

Priorities in the Life of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] I'm sure even as we were reading from verse 21 just a moment ago, just as we were reading that particular section of the first chapter, have you noticed how many times the little word and was mentioned? Because, you know, Mark, as we've been noticing, Mark's gospel is that racy-pacy gospel. Mark is, you know, telling us of the, something in this chapter, chapter one of the early stages of Jesus' ministry. And Mark's doing this in a very sort of fast-paced manner. Even that little section from verse 35 to 39, you notice how every sentence would almost say is punctuated by and. But it's not so much a punctuation, it's more Mark's showing us the urgency of Jesus' ministry, the urgency of Jesus' teaching and preaching and healing and his evangelism and his mission of salvation for sinners.

So Mark, in just the way he's writing this, the and, the and, the and, and so on and so on, he's showing us the urgency of Jesus, the intention of Jesus in his mission to save sinners. Mark's showing us the necessity that Jesus' work had to be done, that Jesus had to do this of himself, by himself, in winning salvation for his people. So, you know, as we were reading that section from chapter one, in one sense we were moving swiftly on from one section to another, one aspect of Jesus' ministry to another. But, well, on the one hand we might see a kind of racy-pacy gospel account of Jesus' work here recorded by Mark.

At the same time, we have to remember that the urgency of Jesus' actions, that urgency is shown in relation to Jesus' relationship with his Father. That Jesus will take time to commune with his Father, to commune with his Father in prayer before Jesus returns to the prayer, before he returns to the crowd and performs again his acts of teaching and healing and preaching. And so when we come to this next stage of Jesus' ministry, as we read there in verse 35, what happens after that full day in Capernaum? We see, yes, Jesus had been busy about his Father's business, but Jesus at the same time to take time in prayer, praying before his Father, committing to his Father all that Jesus was committing to him in relation to his work of ministry. Yes, and notice too, even before Jesus comes to preach the Word beyond Capernaum, we see again the timing, the prayer before preaching, Jesus' prayer before preaching. And that's what I want to look at with you this evening, the priorities in Jesus' life, the priority of prayer and the priority of preaching. There's a third aspect, the power that Jesus demonstrates again in his healing of the demoniac. Now, we'll look at that in the context of, particularly of his preaching, and God willing, in a fortnight's time, again, we'll look at that power evident in his healing many. But as we grasp the priorities that Jesus showed in his ministry, in his life and earth, then surely it's for you and for me to follow the Lord Jesus in these priorities. To prioritise our lives, yes, in the priorities that

Jesus has given us, the priority of prayer. And then, you know, in particular in the context of our worship before God, that we show even that we have a priority in the preaching of God's Word, whether it's for you as a congregation, me as a minister, that preaching is high up there in our priorities.

Somebody has written about the expulsive power of a new affection. And, you know, when we think of that power that God gives us in his Word and by his Word, in God overcoming that darkness in the hearts of his people, bringing grace in, then we know that power, that expulsive power of the new affection brought about by his power, his Word. And we'll look at that in a third heading.

[5 : 08] We'll look at the power, the priority of power in Jesus' life. But, well, let's get the background firstly to this section. I mean, it's been a most extraordinary day there in Capernaum, there in Galilee. I mean, Mark, in his very economical use of language, Mark has shown us all that Jesus has done on that day and that Sabbath day there in Capernaum. In the morning, we read there of Jesus teaching with authority, the authority that Jesus showed that so astonished the congregation there in the synagogue.

And then, we read of Jesus healing that demon-possessed man, even there in the synagogue. Again, demonstrating an authority that so astonished the people. In the afternoon, we read of Jesus healing of Simon's mother-in-law.

Jesus revealing his power over sickness. Jesus revealing his compassion over those who are unable to heal themselves. And then the evening, we read there of more healing, more healing of the sick and demon-possessed.

And Jesus revealing by these healings, Jesus revealing his authority as the divine Son of God. Jesus showing that his purpose in his mission is to bring judgment against evil and to restore sinners to himself.

Three stages, we might say, morning, afternoon, evening, showing Jesus' authority, his power. Jesus showing who he is. And his authority is the Son of God. And you might think after that long Sabbath day, you might think Jesus would now take some, you know, prolonged rest, some physical rest to recuperate.

[6 : 59] But he does take rest. He does take rest. But notice, notice what we see in that rest. That rest is resting in his heavenly Father, resting in prayer, resting through prayer. We see verse 35 to 37, the priority of prayer.

