

Mark 1:35-45, A Single-Minded Savior

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. 36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, 37 and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' 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.' 39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."

I. Jesus Seeks the Father's Will

Despite the demands of previous evening, Jesus is up early that morning to pray (the Gk. word behind "early" indicates between three and six⁽¹⁾, being further qualified by "while it was still dark"). Jesus was refreshed in seeking his Father. He also received the guidance needed to continue his mission. "Jesus' withdrawal to solitude and prayer points up his dependence on God, the only true source of his authority" (Hugh Anderson²).

1. Prayer as Refreshment

a. Respite and Refuge - "We are told again and again that Jesus prayed alone. Prayer was an essential part of his service and continually guarded that service from overactivity as well as from indolence. It was at the same time a refuge from an enthusiastic recognition on the part of individuals who did not desire to become disciples" (Eduard Schweizer³).

b. Communion - "For Jesus (and it should be for us), prayer was communion, a time to be alone with his Father and to bask in his presence and love" (Grant Osborne⁴).

c. Strengthening - Psalm 89 speaks of King David, and through him of the Son of David, Jesus the Messiah. The Lord promises to strengthen his anointed when he cries to him:

"20 I have found David, my servant;
with my holy oil I have anointed him,
21 so that my hand shall be established with him;
my arm also shall strengthen him...

26 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'
27 And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.
28 My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him." (Ps. 89:20-21; 26-28)

2. Guidance in Crisis

A. Three Prayers of Jesus in Mark

"Only three times in this Gospel do we hear of Jesus praying:

- (1) here at the beginning of the ministry;
- (2) in the middle of the ministry at the feeding of the multitude;
- (3) in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In other words, these references appear at crucial junctures, at crisis moments in the narrative ... In each praying episode Jesus' retreat is preceded by a demonstration of great power and preaching. If Gethsemane is any clue, Jesus is seeking guidance from the Father about what he should do in view of the responses he is getting to his ministry" (Ben Witherington III⁵).

B. The Prayer Life of Jesus

It should not be thought that Jesus **only** prayed three times during his ministry.

1. Observant Jews then as now prayed three times **a day** as a matter of religious obligation (reflected in Ps. 55:16-17 and Dan. 6:10).

2. Jesus was at the throne of the universe morning by morning, receiving instruction from the Father pertaining to the redemption of his people. The third Servant Song of Isaiah depicts the Lord opening the ears of the Servant every morning to instruct him and equip him to sustain "the weary" with "a word" from God. The Servant obeys, even though his preaching is met with hostility and ridicule:

"4 The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
5 The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward.
6 I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting." (Isa. 50:4-6)

3. John's gospel also makes a point of Jesus' absolute dependence upon the Father:

"19 So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing ... 30 I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me'" (John 5:19-20a; 30).

Mark, then, mentions only the three times of prayer because he thought it important, under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, to emphasize these times. Together they show that Jesus did nothing apart from the Father, and especially leaned upon that connection in times of trouble.

II. The Disciples Seek the Will of the Crowd

a. The Role of the Crowd in Mark - "Together with the religious authorities, [the Jewish crowd] makes up Israel, which stands opposite Jesus. In the peculiar role it plays, however, the crowd contrasts with both the authorities and the disciples. Unlike the authorities, the crowd is not the inveterate enemy of Jesus: Jesus ministers to it and it eagerly searches him out. Unlike the disciples, the crowd never joins itself to Jesus as followers

committed to his cause. On the contrary, at Jesus' arrest it unites with the authorities to bring about his death" (Jack Dean Kingsbury⁶).

b. Jesus Christ Superstar - "...the results of the ministry so far have been excitement and amazement on the part of the crowds and he thronging of invalids in the evening at the door of Peter's house--neither of them results in accordance with Our Lord's purpose. Peter and his companions do not help, for instead of leaving Jesus in peace, they track him down (the Greek word *katadiōkein* usually implies 'hostile following', 'persecuting') to give him what they regard as the good news that everyone is looking for him. But to be 'searched for' (Greek 'sought') in this way as a wonder-worker is not the 'following' Jesus had been sent into the world to attract..." (D. E. Nineham⁷).

"The Greek word behind 'looking for' (*zēteîn*) occurs ten times in Mark, and in each instance it carries negative connotations ... 'Seeking' connotes an attempt to determine and control rather than submit and follow. In this respect, seeking for Jesus is not a virtue in the Gospel of Mark. Nor are clamoring crowds a sign of success or aid to ministry. Here, as elsewhere in Mark, enthusiasm is not to be confused with faith; indeed, it can oppose faith" (James Edwards⁸).

c. Star-struck Disciples - "While the disciples initially are models of how to answer God's call, Mark now puts a question mark about them too. Jesus rises very early to pray. The disciples are caught up with the general enthusiasm. They scent success, and the smell is sweet to them" (Patrick J. Flanagan⁹).

"They are looking for him in Capernaum because of his miracles, not because of his words, and the disciples would like to accommodate this surge in popularity: more evening healings with a band concert, perhaps they could even develop a Capernaum healing theme park" (David E. Garland¹⁰).

