Series: What We Need Now
Title: Faithful and Fervent Prayer
Text: Mark 1:35-38
Date: August 9, 2020

Verse 35

In verse 35, Mark gives us a peek into Jesus' practice of private worship. He describes our Lord's commitment to personal prayer, saying, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying" (Mark 1:35). Notice that Jesus awoke "very early" to pray. He even got up "while it was still dark." The day before was a very exhausting day for Jesus. See verses 21-34. He had preached, healed people, and cast out many demons. Any faithful preacher knows how tiring a full day of spiritual work can be. Jesus knew better than anyone. He was undoubtedly worn out, but He still prioritized prayer. The original language of the text indicates that He got up at some point between 3am and 6am.[1] Our Lord knew what faithful saints of all generations have known — discipline is a prerequisite for personal prayer. If one is going to be faithful to pray, one must make time to pray. Both the Psalmist (Psalm 55:17) and Daniel (Daniel 6:10) exhibited such discipline. They scheduled time for prayer into their lives.

May we learn a lesson from His habit of life. We must make prayer a priority. Jesus is an example of this. We should make time for prayer. Many falter and fail in prayer for one simple reason — they don't make room for it in their personal schedule. I've learned that if I don't block out dedicated times for prayer, I probably won't pray. Indeed, forethought is half the battle. Strong saints realize that one must "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33), making personal worship a priority, if one wants to excel in this area. Indeed, the call to "train yourself in godliness" can applied to this matter (1 Timothy 4:7). A degree of spiritual sweat and effort is needed if we want to be prayer warriors.

It is important to note that our text does not mandate prayer during a set time. The morning is not holier than the evening time. Neither Jesus nor Mark espoused a ritualistic approach to morning devotions. The words in our text should not be seen as prescriptive. They are merely descriptive. Mark simply described how Jesus made time for prayer. The exact hour of Jesus' intercession isn't what's important. The fact that He carved out time for prayer is. Do you make time for prayer? Follow our Lord's example. Set apart a portion of your day for prayer. Maybe the morning time, or perhaps the evening is better. It could be that several different chunks of time throughout the day are more beneficial. Don't get hung up on what someone else does. Do what works for you. Make time for prayer!

We can also see some helpful truth in Mark's mention of how Jesus "went out, and made his way to a deserted place." The Greek language translated "deserted place" doesn't refer to a wilderness area or a desert. No such areas existed around Capernaum. The language was meant to portray an isolated and solitary location.[2]

Our Lord knew He needed to escape the hustle and bustle of Capernaum so that He could have unhindered time with the Heavenly Father. Jesus' selection of such a locale for prayer is instructive for us. Private, secluded times of prayer are necessary. Sure, we can pray anywhere and at anytime (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We can talk to God in the midst of an interaction with someone else (Nehemiah 2:4). However, there is a need for praying in isolation, for setting apart specially reserved times for private prayer. Did not Jesus teach us to find a "secret" place for

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[1] Robertson, 263.

[2] Lane, 81.

prayer? He said "when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray" (Matthew 6:6). Though we can pray instantly and intermittently throughout the day, we need times of isolated prayer as well. Such isolation and secrecy provides a break from the day. It gives us an opportunity to fully focus on the Lord without distractions. Know this — you need a specially reserved location in which you can be free from distractions and the hurriedness of life. Do you have such a sanctuary for prayer?

Verse 35 ends with what may seem to be an insignificant statement. It says "and there he was praying." Many believe that on this occasion our Lord was likely praying for blessings on the previous day's ministry, as well as strength for the ministry that awaited Him on the current day.[3] Wouldn't you like to have been there to hear Him pray? Can you imagine hearing God's Son pouring out supplication before the Heavenly Father? Some of His prayers are transcribed in Scripture for our benefit. Read His "High Priestly Prayer" in John 17:21-26, or His prayer in the garden, shortly before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-46). His prayer life was undoubtedly something to behold. It was so powerful and moving that it prompted His disciples to ask "Lord teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Some may think it strange that Jesus needed prayer. Wasn't He God? Why would God need to talk to Himself? Well, such an incident really isn't that strange when one considers the constitution of our Lord. God exists in three persons — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As early as Genesis 1:26, we see dialogue amongst the persons of the Trinity. Scripture affirms that a sort of interrelatedness exists between the three entities of the Godhead. When Jesus prayed to the Father, He simply engaged in activity that has gone on since eternity past. In addition, He provided a needful example for humanity.

