“THAT IS WHY I HAVE COME”

Mark 1:21–39

Key Verse: 1:38

“Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’”

We’ve seen how Jesus is the good news and how his ministry could begin. Jesus’ ministry could begin through an unselfish man like John the Baptist who prepared the way. Before starting to do ministry Jesus went to be baptized by John, received the Holy Spirit and God’s approval, and was tempted for forty days in the wilderness. These were necessary spiritual preparations. By resisting the devil’s temptations Jesus prepared to enter the world where the devil is ruling and set people free (3:27). His message was: “The kingdom of heaven has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Even today, when we repent and believe in Jesus, we get out of all kinds of dark thoughts and experience righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Ro14:17). And we no longer live as if this world were everything; the living hope of God’s kingdom begins to grow within us (1Pe1:3,4). Finally, we saw how, right from the start, Jesus called disciples. He gave them a new hope to do something meaningful with their lives, and they responded immediately, with faith.

Now today’s passage is an unusual glimpse into one day in the life of Jesus. How people spend their time during one day is revealing. Many people’s lives revolve around making money or other self-centered pursuits. Many watch their favorite shows or play video games. Many spend a lot of precious time and energy gossiping. But Jesus used 24 hours in such an inspiring way! As we think about this passage we want to learn more about the heart and mind of Jesus that made him different. And we want to learn how we can become more like him.

Look at verse 21. Here, the “they” is Jesus and his first four disciples. Capernaum was a significant settlement on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Gospels tell us that Capernaum had a customs post, a detachment of the Roman army, and even a royal official (2:14; Mt8:5–13; Jn4:46). Some estimate Capernaum’s population at that time at about 10,000. The Capernaum synagogue was a rather large place. On the Sabbath people would gather to pray and listen to a reading first from the Old Testament Law, and then from the Prophets. Then someone would get up to speak, explaining the texts. In most towns, synagogue rulers would invite a special guest to come and speak (Ac13:15), so Jesus must have been invited this time. The word “teach” in some form is repeated here three times (21,22,27). It tells us that teaching was at the heart of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus was always teaching the Bible (Mt4:23; Mk10:1). He focused on it because believed that the word of God, properly taught, would help any person encounter the true, living God and enter his kingdom (cf. 1Ti4:13; 2Ti3:15,16; 4:2). Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Look at verse 22. Throughout this Gospel Mark loves to use the word “amazed” (27; 2:12; 5:20; 6:2,6,51; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18; 12:17; 15:5), mostly to describe how people responded to Jesus’ teaching. In Greek the word literally means to be slapped or shocked. To most people, teaching is boring, and our attention span is short. But Jesus’ teaching was different. Verse 22 says Jesus had authority, unlike the teachers of the law. What does it mean that his teaching had authority? And why was it different from the teachers of the law? When those people taught, they would quote various other teachers and offer elaborate technical explanations. But when Jesus taught, he just spoke what he himself understood and believed. Of course, this is Jesus, and he’s the unique Son of God, so we would expect him to have an understanding and authority unlike ordinary humans. But there’s more to it than that.

Ordinarily, to be an authority on a subject, we need at least a master’s degree and to have done lots of research. But for Christians, spiritual authority doesn’t come from knowledge, but from faith. It comes from believing in God and in his word. It also comes from personal obedience to God. Jesus’ ministry wasn’t his own idea or ambition; it was his personal obedience to God the Father. He taught with authority because he was living in personal obedience to God. More generally, spiritual authority comes not just from knowing but from *doing*, from *practicing* what we preach. The teachers of the law loved to teach, but they did it to impress others, to gain honor for themselves, and they weren’t actually doing what they were strictly teaching others (Mt23:1–7). Jesus taught with a totally different spirit. As we saw in verse 10, Jesus had been empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus wanted all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1Ti2:3,4). Jesus’ teaching came from his compassion (6:34). It wasn’t dry knowledge; it touched people’s real questions, struggles and problems.

Jesus’ teaching was so deep that something dramatic happened. Look at verses 23,24. To us, “spirits” can sound like old superstition. Today people consider all those who are disturbed as mentally ill with a chemical imbalance. But actually, there’s a spiritual world. We can’t see it with our eyes, but it’s nonetheless very real. The verse says that the man had an “impure” spirit. It tells us what influence the spirit had in his life. It made his mind and heart impure. This makes it a lot more relatable to us. Quite a few people today have impure spirits; if we’re spiritually alert, we can sense it. Impure spirits make us feel gross and hate ourselves. This impure spirit also made the man hostile. So he screamed, “What do you want with us?” He was smart. He knew that Jesus had come from Nazareth. He also knew that Jesus had come to destroy impure spirits. He knew that Jesus was the Holy One of God. He knew more than everybody there, and he was disrupting Jesus’ ministry.