Before we actually look at the passage itself, just ask yourselves this. What are your priorities? What are my priorities in life? What sets your priorities? Is it your relationship with God and the developing that relationship through communion with him, through a closer walk with him? Or is it other things that set your priorities? Work, family, even popularity that somehow establishes your priorities? Well, surely for the Christian who knows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian, for you it's your relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus, that has to set your priority. All your priorities in life. What did Jesus say? Seek first the kingdom of God.

Isn't it so often the case that seek last the kingdom in our, you know, as a sort of tail end afterthought in our lives? But priorities have to be established according to where we place our highest good.

Where is your highest good? Surely your highest good must be seen in your relationship with God. The one true God who blesses you in every spiritual blessing.

And within that priority, in that priority of God first, has to be your communing with him in prayer. Prayer, as somebody once said, prayer is that umbilical cord, that cord that connects you to your heavenly Father. And notice here Jesus going off by himself to pray. He's praying to God, to God the Father, praying to God his Father. So amidst all the work of the kingdom that Jesus has been engaged in, and amidst all the business of his teaching and preaching and healing, Jesus took time to pray.

[9 : 19] Jesus took time to commune with his heavenly Father, with his Father. Because that was the focus of his work, to do his Father's will. And essential in doing that Father's will was communing with his Father.

God the Father had sent God the Son to bring salvation for those for whom God had so given to the Son. And then, again this is fascinating in Mark's Gospel. When you look at the occasions when Mark records Jesus praying, in fact, I think I'm right in saying this, there are only three prayers, three times that Jesus prayed that Mark records. Now of course in other Gospels we see other occasions when Jesus prayed.

But in Mark's Gospel, Mark records only three prayers of Jesus. Once at the start of his ministry, as here. Once in the middle. And once at the end, towards the end of Jesus' life. In other words, key points in Jesus' ministry.

Showing how central prayer was for Jesus. Prayer to the Father. Prayer in relation to his ongoing work and his mission of salvation.

Think for example of the prayer in Gethsemane that Mark records of Jesus' last hours of life before his crucifixion. And that prayer, remember. Prayer was uttered when Jesus was in the agony of his soul.

[10 : 48] You know, he had that prospect of his sin bearing. He had that prospect of facing the wrath of God against sin. Even though Jesus knew no sin. And yet in that prayer, that prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus affirmed that yes, it would be his Father's will. Not his own will, but his Father's will that he would do.

And that he would die for the sake of others according to the will of his Father. So Jesus, even in that prayer, showing the priority that he had in submitting to his Father's will.

Submitting even today. Such was the love of Jesus. Such is the love of Jesus. Towards his Father. And we might say wonder upon wonders.

Love for sinners. And here in this first of these three recorded prayers that Mark shows us, here we see marvelous truths. Truths for each one of us to consider.

Truths to consider in relation to the Lord Jesus and his priority of prayer. And truths in relation to our own priorities.

[12 : 03] To establishing priorities that honor God. And indeed, bless ourselves when we have our priorities right with God through Jesus. Well, let's look more closely at the passage then.

Look at the time and look at the place of prayer where Jesus prayed. Look at verse 35 again. Very early in the morning. While it was still dark. He departed and went out to a desolate place.

And there he prayed. Just use your imagination at this point. And just see that deepening darkness of that morning. That very early morning.

Long before sunrise. Jesus left the house he was staying in. And Jesus went out to pray. Where did he pray?

He, well, he found solitude, we would have to say. Firstly, he found solitude in the darkness of that very early morning. No one else around. That Sunday morning, we would say.

[13 : 02] He set aside time to be with his Father. But this is Mark, remember. And Mark, in his economical use of language, he's being very precise here.

He's giving us precise detail for good reason. There has to be particular reason or meaning. Showing us something very important happening in the life of Jesus here.

Even in this time of prayer, in this place of prayer. And the combining of the time and place where Jesus prays. There has to be meaning in these details that we might just pass by.

Not ordinarily, but no. This is important. Darkness. The darkness of that early morning. Then the location of desolateness. It's got to be in relation to the work of Jesus.

Bringing salvation to his people. Think first of the desolate place where Jesus goes to. Well, remember the last time that Mark spoke of a desolate place.

[14 : 02] It was where Jesus was being tempted by the devil. In the wilderness. And when you read there of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness there. In verse 13. It's exactly the same word.

Exactly the same word where we now read there in verse 13. Whatever it is in chapter 1. The verse of Jesus going into that desolate place.

