

Title: "The Priorities of Jesus and His Followers."  
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Text: Mark 1:32-39  
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## "The Priorities of Jesus And His Followers"

It is pretty widely accepted that priorities are important. That even sounds redundant - like saying priorities are a priority. But there is no question about it. Whether you are reading a book about achieving your goals in life or skimming a blog on finding your bliss pretty much everyone agrees you have to wrestle with the issue of what is most important – what comes first – what's the priority. There are often things that seem urgent, and there can be all kinds of pressures placed on you that can keep you from what is truly most important. As we continue our messages on *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*, and especially now, the story of Jesus, we come to a part of his story that speaks about priorities. Everything in the life of Jesus is important, but some of these stories that take place early in his public life and ministry seem especially foundational. This is one of them.

One distinctive of the gospel of Mark is that it skips the birth and childhood of Jesus and begins with his public ministry. Mark also flies quickly through several events the other gospels record. But comparing all the gospels, most scholars believe this event takes place *after* the things we've looked at in recent weeks. Jesus has begun what is called the Great Galilean ministry. His popularity is exploding, and that is the setting for this story, and it's lessons in priorities.

One thing to notice in the Scripture reading is the fact that you get these very exact little down-to-earth details: it was sundown, the crowds gathered at the door. Then **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*. It reads like someone is relating their memories. Mark wasn't a part of Jesus' life at this point, so he must be recording someone else's memory. It is probably the man mentioned in **verse 36**, *Simon, who is also called Peter*. The most ancient statement we have about the gospel of Mark is fascinating. It comes from around 95 – 120 AD. That's just 60-80 years after the death of Jesus. It is from a church leader named Papias who, it is said, in his younger days knew and was a student of the apostle John. Papias wrote that John used to say that Mark was Peter's interpreter, and he wrote down accurately as many things as he recalled from memory that the Lord had said or done but not in an ordered form. In other words, Mark represents Peter's memories, but he is not trying to put things in chronological order. <sup>1</sup>

What he is doing is conveying valuable lessons about crucial priorities. If you want to understand what Jesus is about -If you want to follow Jesus, if you believe there is wisdom and even blessing in following him, this passage is critical. The priorities in the story work on two levels that are totally interrelated. You have what I am going to call, *the ultimate priority of life*, and *the practical priority of life*. The two are connected in that it is in his spiritual practice that his life purpose is clarified. There are all kinds of lessons in this for you and me.

*Let's start with the big lesson of this story...*

### **I. THE ULTIMATE PRIORITY OF LIFE IS THE SOUL'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.**

This comes through in **verse 38**. Jesus has been delivering oppressed and suffering people. It's a new day, and there is more work to be done, but Jesus has gone off by himself. So Simon Peter and some others go looking for Jesus. When they find him, he says he is not going to go back and continue healing people. Why? Because he has a different priority. **Verse 38**, *"And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.'"* The Greek word used here means to come out or from a place. <sup>2</sup> But he's not saying, *"that is why I came out of the city."* He's saying that is why I came from God in heaven. The same word used to make this point repeatedly in the gospel of John. One example is **John 16:28**, *"I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."* Luke 4 tells the same story we have here in Mark and the parallel passage from the gospel of Luke that makes his point especially clear. **Luke 4:43**: *"but he said to them. 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.'"* His is preaching the gospel because the ultimate priority of life is the soul's relationship to God.

#### **A. Eternal salvation – the soul's relationship to God - is the reason for Jesus' whole life and ministry.**

*This is the first of several places in the gospel of Mark, where Jesus makes this point in various ways.*

**1. This is the reason for his preaching and teaching.** In **Mark 2:17**, Jesus says, *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*" Of course, the point is none of us really are righteous, but we have to recognize our unrighteousness before we can value his purpose and hear his call to save our souls.

**2. This is the reason for his suffering. Mark 10:45,** *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” In that verse, he is saying he came to give his life to pay the ransom for our souls’ salvation.

