

Finding God In Desolate Places

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Preacher: Pastor Cal Morrison

[0 : 0 0] it's a strange thing but there really is hope in jesus against every impossibility every form of evil and darkness and every uncertainty there is real living hope in jesus well we are continuing our study in mark's gospel and mark chapter one if you happen to have a bible that is where we're going to be at now i'm going to say a few things before we read the passage um and it's going to be up on the screen when i read it anyway but first let me encourage you to use your imagination and i think probably most of you will uh will know what i'm talking about right but i want you to imagine for a moment that you and your family have been invited onto the tv show family fortunes okay les dennis or whatever the time was family fortunes the show where two families are pitted against each other to guess the top answers of survey questions hundred people on the street are asked a question and you have to see what the top answers would be now imagine you are on that show with your family and you were asked this question right a hundred people on the street were asked this question what did jesus visit the towns to do okay discuss with your family we'll go along and you try and guess what the top answers would have been from the people on the streets les dennis goes along the line what are your family members going to guess and if you've seen the show you will remember that sometimes a family member guesses something and the family are clapping like yeah that's a good answer that's a good guess we are glad of this guess and then other times uh a family member says something and the families are like oh goodness why did you say that weird answer that's never going to be the top answer so a hundred people are asked what did jesus visit the towns to do what do you think the answers would be our survey says or what about this a hundred people were asked to fill in the missing word and then there's a quote from jesus jesus said let us go into the next towns that i may something there also for that is why i came out let's go to the next towns so that i can for that's why i came out what are the top answers going to be our survey says you see there are many good things that jesus did many good things in fact so many that john said john said john the apostle said there are also many other things that jesus did and were every one of them to be written suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written about all the things that jesus did there are many things that jesus did many good things but there are only a few times that he said this is the reason that i came and so who do we think jesus is and what do we think he should do let me read the passage mark chapter 1 verses 35 to 45 and so the context is jesus has just been at peter and andrew's house and he just healed peter's mother-in-law

and then everyone came to the house that evening everyone came from the town to be healed and Jesus spent so much time healing all these people and then this is the next morning verse 35 and rising very early in the morning while it was still dark he departed and went out to a desolate place and there he prayed and Simon and those who were with him searched for him and they found him and said to him everyone is looking for you and he said to them well let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also for that is why I came out and he went through all Galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons and a leper came to him and ploring him and kneeling said to him if you will you can make me clean moved with pity he stretched out his hand and he touched him and he said to him I will be clean and immediately the leprosy left him and he was made clean and Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once and said to him see that you say nothing to anyone but go show yourself to the priest and offer your for your cleansing what Moses commanded for a proof for them but he went out and began to talk freely about it and to spread the news so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town but was out in the desolate places and the people were coming to him from every quarter amen well Peter Peter would have known he would have remembered this when he told Mark about the time when Jesus healed his mother-in-law did you know Mark Jesus healed my mother-in-law and then he healed everyone who came to the house did you know that Mark and then the next morning he was gone we couldn't find him he just disappeared everyone got up and Jesus was nowhere to be found and everyone started looking for him and then we found him out in the desolate place and we said to him everyone's been looking for you come on we've got loads for you to do and Mark do you know what Jesus said he says let's move on to the next town so that I can preach there because that's why I came out and so Peter would have told Mark about how much they had on their schedule for Jesus to do the next day and how Jesus didn't entertain that how Jesus moved on how he had different priorities and I think this this shows us a picture of what humans in general think we need we think we need certain things and Jesus has different priorities and even churches up and down the country have traded things like prayer and preaching and for many other things good things social action very practical things they're not bad things but the church has a specific mission Jesus had a very specific mission and so firstly let's look at the effort that Jesus goes to to pray Jesus had every reason to have a long lie that morning he'd spent all evening

healing people attending to people entertaining people and he gets up early so early it's still dark before anyone else is awake and he sneaks off to a desolate place just to pray this is what gets him out of bed in the morning what gets you out of bed in the morning you see in our culture prayer is often used like a genie's lamp i think even for many christians we need something and so we pray we need something and so we pray but again this assumes that we actually know what we need now here's the thing if jesus was perfect why does he need to pray what does he need when you read through mark's gospel you get the sense that there is actually no need that jesus cannot meet jesus heals the sick he heals the blind and the deaf he casts out demons and he raises the dead he feeds thousands he curses a fig tree he commands the weather he walks on the sea what can jesus not do why does he need to pray why does he go to these lengths to pray well i want to show us three reasons why i think jesus goes to these lengths to pray first reason is because he is the son of god so think about this for jesus his father is his go-to person elsewhere in the bible it says the son can do nothing of his own accord but only what he sees the father doing whatever the father does that the son does likewise and jesus says what i say i say as the father has told me wouldn't it be natural for a son to want to spend time with his father jesus is like he's all for people but he wants to spend time with his father and he's the only opportunity he can get to spend time with his father is to get up early before anyone's up and go out to a place where no one is just to be with his father and jesus would have watched and imitated joseph as a young boy he would have saw how joseph used a saw or a chisel he would have imitated his carpentry he would have spent time with him but even as a boy at age 12 in the temple he was about his father's business and so how could the son of god who comes to earth how could he do the work of god his father unless he spent time with his father watching and learning asking and imitating i don't know if there's any hope for you of your children following you in the in the plastering business jesus was all about people alex said before jesus would never say to anyone i've got no time for you i love that and so he sacrifices his own time to spend with people healing him all night and then he sacrifices his own sleep because he needs to see his father there's no relationship more of a priority to jesus than with his father and there is no one that jesus wants to please more than his father in heaven and so whether you're a christian or not isn't this the struggle for us humans that we know what it's like to want to please people don't we all have had a taste of that wanting to please other people but where does this get us there's only one opinion that matters in the end and god isn't fooled or impressed by the things that make people