Exactly the same word. Okay? Again, I think there's a connection. Jesus was sent to this most...

When he was being tempted by the devil. Remember the spirit drove Jesus into the desert. And Jesus was sent there to that most desolate, difficult place.

Why? To show his resolve. To resist the devil's schemes. And in that desolate place. In that wilderness. That first time. He's showing that it is his utter resolve.

[14 : 58] To do his father's will. To save sinners by his death. So, Jesus has gone to a desolate place. Now he's gone to pray. And he's going to show again his resolve to continue to do his father's will.

I mean, he's just cast out demons. Demons from people. He's shown his power over evil. He's shown that his work is a work of victory. Triumph against the forces of evil.

He's come to rescue his people from the power of Satan. And Jesus is continuing that work. And he's been strengthened in that work through prayer.

And there he's praying in that deep darkness. Why darkness mentioned? Well, surely it's to indicate. Well, one reason might be to indicate the darkness of sin around.

The darkness of the forces of evil around Jesus. The forces that Jesus had come to conquer. So, Jesus going to that desolate place to pray at that particular time of darkness.

[16 : 02] Surely it's an indication of Jesus' work in obedience to his father. He's come to resist and destroy the power of darkness.

He's come to reveal his utter resolve to bring the light of God's saving love into the hearts of his people. He's come to bring his light and to expel the darkness of the power of Satan.

So, in that solitude, being alone with the father, Jesus prays. He's showing, even by his prayer, he's showing that his constant communion with his father.

He's showing that that communion that shows the love of the son to the father, the father to the son. That mutual love will take Jesus to the cross. But what about, you know, our own application in this aspect of the priority of prayer in Jesus' life?

Well, think of your own relationship with God as you exercise that relationship in prayer. In what circumstances are you coming before God?

[17 : 12] You're doing it in the midst of darkness all around. Whether it's the darkness of the world opposed to the cross of Jesus. Or, indeed, even the darkness of our own souls, our own selves, and our own sinful nature.

And, of course, it's only when we reach the perfection of heaven, there'll be no darkness. No darkness. Even challenging our relationship with God.

But we still pray. And we must pray. And pray, yes, even in the midst of the darkness around, knowing that God hears the prayers of his people, yes, through the darkness. That darkness of sin.

Yes, it's there when we pray. But remember, as God's word commands us, we pray without ceasing. Especially because of the darkness around. The darkness will not overwhelm the praying church of God.

Just as the darkness didn't overwhelm the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. But then, of course, there's the practical aspect of prayer that Jesus teaches us here.

[18 : 19] It's a very simple and yet so often forgotten discipline of prayer. Remember, what do we notice? Jesus went outside. And he went outside to pray alone.

On another occasion, remember in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about going to a particular place, a particular room in the house to pray. Now bring this to practical application.

Surely the point here is that we take time to pray. And yes, pray in the secret place, the private place. As one old Puritan wrote of the place of prayer, the private place that's the gate, the gate to heaven.

And you know, in all the busyness of life, we're all busy people, but in all the busyness of life, let's not rush through our prayer, our prayer time with God.

Now, of course, there are times when it's absolutely necessary to pray what we might call arrow prayers to God. You know, in times of particular crisis, for example. But for the most part, the most part, we're to wait on God in prayer.

[19 : 27] To have that special one-to-one communion with God. It's such a blessing to every saint of God in that one-to-one fellowship with God in prayer and taking our time with our God and Saviour.

I notice in Jesus' case, here in that very early part of his ministry, early stages of his ministry. I mean, the road to the cross, yes, is looming ahead.

But even these early stages of his ministry, he's committing to God, that path to the cross in prayer. You think of your work for the Lord Jesus.

Whether it's the beginning of a particular work, or maybe you're going through a particular work, maybe even coming to an end of a particular work. It's still for you to be constant in prayer.

Last Wednesday evening at our midweek meeting, we were discussing the whole aspect of evangelism. Evangelism in the ministry of the believer. Evangelism in the work of the Christian.

[20 : 30] Indeed, in the work of this congregation. And we were asking ourselves, what are our priorities? What are the priorities of a church's work of mission? Many things that, of course, come to mind, but surely the priority is prayer.

Prayer for God's blessing. Prayer for God's leading. Prayer for God's guiding. Prayer for God's support in our weakness. Prayer to him when we feel as if it's simply beyond us in all that God has given us to do.

