus made every effort to stay in close, constant communion with His Father.

Why did Jesus seek a place of solitude? – He wanted His prayer time to be uninterrupted and unhindered. Jesus knew that His prayer time was precious and private and He wanted nothing to be able to come between Him and time spent in His Father's presence.

Our Lord's early morning prayer meeting has some valuable lessons to teach us, if we will hear them today. So the first lesson from this section is simple yet vital: get up, get out, and get praying for strategic direction in your life from your Father.

If Jesus, Who is God in human flesh, felt the need for prayer in His life, how much more do we need to make prayer a priority in our own lives? Prayer is essential for a holy, empowered spiritual life. A preacher by the name of E. Stanley Jones says that prayer is "a time of exposure to God." Sadly, most Christians in our day are underexposed! In fact, I know of no one who is overexposed! If we want a life that can be used of God for His glory, then we must pray. If we want the power of God on our lives, then we must pray. If we want to live holy lives, then we must pray. Prayer is the absolute nonnegotiable requirement for a life of power in the things of God.

The Bible has a lot to say about prayer.

... The Bible commands us to pray – 1 Thes. 5:17; Luke 18:1; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2.

... It gives us great examples of prayer – Abraham, Moses, Hannah, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Jonah, Paul and of course, Jesus.

... Jesus gives us instructions how to pray – Luke 11:1-4.

... He even gives us instructions as to how not to pray – Matt. 6:5-8.

... And He gives us great promises of answered prayer – Matt. 7:7-11; John 15:7.

Prayer is not about getting our will done in Heaven, but about getting God's will on earth. When Jesus went out to pray, He probably prayed about the direction of His ministry. Surely He was asking the Father what He should do and where He should go next.

Prayer must become a priority in our lives, if we want walk with Jesus! Do you want the power of God on your life? Do you want close fellowship with the Lord? Do you desire to be used to the fullest of your potential? If so, then you must make prayer a priority!

How?

Set a TIME: Set aside a set time to pray and stick to it! It's worth noting that the setting all three accounts in Mark's gospel of Jesus pray - all of them, without exception, were during the night or early morning while it was still dark. Jesus found a time to be alone with His Father. We also need to have a time of prayer just like the Lord Jesus; a time when we can get alone for unhurried prayer and for preparation for service. The time was very early in the morning, Mark says, and that means that it cost the Lord Jesus some sleep in order to pray in this way.

Prayer is not a matter of personal convenience. Prayer is not something that we just fit in in the spare time that we can get after we do everything else that seems to be, practically at least, more important - but prayer entails self-sacrifice. It means that we're going to have to discipline our lives during the day to make time to pray.

Find a PLACE: Jesus went to a solitary place, a desert place. It's important to get alone with God. It's not enough to meet together as a church, though that is necessary. It's not even enough to meet with your family, you need to have time alone with God - and it helps to have a solitary place. That's why the Lord Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that we ought to go into a closet, there pray to our Heavenly Father in secret.

Find you a place where there are no distractions. Get away from the phone, the TV, the computer and any other distractions and pour your heart out to the Lord. Prayer was a habit in our Lord's life and it must become a habit in our lives, if we would have His power.

(III. Ray Steadman shares the following story: "On January 21, 1930, King George V of England was about to address the opening session of an international arms control conference in London. It was an event of intense interest around the world. The First World War had ended less than a decade and a half earlier, and the people of the world were anxious to prevent another world war. King George's speech was about to be carried around the globe by a relatively new technology called radio, but America almost didn't get to hear it.

Just minutes before the king of England stepped up to the microphones; a technician in the control room of the Columbia Broadcasting System tripped over a cable and severed the connection. The CBS control chief, a man named Harold Vidian, didn't even stop to think about what he was doing. He reached out, grasped the ends of the severed cable with his bare hands, and restored the circuit with his body.

Instantly Vidian was jolted by several hundred volts of electricity. He managed to hang on as King George's message was broadcast across the North American continent. Vidian survived--and the king's voice was heard.

That is an electrifying image of what our lives are to be like. We are the channels, the conductors of God's power. When we allow His power to course through us, then the voice of the King will be heard throughout the world."

I want that power! But, if I would have the power, then I must pray, but I must pray often, from a clean heart with pure motives. When we learn to pray like Jesus, God will bless our lives as He did His!

... Nothing should ever be allowed to crowd out our private time with God. Neither time, tiredness, tardiness, treasure nor tasks are more important than our time with Him!