applaud jesus wants to please his father above all else and so it's natural for him to be desperate to pray he is his father's son the second reason is because he is the christ the messiah he's the king of god's kingdom and you can read in deuteronomy 17 what it takes to be a good king in god's kingdom solomon one of the greatest kings was someone who broke almost everything every command and yet solomon's father david who was the greatest king of israel it was said of david that he was a man after god's god's own heart and you can tell this who wrote most of the psalms king david see how david is just always going to god whatever problem whether it is for prayer whether it is to praise david's go-to person is god when he knows that he's messed up straight to god and so this is what it is to be a good king and so it's natural for the christ the messiah to lean on prayer if anyone wants to lead god's people he must love god sincerely and depend on him greatly and the third reason that i think jesus goes to prayer is because he is the perfect man and you might say why would the perfect man need to pray well he's got no sin that he needs to confess jesus is the forgiver not the forgiven he's not like us jesus is the bread from heaven but his flesh is like yours he knows that man does not live by bread alone but by every word of god and so he shows what it is to be truly human because we are actually made to connect with god this whole thing about independence no it's all right god i don't need you just now i'll check in when i need you that's not what it means to be human god made us to be connected to him not just for every need but for relationship for a relationship and so jesus shows that humans are made to connect with god and enjoy him as the source of our very lives it says in act 17 that in god we live and move and have our being and so jesus is the new adam so unlike adam who turned away from god and wanted independence and disobeyed god and hid from god jesus always looks to his father he always depends on his father he always obeys his father and never hides from his father but always runs to his father we were not made to be separate or autonomous from god and prayer is not just about asking for things it's about being with god just being with god so think about this if there was a devil okay if there was an enemy of god would it not make sense that he would want to keep humanity from talking to god altogether stop them at all costs from talking to god don't let them connect to god because he is their life cut off the life and so in these verses that we've just read it seems like jesus hardly gets the chance to pray because everyone has got him doing other things keep him busy and so c.s lewis in the screw tape letters great book he imagines a demon training another demon and this is what the demon says to his nephew this is his tactic against the christians he says well the best thing where possible is to keep the patient from praying altogether that's the

tactic but as exhausted and as in need of rest as Jesus is he sees prayer as something worth getting out of bed for he sneaks away to a desolate place before anyone else is awake and catches him it's the only thing he can do without others following him it's the only place that he can go to and notice that it says that everyone is searching for him I don't know if it was Peter that found him but it says everyone's searching for him well if everyone's searching for him why can't they find them well it's probably because they're searching in all the wrong places and is that not the case for humanity for the entire history of humanity that we seem to be searching in all the wrong places Jesus is not in the house he's not in the synagogue he's not where people expect him to be and so don't expect don't expect that God is going to be where you think he's going to be he might just be out in the desolate places when the disciples find him they say Jesus finally we found you we've got this full schedule for you but in order to keep to his purpose he says no you have to say no it's a lesson to us people will have expectations is this not true how many of us have experienced other people having expectations of us and in order to say yes to the right things we need to say no to other things and so what did Jesus visit the towns to do our survey says to preach it's a surprising surprising thing there's a crowd waiting for him back at Peter's house there's people that are wanting to meet Jesus you would think that this was excellent this is great there's people want to see you and Jesus says no because I know what they'll have me do and I came to preach his mission is not to entertain people with miracles his mission is not even primarily to heal people because healing is not the answer it's just a foretaste of his kingdom the answer is his kingdom but how do we get there how do we know how to get there unless he tells us unless he proclaims and so think about it if healing was the answer then after healing so many people why did so few follow him why did so few people actually believe in him when he healed thousands of people because healing is not the answer he was showing them the kingdom but many of them just wanted health and it's no different 2000 years later we still think that the greatest problems are this and that and yet we always miss the real problem so Martin

