

JESUS PRAYS ALONE

Mark 1:35-37

Contemporary English
Version (CEV)

35 Very early the next morning, Jesus got up and went to a place where he could be alone and pray. 36 Simon and the others started looking for him. 37 And when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you!"

THREE WORLDS OF THIS TEXT

WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT.

The gospel of Mark- a very human portrait of Jesus.

Mark's gospel usually is said to offer the most human portrait of Jesus in our new Testament. Such a judgement is necessarily relative and is derived only by way of comparison with the other Gospels. If one were simply to read Mark without reference to any other book, Jesus would appear to be an extraordinary and indeed divine being. He often knows the future (10:32-34; 13:2; 14: 18-20; 27-30) or the inner thoughts of other people (2:8;12;15) and he is in direct and constant communication with God, who is pleased to call him "Son" (1:11; 9:7). He seems to make no mistakes and commit no sin and he exhibits power over disease, nature and unclean spirits. But he is also careful to distinguish himself from God (10:18), and he is depicted as a man subject to human weakness and frailty: he gets hungry (11:12), he does not know everything (13:32) and he is unable to work miracles for those who have no faith. He exhibits a full range of human emotions, including pity (1:41), anger (3:5), sadness (3:5), wonder (6:6), compassion (6:34), indignation (10:14), love (10:21), and anguish (14:34). He sometimes must struggle to know the will of God (14:36) and at one point in the story he even seems to change his mind, coming to a deeper understanding of God's plan in the light of a woman's clever remark (7:24-30). Mark most certainly portrays Jesus as a human being.

Mark's Gospel was written in the 50's or 60's and was the first Gospel written. Mark wrote for Gentile readers, probably in Rome. Mark was addressing a church whose members were undergoing a great deal of Persecution, exhorting them to remain faithful through difficult times.

Mark 1:21-38 describes one twenty-four-hour period. All of this material traces Jesus' ministry to the crowds, who are filled with wonder at each



new illustration of his healing power over demons and all kinds of illnesses. In addition, with each new powerful act, Jesus' popularity soars. Jesus tries to get away for a time of prayer as he learns that "everyone is looking for 'him (1:37)." (1:37).

WORLD OF THE TEXT

MARK 1:35

Very early the next morning, Jesus got up and went to a place where he could be alone and pray.

This may be the same "wilderness" or "desert" where Jesus was tested by Satan (1:12-13), yet it is also a place of solitude where Jesus can gain divine solace in prayer with his father. There is contrast between Jesus, who wants to be alone with God, and his disciples, who in 1:36 are attracted to Jesus. This concludes Mark's portrait of twenty-four hours at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and it is appropriate that it end with prayer.

Mark 1:36-37

Simon and the others started looking for him. 37 And when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you!"

The four disciples from 1:16-20 are still with Jesus, and they, as the Bible puts it, "hunt him down", obviously because they are caught up in his popularity. In effect, this becomes the source of a new temptation for Jesus, the path of opportunism and desire for fame. Here they want spectacular miracles rather than the kingdom truths and the call for repentance. Jesus, however, intends to move in a different direction. The problem with the crowds here in Mark 1 is that they are filled with wonder and follow Jesus everywhere but fail to commit to him. Their desire is for the spectacular miracles but not for the gospel truths. This problem will continue throughout Jesus' ministry and at the end the crowds will join the leaders in seeking his death (15:11-15)ⁱ

This Gospel passage indicates the tension in Jesus' life between outreach and withdrawal, or a rhythm of action and prayer. In the last part of the final verse, Mark suggests that this division collapses and that even in the desert Jesus is not away from the crowds that need healing.ⁱⁱ



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THE WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

The key to this passage is that it contains Mark's first explicit reference to Jesus' prayer. Mark wishes to underline the fact that Jesus' mission cannot be described simply as a mission of love. If it were, he would surely have stayed to meet the needs of those who were searching for him so keenly.

His mission, rather, was to mediate the love of the Father to people, and to do so always in obedience to God's will.

Hence the need for prayer. In fact, he discerns in prayer that it is God's will for him to move on. The whole of Galilee must know of and experience the good news. It is surely appropriate to speculate that obedience in this case would not have been easy for Jesus. Who finds it easy to leave people when they want us as much as those people wanted him? Jesus remained continually attentive to the Spirit of the One whose mission he was carrying out. Here we have another lesson in detachment. As we watch Jesus seeking solitude even from the grace filled activity which the Spirit of God was accomplishing in and through him, we are reminded not to neglect the silence of solitary prayer ourselves.ⁱⁱⁱ

John of the Cross has the following advice:

Let those who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and exterior works, observe here that they would profit the Church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half of this time with God in prayer, even though they may not have reached a prayer as sublime as this. They would then certainly accomplish more by one work than they otherwise would by a thousand. For through their prayer they would merit this result, and themselves be spiritually strengthened. Without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm.

– The Spiritual Canticle 29.3

Key themes of Mark include;

Jesus needs time alone with his father

Jesus desires mission rather than popularity but cares for everyone.

When Jesus touches our life, we cannot keep quiet.^{iv}



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- ⁱ Grant R. Osbourne, *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Mark*. (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing, 2014) 31-32.
- ⁱⁱ Daniel Durken OSB. *New Collegeville Bible Commentary New Testament*. (Minnesota, Liturgical press, 2008) 106.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Fallon. *Book one: The gospel of Jesus the messiah Mark 1:14 -8:30*
http://mbfallon.com/mark_commentary/mark_1,14-3,6.pdf
- ^{iv} Grant R. Osbourne, *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Mark*. (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing, 2014) 31



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