How did Jesus handle him? Look at verses 25,26. This is the first record that Jesus actually drove out an impure spirit. How did he do it? There was no magical incantation, no drumming, moaning, potions or elaborate rituals; Jesus did it simply, with one stern command, “Come out of him!” Unlike human beings, Jesus’ authority extends over the invisible, spiritual world. He used his authority not to crush the man, but to cast the impure spirit out of him and set him free. Jesus who resisted all the devil’s temptations had a keen spiritual awareness. He could differentiate between people and the impure spirits in them. And he had zero tolerance for impure spirits. In our lives and ministry it may not be this dramatic, with violent shaking and shrieking. But as we listen to Jesus’ teaching, the impure spirits lurking within us also are driven out. If we want to come under God’s gracious reign, we need not to avoid it, but really listen to Jesus’ teaching, to make our spirits whole.

Look at verses 27,28. Jesus’ new teaching sparked a debate among the people. The powerful impact of his teaching was undeniable. For those suffering from impure spirits, or had loved ones who were, it was really good news. It was evidence that, at long last, the kingdom of God really *had* come near.

The next part of Jesus’ day wasn’t public but private. Verses 29–34 give us a unique glimpse into this private sphere of his life. People in their public lives can seem so nice, but be angry and cruel in their private lives. How was Jesus? Look at verse 29. After being in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were no doubt hungry. They went to the home of Simon and Andrew, hoping for a meal. But there was a problem: Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever (30). It may’ve been a random illness. But it’s also possible that this woman had made herself sick with worries about her daughter after her son-in-law Simon had just left his fishing job to follow Jesus. She could have been saying, “How could he be so irresponsible? Where’s the money going to come from now?” The more she thought about it, the sicker she became. It’s just a guess. In any case, Jesus had become an important public figure, with many things to do, and this woman didn’t seem so important. He could have just taken his disciples to another house for Sabbath dinner. But what did Jesus do? Look at verse 31. He didn’t go and rebuke her for a lack of faith. He took time out for her, as if she were the most important person, and actually cared about her condition. When he treated her with personal love and respect, as well as with his healing touch, her heart was melted and she quickly recovered. She happily began to serve Jesus and his disciples. Men have a lot to learn from Jesus here.

Then what happened? Look at verses 32,33. People must have heard about the man in the synagogue that Jesus had cured that morning. But they waited until after sunset because it was the Sabbath. Suddenly, the whole town gathered at the door. Jesus could’ve had his disciples tell them, “We’re tired and it’s time for bed; come back tomorrow.” But what did Jesus do? Look at verse 34. Jesus opened the home to these people. He was willing to welcome these people and be present with them. And he healed these desperate people one by one. They had various diseases, but Jesus could heal every one of them. He also drove out many demons. It must have gone on until late into the night. Jesus’ healing ministry characterized the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom is always open to anyone, with any problem, at any time. And those who repent and believe the good news experience real healing; damaged lives are restored.

After such a long day Jesus must have been exhausted. But what did he do? Read verse 35. This one verse tells us a very important aspect of Jesus’ life. No crowds, no disciples, just him and the Father, alone in prayer. Based on all the demands around him, it seems like Jesus actually didn’t have the time or physical energy to do this. But he *made* time. Jesus was the Son of God. But in his humanity he made personal prayer his first priority in daily life. Through prayer he depended on God the Father. He must have talked to the Father about everything, all his concerns, and all the people’s needs, including his disciples’. But he also listened to the Father. Personal prayer was a precious time to have fellowship with his Father God. People respond to a demanding life in many ways. Some watch T.V. Some drink. Some just sleep. But Jesus prayed. It was the core of his life, and the secret of his enduring inspiration and strength.

Look at verses 36,37. The people had already come this early, looking for Jesus. The disciples had woken up to a whole new world. Their hometown people really liked Jesus. They were excited by all the sudden popularity. But they seem a little irritated that Jesus had sequestered himself in this solitary place. Read verse 38. The disciples must have been shocked: “You mean we’re *leaving*? We just got *started*!” Clearly, through his time of personal prayer Jesus found a new direction. Sometimes, when we really pray, God gives us a new conviction about what we should be doing, what we should be focusing on. Through prayer he had renewed his life’s purpose; so he said, “That is why I have come.” And why had Jesus come? He said it was to “preach there also.” He had come to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, not to some people in one town, but to the whole world. He could have enjoyed a comfortable life with people’s admiration in Capernaum. Instead, he chose to carry out God’s greater will and purpose for his life. It was much harder, but it was God’s will. Sometimes in life we don’t know what we’re doing. Sometimes it can seem like we’re struggling just to survive. Why am I here? We can find our life’s true purpose as we follow Jesus. As we follow him, we come to share in the same purpose God had for him. The details will look different for each person, but the basic purpose is the same: to bring people in our world to the kingdom of God, to know the gracious, living God and to have real hope in him. May God help us to live for the greater purpose he has for us.