And surely then it's for us to learn the secret of prayer in the secret place as we commune with our Heavenly Father. Yes.

And in that time of prayer and waiting in God, knowing that he is listening, he is hearing, that he is with us, even as we call upon him, even in the very works that he's given us to do, that we commit these works to him in prayer and know that we address him even in the very throne room of heaven itself.

Even now, he's hearing your prayers. Even the prayers uttered in the quiet of your heart. And then we, so we have to say this, if prayer was a priority in the life of Jesus, it has to be a priority in our lives.

[21 : 51] I mean, if the sinless Son of God, if he deemed it absolutely necessary to commune with his Father, how much more we who are sinners, how much more we need to commune with the living and true God, to have that prayer fellowship with him, to call upon him in your need, to seek his strength, to seek his guidance, yes, to seek his forgiveness for our sins, there's the priority of prayer that we see taught here in Mark's Gospel.

But then, secondly, there's the priority of preaching. I mean, you know, you can work it out. I mean, evidently, Jesus has been some time away from that house where he'd been staying.

Simon and the others, they noticed, obviously, that Jesus was absent and they searched for him. Now, presumably, the morning light had come and eventually they find Jesus.

And if you notice in the passage, notice in these verses, you know, Simon there, verse 36, they search and they find him and they say to him, everyone is looking for you.

You know, you can get in a kind of tone of indignation almost in these words. You know, this sense of, where have you been? Everyone's looking for you. Don't you know there are more sick people to heal?

[23 : 22] But remember that Jesus' priority, his priority in his mission, his priority wasn't the physical healing of people. Jesus wasn't sent to earth to be some kind of celebrity miracle worker, some, you know, performer attracting people, you know, to himself for his fame and healing.

No, Jesus' priority was to bring salvation, salvation to his own. Jesus' priority was to rescue lost sinners. Jesus' priority was to reconcile man with God, to do so by his death.

Jesus' priority was to tell others the good news of salvation through him. He wasn't going to be coaxed into, you know, some kind of exclusive ministry of miracle making.

Jesus must preach the good news. And that's why you tell Simon and other disciples there that, you know, they have to go to other towns, other towns of that Galilee region and do what?

And preach there. That's why Jesus says, that's why he left heaven for earth. It wasn't to heal as many people as possible. It wasn't, you know, through that healing somehow to bring to their hearts and minds the kingdom of heaven.

[24 : 37] No. Jesus' priority was to preach the good news of the gospel and ultimately die for sinners. The message that that gospel, the good news, it gives.

And that surely then shows us the priority of preaching in Jesus' ministry. Jesus had come to show to no man the way of peace, peace with God, the way of peace through faith in him.

Remember, Jesus had come as priest, king and prophet. Jesus had come as priest to offer himself up as that once for all sacrifice for sin. He'd come as king to reign in the hearts of his people.

But remember too, he'd come as prophet. He'd come to proclaim the word of God to the people. He'd come to proclaim the word of peace. He'd come to direct people to repent and believe the gospel of God.

And if preaching was a priority in Jesus' life, in Jesus' ministry, then surely preaching has to be a priority in the life of the church. And we might say in two associated ways.

[25 : 45] one in the centrality of preaching in our worship services. And then secondly, and associatedly, in the priority any church gives to preaching.

So that you do make every opportunity to attend worship or preaching is essential. And we say it with such sadness I say it with such sadness of heart.

We're living in a day when preaching isn't universally held as central in the life of a church. For even preaching isn't considered sufficiently important in the life of a believer to come to a place of worship to hear the word of God proclaimed.

Now of course there's preaching and there's preaching. There's preaching where the central truths of Scripture of salvation and Jesus alone where these truths are proclaimed.

Where the authority of God's word is held as absolutely foundational to any preaching. The purpose of preaching surely is to glorify God to learn more of Him through His word to worship Him to direct hearts towards God in love in praise and thanksgiving.

[27 : 00] You know of course there's preaching where it's a mere morality that's proclaimed. Maybe even the name of Jesus not even heard or misused.

But when we're speaking of the priority of preaching because we're thinking of where preaching is given upon the authority of God's word in proclaiming salvation in Christ alone through His death on the cross.

I'm not saying that every sermon is perfect. I'm not saying that sermons are preached by perfect people or two perfect people.

There was only one perfect preacher only one perfect preacher who preached every perfect sermon and that was of course the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean we're imperfect people who preach in perfect sermons and perfect people.