Just as the Lord enjoys a trinity of relationships, humankind is made to do something similar. Humanity has been made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and the concept of "the image of God" revolves around our relational capacity. Just as fellowship is enjoyed between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, mankind is to enjoy fellowship between himself, God, and others (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus' faithfulness to pray reminds us of our need to have a similar faithfulness. We are made for a relationship with God; thus, we should regularly talk to Him. Our Lord provides us a model of devotion to such relational communication. J.C. Ryle has said, "We ought to see in all this the immense importance of private devotion. If he who was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,' thus prayed continually, how much more ought we who are compassed with infirmity? If he found it needful to offer up supplications with strong crying and tears, how much more needful is it for us, who in many things offend daily?"[4]

Verse 36

When the disciples awoke, they couldn't find Jesus. Perplexed, they began to look for Him. Mark recorded, "Simon and his companions search for him" (Mark 1:36). The word translated "search" is a word that often meant "to hunt down." The disciples went on a manhunt. They were disturbed and concerned about Jesus' disappearance. Based on all that had happened in 1:21-24, excitement about His ministry was growing. The Twelve didn't want the the fanfare to lull. They wanted to seize the moment. Messianic anticipations were escalating and the disciples realized that they might have the opportunity to be a part of something big. Prayer wasn't a priority.

Verse 37

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[3] Ferguson, 19.

[4] Ryle, 14.

When the disciples finally found Jesus, they exclaimed, "Everyone is looking for you" (Mark 1:37). As the new day had started, crowds had already started to flock to find Jesus. A scene similar to the one in verse 33 was unfolding. Masses of humanity were thronging to see Jesus. Many probably wanted to see another miracle. Perhaps some were bringing sick and lame folk, as they had in verse 32, for healing.

Peter and the disciples saw the demands of the people as being more urgent than private worship. For them, it was senseless to spend time alone in prayer while there was an opportunity for public recognition. The original language of the disciple's statement — "everyone is looking for you" — carries a tone of reproach and correction.[5] It depicts "an attempt to determine and control rather than to submit and follow."[6] Emphasis is placed on the fact that the disciples had not grasped the purpose of Jesus' ministry. The Messiah had not come to launch a sideshow spectacle. He wasn't interested in large crowds and popular acclaim. He had come to preach, heal, serve, and provide atonement for sin (Mark 10:45).

The disciples scolded Jesus for wasting time on prayer. He could have been healing more people! He could have been building His brand and increasing His number of followers! The disciples didn't realize that the way of the Master is often counterculture and counterintuitive. Prayer takes priority over personal prestige and power. Kingdom-minded people don't let the hurry and hustle of life on planet Earth to choke out the life of God. They value intimacy with God over the rat race. The godless stay stuck in the hurry of incessant activities, but true worshippers make private worship a priority.

Verse 38

The reason for Jesus' devotion to prayer is seen in verse 38. In response to the frantic rebuke from His disciples, the Lord said, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come" (Mark 1:38). Jesus seemed unfazed by the disciples hysteria. He was focused on His mission. The original language of the text involves verbiage that depicts purpose. Jesus' life purpose was to preach and provide salvation. See Luke 4:18 and 19:10. Our Lord was laser focused on His mission in life. He knew He had come to Earth for a reason, and He was well aware that prayer was a prerequisite for Him to fulfill His purpose.

Aware of the purpose, Jesus summoned His disciples to go with Him into "the neighboring villages." The designation referred to the smaller towns surrounding Capernaum that only had village status. History attests to the fact that there was a multitude of such towns around the area. Josephus referenced the plethora of such villages in Galilee in his writings. Jesus' burden to go to such places was rooted in His role as Messiah. The Hebrew Scriptures had foretold, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Jesus didn't want to stay in just one place and build a following. He knew He had been commissioned to preach the gospel (Mark 1:15). It was His purpose in life to "seek" out the lost (Luke 19:10). His commitment to go to all types of places is a reminder that the Great Commission is inclusive. Acts 1:8 instructs believers to witness in all the world. The work of proclaiming the gospel isn't to be reserved to one geographical location.

Notice from our text that Jesus' prayers were intimately tied to His preaching. He prayed in verse 35, because He knew He would go out to preach in verse 28. Our Lord didn't dare preach without praying. This should be instructive for modern believers. We should never attempt the work of God without giving place for prayers and supplications. When we work, we get what we can do. When we pray and work, we get what God can do.

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[5] Lane, 82.

[6] Edwards, 67.