

Prayer

The beauty of Your presence, Lord Jesus, illuminates our lives. All praise to You, Lord God, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. You are the King who acts justly, the friend who stands by those He loves, the servant who does what is right for all, and the Master who cares for His household. Thank You, Lord God, Thank You. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'New beginnings'

Pray today for people and situations you know in need of a fresh start; the past must be dealt with and what is new must be embraced. Ask the Lord to bless this ministry of grace.

On-going prayers

- *Praise God for His mercy in keeping you safe as you travel*
 - *Continue to pray about the tensions over Iran and its elections*
 - *Pray about waste disposal, and your own attitude to this issue*
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Meditation

Dear Jesus, You are our help and our comfort,
Assist us again, as we need You.

When suffering and distress enwrap our souls,
Cover us over with love and care.

When worry and anxiety eat at our hearts,
Robe us with the comforts of peace.

When fear and dread fill our stumbling emotions,
Surround us by Your guardian angels.

When panic and horror take a grip on our minds,
Wrap us around with Your mercy.

When misery and pain engulf our spirits,
Clothe us with the righteousness of Christ.

Dear Jesus, You are our help and our comfort,
Your power is sufficient for our needs!

Bible Study - Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the house of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Him about her immediately. ³¹ He came close, took her by the hand and helped her up. The fever then left her, and she served them.

³² When it was evening and the sun had gone down, they kept on bringing Him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ The whole city gathered around the door, ³⁴ and He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He would not allow the demons to speak because they knew Him.

³⁵ In the early morning, while it was still very dark, He got up and went away to a place which was deserted, where He prayed. ³⁶ Simon and those with him searched for Him, ³⁷ and when they found Him, they said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' ³⁸ He replied, 'Let us go on to other towns nearby, so that I may preach there as well; for that is what I have come to do.' ³⁹ So He travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Review

Here are three short incidents which Mark tells us happened immediately after Jesus had spoken in the synagogue at Capernaum and evicted a demon from an unclean man. The first two stories tell us about Jesus the healer (1:29-31, and 1:32-34) and contain some fascinating insights into this work. The last story tells us more about Jesus Himself and His sense of purpose at this early stage of His ministry (1:35-39). Clearly, after His baptism and the wilderness temptations, things began to happen very fast, and Jesus found Himself dealing with a rapidly unfolding situation. We may wonder why so many people responded to Jesus so quickly in those early days, and what caused them to flood into Simon Peter's house that evening (1:33f.), but all we know for certain is that everything that happened during the day caused Jesus to draw to one side to pray (1:35). After prayer, He knew that God wanted Him to continue to preach around the region of Galilee, and as we will see in coming studies, He gave Himself to this task.

In the first story of this passage, Jesus healed a woman who was sick, in stark contrast to what he had just done in casting out a demon in the synagogue (1:21-28). We may think it would have been natural for Jesus to do such a thing, given that the woman was the mother-in-law of His new disciple, Simon Peter. However, nothing Jesus did was normal or could be kept private. In those days, men and women were kept apart, and it would have been unthinkable for a man to go into a woman's room when she was sick, yet Mark makes the point that Jesus 'touched' her and took her by the hand to raise her up. Liberated by Jesus' ministry, she stood and took her place in the household, serving (1:31). This return to work demonstrated her complete healing, and already, Jesus was showing how boundaries could be broken down. Imagine the furore that such an action would have unleashed amongst the authorities at the synagogue!

News of Jesus' words and deeds at the synagogue and at Simon's home had spread quickly, and by the evening, when the Sabbath was formally over, the people of Capernaum came in their droves to find the healing and deliverance they felt they needed. The picture painted for us is of a clamorous crowd gathering at Simon's house, even the 'whole city' (1:33) but Jesus could only heal people or help them as they presented themselves to Him. The disciples with Him observed that amongst the many people He healed that evening, a pattern was clearly observable; they probably noticed it because it was similar to the dramatic way Jesus had dealt with the unclean demon at the synagogue. Jesus 'would not allow the demons to speak because they knew Him' (1:34). He would not engage with evil; he stood above it.

In the morning after all this happened, Jesus rose before dawn and went away to pray, to a place where he would not be found! The story in verse 36 indicates that Simon and the others had difficulty finding Jesus, but they eventually found Him (1:37). Then they told Him that many other people were also looking for Him, presumably to seek the same ministry Jesus had given the day before!

Jesus, however, saw beyond this situation. How easy it would have been to spend a long time ministering to people in one place alone, meeting expectations and responding to people's perceived needs. Jesus knew, however, that the message of the Kingdom was bigger, wider and more important than the needs of the people in any one place, so He took the difficult decision to move on (1:38). We can learn a great deal from Jesus' ability to read situations not simply from the public response, but from what God required of Him, and the two were not the same. Jesus followed the Father's will by taking His ministry God further and to other people. Jesus was always moving on.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Why is the subject of healing ministry a matter of controversy within the church today?
2. Why is the subject of the deliverance ministry a matter of controversy within the church today?
3. Discuss in your group the importance of regular times to pray and speak to God. Does this passage suggest regular devotions are important?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

These three short scenarios are a glimpse of what went on in the early days of Jesus' ministry. They combine action and reflection, and therefore show us something of the right way to approach the work God has given us. Jesus needed to reflect on what had happened in the first days of His ministry, and by doing this, He was able to make important decisions about what to do next. How much more important is it for us to do the same.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Take time to reflect upon how you can help others who are sick and unwell. What is your experience of 'healing ministry'? What are the different ways in which we can operate a 'healing ministry' today? What conditions of humanity require 'healing ministry'?*
 - *Pray for those you know who are unwell, and who are in need of help, whatever help that may be. Pray for the leaders of your church community who have the responsibility to help people who are ill.*
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Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, help us understand your life and work with such clarity, that we may have no fear of speaking to others about You or explaining the Gospel of Salvation. May we always treat Your Word with respect, and use it with dignity and care, all our lives. AMEN