But we have that command to preach the word to proclaim the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have that command to warn sinners of the judgment to come unless Jesus has received the Savior.

[28 : 11] We preach to encourage sinners to trust in the Lord Jesus. And we'll preach and we'll continue to preach and use the means that God has so ordained for the building up of His church and proclaiming the truth of His word.

So preaching can't be an added extra in a service. Preaching is the core of the service. The means that God has blessed His church with.

So it's for each one of us the more to value preaching. Yes to thank God for the ministry of preaching. And for those of you who do preach well to echo the words of Paul, the Apostle Paul, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.

And that I suppose takes us to the whole matter of attending. Services where preaching is central. Because if preaching is central in the life of a church, if Jesus prioritised preaching in His ministry, if He communicated the truth of the gospel through the means of preaching, the means of yes, the spoken word based on the word of God, then why is it that we can be so dismissive or maybe even casual about missing means of grace where the word of God is preached?

A recent report on church attendance in England, for example, a report given about so-called regular church goers found that church attendance was becoming more an option than central in the life of those who claim the name of Jesus.

[29 : 59] And that means therefore of course the regular hearing of the word of God proclaimed, the regular focus and preaching of that word is becoming less and less a central aspect of the life of the person who claims to be a believer in the Lord Jesus.

So if you're tempted to drift away in the regularity of hearing the word preached, you'll be reminded of the priority that Jesus placed in preaching.

If it was a priority for him, or it was a priority for him for the converting and saving of people, well surely it has to be a priority for any who call Jesus Lord.

It's surely for us to want to see preaching restored in that central place in any worship service. The priority of prayer, the priority of preaching and then finally and lastly the practice of power.

Now of course we see that more fully from verse 40 to 45 as I say we'll leave that for a fortnight but just even the last little last verse there in verse 39 and he went through it all Galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

[31 : 15] Notice the connection. Jesus preaching accompanied by the casting out of demons. Now notice, notice, this is the third time in this short chapter that we read of Jesus casting out demons.

But then here in particular we've been shown that Jesus is preaching throughout Galilee and that preaching immediately associated with demon expulsion. Why?

Why is this the case? Well as old Matthew Henry tells us, we're seeing this, to illustrate and confirm Jesus' doctrine in casting out demons.

The doctrine confirmed, the teaching of Jesus, the preaching of Jesus confirmed in the casting out of demons. In other words, Jesus preached, preached to point people to the reality of his power.

His power to release prisoners from the darkness of sin and Satan. Jesus, remember, preached to save sinners, to save sinners from the clutches of Satan.

[32 : 24] And the casting out of demons being that graphic picture of what the power of Jesus' word does, does for sinners. That release, that deliverance, deliverance, that can't be reversed.

Satan no longer having dominion over a person whom Jesus has freed from the power of Satan, from the power of darkness. Jesus alone has that power to release a person from the power of evil.

And I pray then that as the word of God's been preached today, whether here or elsewhere, that sinners will have responded to the word preached.

that sinners will have called on the name of Jesus and called on him Lord, save. You've heard the good news of salvation, salvation in Jesus alone.

Now, of course, no preacher has power in himself. Power alone resides in God. But I mean, you know, Paul himself, Paul informed us of the priority of preaching in relation to the power of God.

[33 : 30] God using the means of preaching to deliver people from the evil one. Listen to Paul. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they're sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

So pray. Pray that God would work through the means of preaching. that God would work through that means to alert sinners to their need of salvation.

And pray that his power, God's power, will be accompanied by the word of God preached. And that the power of the Holy Spirit will transform lives, yes, to the glory of God.

And that sinners will be saved and they'll be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. So pray for that work. Pray for the work of preaching. Pray for the work of preaching even of God's word today.

[34 : 35] Pray that God will bring, truly bring freedom to the captives. And make that prayer a priority in your life. Pray for a mighty work of God where his word is preached.

Pray for a mighty work of God, yes, here in West Lothar or wherever else his word is preached faithfully. God will be reminded, the assembly reminded very forcibly, the harvest is plentiful.

The labourers are few. Pray to the Lord. Pray to the Lord to send his harvesters into his fields. That the harvesters, by the preaching of God's word, will by the power of God, see the salvation of sinners for the glory of his name, for the furtherance of his kingdom.

Pray that God's will will be done even though that means that God has given to us, to let sinners to their need of salvation, to encourage the faithful, to do as God requires of us to do, to follow him humbly, to do as he will for the glory of his name.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, your prayer,