[19:15] Lloyd-Jones the great famous preacher shared the story about why he left the profession of medicine to become a preacher and people couldn't understand it he had colleagues and friends and people who just could not understand why he would stop being a doctor to become a preacher and so he told this story he said this when I came here people said to me why give up good work a good profession after all the medical profession why give that up I mean if you had been a bookie for instance and wanted to give that up to preach the gospel we would understand and agree with you and say you're doing a grand thing but medicine a good profession healing the sick relieving pain one man even said this well if you were a solicitor and gave it up I'd give you a pat on the back but to give up medicine and

Martin Lloyd-Jones says this ah well I felt like saying to them if you knew more about the work of a doctor you would understand we but spend most of our time rendering people fit to go back to their sin I saw men on their sick beds I spoke to them about their immortal souls they promised grand things then they got better and back they went to their sin their old sin I was helping these men to sin and I decided I would do it no more I wanted to heal people's souls not their bodies it's quite a striking thing isn't it and we probably all know what that's like we all know what it's like to be sincere in prayer and then when we're well we easily forget it's just human nature so when Jesus healed people it was just to give them a foretaste of his kingdom it was not a solution to the problem because he is the solution but it will only be found in his kingdom so he came to proclaim his kingdom and to proclaim the way to enter his kingdom which is through him and only through him he showed that he was the king and God's kingdom was really at hand because he was given powerful demonstrations of the kingdom of god being more powerful than the kingdom of darkness but people do not enter the kingdom of god by being fit and healthy that's not how you enter and so just making people fit and healthy is not the answer it is only by knowing the king it's only by knowing the king and he noted that we only have a few decades a handful of decades and these bodies but our souls are immortal and so the priority of Jesus to proclaim is with a view to see me and you and his kingdom forever but often people just want a miracle worker more than a prophet often the world wants healing without the preaching yet if he didn't tell us of his kingdom how could you and I ever hope to enter if he didn't tell is the way what hope would the world have to be healed in the end he is the way

I remember sitting in the hospital I remember sitting in the hospital and thinking like this leper thinking I know that he can when the leper said if you will you can it's just if you will and I remember sitting in the hospital with someone and thinking to myself well I know that he can and he doesn't even need to be present he can do it from afar if he wants to he can heal this person why does he not and I thought to myself well because this world is not the answer his kingdom is the answer it is so that we're in his kingdom that's where it will be better but then I thought this to myself well why doesn't he just take us from this terrible earth and take us into his kingdom come on what are you playing at what are you waiting for why doesn't he just take us out of this place and bring us into his kingdom if that's the answer and I was suddenly struck by this thought how many people in the hospital knew about that hardly anyone so many people in the hospital with the same need but not knowing the answer and so that's why we are still here so that we can tell other people the way and the way is through him the question is do people want him or just what he can give so Jesus seems to sense when they find him and they say everyone's been looking for you

Jesus there's people back in town waiting for you and Jesus says no let's go on to the other towns Jesus has time for everyone but there seems to be something he seems to sense that the people don't really need him at this point maybe they're just looking for another miracle whatever it is he seems to sense that maybe they're just after what he can give they just don't they don't want him and so they move on there's other people in other towns who need Jesus and as they move on a leper comes to Jesus I don't know if you know anything about leprosy but they were outcasts because it is a highly contagious disease and so when this leper comes to Jesus I imagine everyone just scatters everyone like Jesus stand back this guy has leprosy and they would have been saying don't go near him don't touch him nobody everyone get out of the way of this guy and Jesus came for such people and he treated this leper the way that I imagine a mother treats her son like doesn't matter what you have there's nothing going to stop a mother embracing her son and Jesus is like I don't care what this guy has and he touches him that is forbidden he touches him the man pleads with

Jesus he knows that Jesus can make him clean if you will you can make me clean and Jesus stretches out his hand touches him and says I will be clean he has pity on him don't expect that God's going to do what you think he's going to do he might just do something radical that you and I would never do and it's not just what you do with a leper this would kill you if you touch the leper back in that well anytime it would make you an outcast for the remainder of your life but Jesus is motivated by compassion and that's the thing with healing it's not that he came just to heal it's not his primary mission because the solution is not making these bodies healthy the solution doesn't belong to this earth his kingdom is the solution but when he saw people he often had compassion for their brokenness and their pain and that was something that he would teach his disciples to spend time to help people that nobody else would help however the surprise comes

[27 : 03] I think when Jesus warns him he makes them clean he heals him and then he warns him and he tells him to say nothing to nobody why does he say that why does Jesus tell this man don't say anything about this well I think we see a couple of reasons in these verses firstly he was to go and show the priest show himself in a proper manner according to the law of Moses and so think about this Jesus didn't heal the man to then go and break the law Jesus doesn't save us to live lawless lives he doesn't heal us so that we can continue on living in a broken way he heals!