In **Mark 8:36**, Jesus puts this ultimate priority to us in the form of a question: *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* The answer? Nothing! Michael Bloomberg just dropped out of his presidential race after spending \$500 million of his own money on his campaign. They say that’s not a lot for him because he is worth about 59 billion. I know nothing about his spiritual life but Jesus would ask him this: *what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*

*That same sense of the priority of the soul's relationship to God comes through powerfully in this little story.*

**B. Eternal salvation – the soul’s relationship to God - is more important than any other need, no matter how urgent.**

As this Scripture reading reminds us, this time in his life shows us, Jesus was a compassionate healer. He delivered men and women from the nightmare of a mind virtually taken over by alien demonic powers or a body breaking down under sickness and disease. He had unique power to remove all mental, spiritual, and physical afflictions. His healing ministry was desperately needed, and urgently demanded. He had authority over and even commands the demons to be silent because he doesn’t want their twisted endorsement. If he made healing his priority, the crowds would have loved it. He would have been crowned King and gone down as a phenomenon to be marveled at. But that was not his ultimate purpose. He will continue to heal, but he continually pushes back against this as the *priority* of his life.<sup>3</sup>

**C. Eternal salvation – the soul’s relationship to God - is more important than any social or personal pressure.**

Look at **Mark 1:36-37**; the word *sought* in **verse 36** means *to hunt, to run down, to chase down, or to pursue in a hostile manner*. Jesus went off the pray, and Simon and those with him were trying to run him down! The word *looking*, in **verse 37**, is used nine times in Mark and always of looking with wrong motives. So read and understand the passage like that. *Starting in 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.*<sup>36</sup> *And Simon and those who were with him*

hunted him down<sup>37</sup>, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you. You have to hear the irritation and even the accusation in their voices: What are you doing? Where have you been? They are annoyed with Jesus.

**1. There is a stubborn blindness in the disciples and, of course, in all of us.** We so often do not get the priorities of Jesus. Even if unspoken, we have an agenda we assume and believe we know to be right. We aren't saying, "Let's all do more evil!" But we aren't humbly submitting to God's agenda either. The disciples want what they would call "real needs" to be met: health care, social justice, something useful in the real world. As a man, Jesus felt the emotional, and social pressure. But he does *not* cave in to the pressure. He is not going to quit meeting those needs altogether, but he isn't going to compromise his priority.

**2. Jesus' healing ministry is a sign of something more!** Is his purpose to save suffering humanity from the pains of this earthly life, or is it ultimately to save sinful people from an eternity in hell? Jesus often spoke about hell. I'm not talking about some of the bizarre medieval pictures of hell with horned demons, pitchforks, and rivers of burning lava. That's not the Bible's picture. In fact, the images of hell in the Bible are consistently terrible and yet pointedly paradoxical. Centuries ago, a famous theologian and scholar named John Calvin pointed this out and said that while hell is real, the images of it in the Bible must be figurative because you cannot put them all together and make sense of it. He concluded the imagery is not designed to give us a scientifically precise understanding of what hell is like but to fill us with dread over the tragic sadness of eternal lostness.<sup>4</sup>

**3. Jesus clarified in prayer that he came into our world to meet a need that was far more critical, even if much less visible, than the physical.** How clearly have you faced this? Do you recognize the only credible Savior this world has ever seen is Jesus, and he said, no one, comes to the Father but through me? He clarified and confirmed in prayer his mission of salvation. Have you gone to him in prayer to ask him to save your soul? If you have – will you thank him? Can you love him because he loved you and laid down his life for your soul? This is not the only thing Jesus does or cares about, but it is the starting point for everything else. Seeing this clearly should inspire gratitude, impart a sense of identity as those who belong to Jesus, convey confidence in God and grace, and shape our priorities for life as well.

*The ultimate priority of life is the soul's relationship to God.  
That's one lesson from this story. The other lesson is this...*

## **II. THE MOST PRACTICAL PRIORITY IN LIFE IS YOUR SOUL'S COMMUNION WITH GOD.**

This is the point of **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.* You see in the story it is because Jesus makes his time alone with God a priority that he is able, despite the demands of the crowd, and the pressures of his own disciples, to stay clear in his heart about what matters most.

### **A. Jesus shows us our need for communion with God.**

Although Jesus is God in human flesh, he came into this world to live a fully human life in dependence on God the Father. Jesus, like us, experienced the wear and tear of life. If you study his times alone with God and what he voices in his prayers, you see a spiritually strong and sane human being, getting alone with God to seek strength, clarity, and fellowship with God. That's what we need. In our times alone with God, he can restore our souls.