There is a rhyme I learned a few years ago that reminds me of this priority:

*I woke up early one morning and rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray.*

*Problems just tumbled around me and heavier came each task;
I wondered "Why doesn't God help me?" He answered, "You didn't ask."*

*I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me. He said, "But you didn't seek."*

*I tried to come into God's presence; I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly reminded, "My child, you didn't knock."*

*I woke up early this morning, and paused before entering the day;
I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.*

II. JESUS MADE A PRIORITY OF PREACHING (Mark 1:36-38)

As Jesus is praying, He is interrupted by Peter, Andrew, James and John. They come to tell Him that the people of Capernaum are looking for Him. Just the night before, the people of the city had crowded around the door looking for help and for healing. Now, at the dawn of a new day, they have returned.

This excites the disciples! They are sure that Jesus is on the verge of superstardom! They are certain that Jesus will be declaring Himself to be the Messiah and that He will begin gathering an army to deliver the nation of Israel from the domination of Rome.

They come to Jesus to encourage Him to capitalize on His enormous popularity. I'm sure they want Him to come back to town and do some more miracles so that the people will cling to Him even more.

Jesus, however, refuses to allow the disciples or the people of Capernaum to dictate the direction of His ministry. He has been in communion with His Father and He knows what the Father wants Him to do.

Jesus reminds the disciples, v. 39, that the message is more important than the miracles. Jesus tells them that He is going to the towns where He has not yet preached so that He can share the Gospel with them too.

B. As they were in that day, miracles are still big business. It seems that any ministry that focuses on the fabulous will gather a huge following, while ministries that major on the message of the Bible will not do as well.

Why is that? People love their miracles! They love to hear about the sick being healed, the dead being raised and the stories of needs being met in miraculous ways. They love the miracles, but they don't seem to have time to hear the message.

Most people are shallow, self-centered and focused on the sensational. Modern people are really not that much different from the ancient people of Jesus' day.

C. There can be no doubt that Jesus had a ministry marked by the miraculous. He healed every known sickness; He raised the dead; He fed multitudes; walked on water; He even rose from the dead after He was buried. He can still heal today, if He chooses to. I have seen Him do that time and time again.

While Jesus can, did and does heal physical infirmities, He specializes in healing the afflictions of the soul. While we praise the Lord for every healing He has performed, healing of the body is temporary at best. But, when He heals a soul, it is for eternity!

The diseases of the soul can kill just as surely as diseases of the flesh. Soul sicknesses like hatred, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, gossip, discouragement, depression, lust, pride, guilt, jealousy, fear, etc, can steal your joy, silence your

witness and cripple your heart. Jesus can touch you in whatever ails your soul and He can give you absolute healing today! And it is the message of Jesus that brings that healing.

The greatest need of the soul is to be cured of the sickness of sin. That is why Jesus placed so much emphasis on preaching the Gospel. He came to preach because He wanted the people to know that there was hope for them, if they would come to Him and receive the Gospel.

The message of the Gospel is very simple. Here it is: **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”**, John 3:16. God gave His Son. His Son died on the cross. His Son rose from the dead. Now, God offers salvation to “whosoever will”. If you need healing for the sickness of sin, Jesus is the antidote. Come to Him and be saved.

If you have allowed sin into your life as a believer and you know you are out of the Lord’s will today, you need to know that there is hope for you too! He will heal the affliction of your soul if you will come to Him in confession and repentance, 1 John 1:9.

Conc: Jesus was consumed with a passion to do the will of His Father. He was consumed with a passion to deliver people from the things that had them bound. Jesus was consumed with a passion for the people He met in His life and for people He never met physically. Jesus was consumed with a passion for you!

Has it ever dawned on you that Jesus Christ came to this world, lived as He did, and died as He did because He was consumed with a passion for you? Do you understand that Jesus went to the cross because He loved you? Do you understand that the Gospel message is a message for you?

Here is God’s invitation to you:

If you have never been saved, I invite you to come to Jesus. He loves you and He will save you and deliver you from whatever it is that binds you today.

If you are saved, but you are not where you need to be with the Lord, you need to come home. He will forgive you and He will restore you today.

If your prayer life needs work, there is no better place to begin than with a time of prayer, asking God to help you today.

If you have any need in your life at all, Jesus has a passion for you. He cares, 1 Pet. 5:7, Heb. 4:15, and He can help you, if you will bring your needs to Him.