"Simon and those who were with him" - a noteworthy phrase by which they are pointedly denied the title 'disciples'. Theirs is not the attitude of true disciples; they come simply as representatives of the crowd, wholly identified with its worldly attitude and interests" (D. E. Nineham¹¹).

d. The Good Shepherd - It was noted above (I.2.A) that Mark emphasizes the prayers of Jesus at crisis moments. Significantly, the times of prayer Mark chooses to highlight also coincide with a failure of Jesus' disciples to understand and do the right thing:

1. Here in Mark 1:36-37, we see the disciples failing to understand Jesus' priorities and the purpose of his displays of power. They interrupt Jesus at prayer to attend to the demands of the crowd.

2. A second time Jesus prays (Mark 6:45-52) after the multiplying of the loaves and the feeding of the multitude. Jesus sends the disciples ahead in a boat and stays behind to pray. Later, he walks by them on the lake during a windstorm and they are terrified, "for they did not understand about the loaves, and their hearts were hardened" (6:52).

3. The third time Jesus prays (14:32-50) is in Gethsemane. In the meantime the disciples, who should be praying, fall asleep. After praying, Jesus is betrayed by his disciple Judas and arrested, and the other disciples "all left him and fled" (14:50).

Doubtless at least a portion of the prayers of Jesus on these occasions was for his disciples. We know, for example, that before Peter denied him, Jesus prayed for him: "31 Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail..." (Luke 22:31-32a). Our great High Priest prays for each of us by name, especially in our failings.

III. Jesus Obeys the Father

Having preached and healed in an unprecedented display of divine power, and failing to see many repent and follow him, Jesus sought the Father in prayer. He was told to move on to the other cities in Galilee and preach about the kingdom, "for that is why I came out." (Mk. 1:38b).

1. This echoes what he said in John's gospel:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38).

"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth." (John 18:37).

2. Jesus Rejected the World's Exaltation - "Jesus is not interested in the fleeting adulation of the crowds and refuses to go back to Capernaum because he is to go preach to all Israel" (David E. Garland¹²).

3. Jesus Rejected the Foolish Desires of His Friends - "Already on the first day of public ministry, according to Mark, Jesus' mission is endangered, and by those closest to him. Jesus, however, remains undeflected from his purpose, responding decisively, 'This is why I've come.' In this unassuming declaration, Jesus reaffirms his baptismal commission of service that he fulfills by 'proclaiming the good news of God" (James R. Edwards¹³).

4. Jesus Rejected Peaceful Seclusion - In his commentary, Joel Marcus notes that the Greek word behind "came out" often carried military overtones in antiquity, i.e., "came out for battle". He notes the many examples of spiritual warfare in the surrounding context, including the defeat of Satan in the wilderness (followed by the announcement of the nearness of the kingdom of God, Mk. 1:12-15), the conflict in Capernaum with the demoniac (vv. 21-28, including the "you have come" declaration of the demon), and the kingdom preaching and casting out of demons throughout Galilee (with the de-emphasis of healings and other miracles, v. 39).

"...Mark portrays a very close connection between exorcism and the preaching of the good news: the latter is about the eschatological advent of God upon the scene, and God's arrival means the destruction of the evil powers that have usurped his rightful rule over the world (cf. 1:12-15)" (Joel Marcus¹⁴).

5. Jesus Obeyed For Us - "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work [John 4:34]. Yes. But, as we are in this world, we cannot make these things our meat. That wearied man at the well could [Jesus, John 4:1-43], but we cannot. No mere man, since the fall of Adam, could make the pure and immediate will and work of God his meat. The very opposite. The man which doeth these things, he shall live by them [Lev. 18:5]. But when any mere man, when any sinful man, tries to live by doing the will and work of God,—'The commandment which was ordained to life I found to be unto death' [Rom. 7:10]. But Christ could and did live under the commandment that was ordained to life. And then such was the will and the work of God toward us that His death; that is to say, the flesh and blood of Christ, are made of God our our proper and true meat and drink, as we are sinners. And now we as we are sinners, live by Him. That is to say, in His own words, we live by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Wonderful! is it not? Amazing! is it not?" (Alexander Whyte¹⁵).

Notes

1. Marcus, Joel. Mark 1-8 [The Anchor Bible, v. 27], p. 201.
2. Anderson, Hugh. The Gospel of Mark [The New Century Bible Commentary], p. 95.
3. Schweizer, Eduard. The Good News According to Mark, p. 56.
4. Osborne, Grant R. Mark [Teach the Text Commentary Series], p. 34.
5. Witherington, Ben III. The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary, pp. 101-102.
6. Kingsbury, Jack Dean. Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples, p. 21.
7. Nineham, D. E. The Gospel of Saint Mark [Pelican New Testament Commentaries], p. 84.
8. Edwards, James R. The Gospel According to Mark [Pillar New Testament Commentary], p. 67.
9. Flanagan, Patrick J. The Gospel of Mark Made Easy, p. 35.
10. Garland, David E. Mark [The NIV Application Commentary], p. 74.
11. Nineham, D. E. The Gospel of Saint Mark [Pelican New Testament Commentaries], p. 84.
12. Garland, David E. Mark [The NIV Application Commentary], p. 74.
13. Edwards, James R. The Gospel According to Mark [Pillar New Testament Commentary], p. 67.
14. Marcus, Joel. Mark 1-8 [The Anchor Bible, v. 27], p. 204.
15. Whyte, Alexander. The Walk, Character, and Conversation of Jesus Christ Our Lord, pp. 200-201.