### **B. Communion with God is deepened when we are alone with him in prayer.**

**1. We need time to be alone with God.** **Verse 35** says *Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place.* It wasn't just this one time. When we read the gospels, we see Jesus does this often. He made it a point to get off by himself alone with God.

I once read about an interesting experiment done with mice. A group of mice were given amphetamines (a stimulant). They were given increased doses until it killed them. But what they discovered is that when they took a mouse out of the group and put it off alone, in solitude, it could survive twenty times the amount of amphetamine that would have killed it in the group. Under the influence of the amphetamine, the group of mice together start hopping around and hyping each other up so much that a dose twenty times smaller than that which could have been survived in solitude proves lethal. In fact, this studied showed that a mouse that had been given no amphetamine at all when placed in the group of mice who had would get so hopped-up by the influence of the others that it too would die.

The Bible teaches us that sin and selfishness and spiritual blindness can turn the world in which we have to live into a kind of crazy hyped up satanic lab experiment. It's not only the pace of society that is dangerous, but it's philosophy. Like germs, false ideas about what matters surround us. Solitude is one of the ways that God invites us to intentionally and occasionally step out of the confusion and find the clarity of a renewed connection to and communion with him.

**2. We need time alone with God to pray.** Mark 1:35 says, *he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.* We don't get away, just to decompress, to enjoy creation, there is nothing distinctively Christian about that. What we are after is not only rest but renewal, new clarity, perspective, faith, confidence, and courage. The Greek word; "*pray*," that is used here is the broadest possible word for all aspects of communion with God. The priority of Jesus is the salvation of our souls, but part of the gift of salvation is a new relationship with God, and the practical priority of our lives is now your soul's communion with God.

I often tell how I sat in the office of a man here in Daytona years ago, and he told me how he had been through a cyclone of conflicting emotions because of a problem in his marriage and family. He had read books and talked to many people, but he had found neither direction nor peace. Finally, in desperation, he took a day and went off by himself with just a Bible and a legal pad. He prayed for wisdom and sat and looked at the clouds and paced and prayed and read and meditated on portions of the Bible and waited on God. At the end of that day, he had a renewed relationship with God, a clear sense of direction about what he needed to do, and profound hope and peace with respect to God's promises for himself and his family. One day alone with God had accomplished what weeks of anxiety had not.

### Conclusion

The ultimate priority of life is the soul's relationship with God, and the most practical priority in life is the soul's communion with God.

One way that salvation is described in the Bible is that it is an act of "reconciliation." Without Christ, we are alienated from God. We can't earn or deserve our way back into his favor. But because of love, on the cross, Jesus took our place and paid for our sins. In those hours, as he became our substitute and suffered God's judgment for us, he was forsaken so you could be embraced.

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He was alone under judgment so you could be welcomed into His presence and love. God raised him from the dead so that he can be our living Lord and Savior. When you come to Christ, trusting only in his sacrifice for your sins, you are reconciled to God.

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When we live in closeness to God, we know what we were created for, and as Christians, what we have been reconciled for. This is the life God wants for you, not just getting by but a life of friendship, fellowship with God. When we live like that, everything we are tempted to find and vainly try to find in in other places we truly do find in Him Trust Jesus to reconcile you to God and then live your life in a deep relationship with him. Those are his priorities and ours.

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**Amen**

## Prayer of Response

Almighty God you are our gracious father through Jesus our Savior. May each person here know and experience the peace only you can give, having lifted to you a heartfelt prayer for the salvation you freely offer. *“Lord Jesus Christ, I need you. I need your grace. I do not deserve it. I cannot earn it. I believe you died to pay for my sins and rose again to be my Savior. I turn to you and I rely on you.”* May all who share this grace enthrone their Lord and Savior and live in grace for him. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/is-marks-gospel-an-early-memoir-of-the-apostle-peter/>

<sup>2</sup> ἐξέρχομαι see also John 8:42

<sup>3</sup> In both of two stories that introduce his Great Galilean ministry, even as Jesus begins what will be a season of many healings, he admonishes the people for their inappropriate emphasis on the miraculous. (See Luke 4:23-30 for his preaching in Nazareth and John 4:46-54 for the healing of the royal official's son.) □

<sup>4</sup> See, Robert Peterson's comments in *Hell On Trial*, Presbyterian, and Reformed Publishing Company, page 112 & pages 188- 192. □