He heals this man and tells him to follow the law of Moses and not only did he not do what the law of Moses told lepers to do he also did what Jesus told him not to do and so he got his healing but it didn't seem like he was interested in listening to Jesus or Moses and so ask yourself this question this man this leper now that he's been made clean is he now fit for the kingdom because it seems like he's not interested in listening to the law of Moses it seems like he's not interested in obeying Jesus strange isn't it I don't know what happened to this man none of us do but he got his healing but it didn't seem like he was giving off the signs of someone who wants to obey King Jesus on the one hand he's no longer a leper you are welcome on the other hand he doesn't want to listen to

Jesus or Moses now I remember hearing this story about Russell Crowe do you know the actor Russell Crowe famous Australian actor he starred in a famous film called Gladiator and he told this story about his very first day on the set first day on the set and the director Ridley Scott said to Russell Crowe he says I want you to do this scene where you're going to follow a bird and contemplate it and your eyes are going to be following this bird and then you're going to come back down into the battle scene and he gave him some direction told him what to do it was kind of strange Russell Crowe had no idea why he was telling him to do this but he did it he followed the instruction he did all this kind of stuff did this scene perfectly great actor and then after the scene the director went up to him and said you and I are going to get on great it was just a test it was a test to see if an actor was willing to follow direction the point is are you willing to listen this leper was like a test are you willing to obey

Jesus are you going to listen are you going to follow direction even if you don't understand why he's asking you to do it are you just going to follow direction are you going to trust that he knows what's best I think that's a challenge I feel that am I willing to take direction well second reason I think Jesus tells him to say nothing is because creating hype about Jesus would limit where he could freely go and what he could freely do it's not going to help people to be ready to listen to Jesus if others are creating a hype about getting healing from him remember back in the day with the Beatles Beatlemania hype such hype about the Beatles that they could hardly go anywhere without people fainting and crowding them it's not going to help Jesus and his mission if people are just all coming to him and getting hyped up and only wanting one thing from him so Jesus wanted to visit every town in

Galilee and there would be people in these towns that actually couldn't leave the town and so we hear at the end of the passage that everyone was coming out to the desolate places to see Jesus but not everyone could do that in fact some of us have known what it's like to not be able to get out very far and think about that what this man didn't realise that there would be people that he would be limiting there would be people that he would be hindering seeing Jesus this man's actions meant that some people wouldn't get to see Jesus and what a shame it was for them Jesus had in effect swapped places with this leper there would be people in these towns who would not have this leper come in the leper was out in the desolate places and he is now able to enter the towns and Jesus was able to enter the towns but now he's out in the desolate places see how

[32 : 24] Jesus swapped places with the leper I think that's a picture of what Jesus does for humanity swap places with us people were going out to him you see it's full circle at the beginning of our passage because of a hype over healing Jesus could only be with God his father out in desolate places and then at the end of our passage again because of a hype over healing people can only be with Jesus God's son out in the desolate places and so do you see that focusing on the wrong things can push God out into the desolate places of our lives is he in the desolate places of our crowded lives are our lives so full of other things that God is somewhere out there I had a friend pass me a book a while back just a couple of years ago he passed me a book of a minister who wrote this book and he found that in retirement he felt that he finally had some breathing space to spend time with God a minister who spent his whole life and yet he finally found that in retirement he could finally spend some time with God because it can be so busy people have expectations there's so many good things to do good things to do and yet despite being a minister for decades the demands made it difficult for him to just be with God praying and listening and stopping sometimes we find that we have to go out to desolate places just to hear God or just to speak to God or just to be silent!

! listen to listen to listen to him if we were organising an event for Jesus what would we promote to us what would we put on the poster healing walking on water event in Bells Hill a man is going to come and calm a storm we're probably going to have him whip up a storm in the first place and then he'll calm it down come and see a man who can turn water into wine you would get a full house but imagine he says come and hear

Jesus preach who would come you see if we really want people to be free and whole if we really want to be free and whole then we need to hear Jesus words we need to know Jesus we need to listen to him and we need to be with him and his kingdom and that's only going to happen if we know the way we can only know the way if we hear Jesus and so I would encourage you to do two things this week make time to do this and it will do your soul good number one find some time to pray to God and number two have a look in this book at Jesus words just listen to Jesus and see what happens let me pray Lord we thank you so much for your word we thank you for the account of these things and we thank you that when we feel like we just can't grasp what you're doing or what you're about or we mess up so often that we can see the disciples doing the same things we thank you that we can learn together who you are and what you're about we thank you that we can trust you and we thank you that you have not come and withheld information from us your word your life given word that can lead us to you to be saved and be in your kingdom thank you that you didn't hold back going to every place to preach and to tell us who you are and the way into your kingdom please help us to understand these things in Jesus name amen