

The Priority of Prayer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 October 2021

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad, they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember the Gospels tell the story of Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection, and we're turning this morning in Mark 1, verses 35 through 39.

We're going to be looking at Jesus in His life of prayer. And so I invite you to turn there with me now. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone.

You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

[1 : 1 2] And so that's why we read now together Mark 1, starting at 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.

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, everyone is looking for you. And he said to them, let us go on to the next town so that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.

And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we thank You that You do speak to us, and we simply ask that You would do that this morning.

We confess that we are simple people and often hard of hearing. And so we ask that You would soften our hearts and speak clearly to us that we would love You and that we would serve You, not because we hope to earn anything, but because of what You have already done for us through Your Son.

And it's in His name that we pray, the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. If you remember from previously in the Gospel of Mark, you know that Jesus has had this exceptionally long day.

[2 : 3 1] We could go back all the way when He arrived in Capernaum. On Saturday morning, He was preaching in the synagogue, and then while He was preaching, He had this man interrupt Him who was yelling.

This man had an evil spirit, so Jesus had to perform this exorcism in the middle of the sermon. Then Jesus leaves the synagogue. He goes home. Surprise, surprise, when He shows up at the house of Simon and Andrew.

Simon's mother-in-law is sick near death, so He has to raise her from the dead. Now, we don't know at that point whether Jesus took a nap in the afternoon, but what we do know is that that night, once it was sunset, their whole house, we're told, was surrounded by people coming for healing.

And so Jesus has been working. He apparently got up early, probably, to prepare to preach, and then He's up late at night healing people and casting out demons. And so the point is this.

As we look at this passage, Jesus' Saturday was epic. Jesus had a super long Saturday, and anyone deserves a lazy Sunday.

[3 : 34] It is Jesus, and it's with that that we come to verse 35. It is what makes verse 35 so shocking and unexpected. Jesus has had this incredibly long day of ministry where He's been preaching, casting out demons and healing.

And then we see this. 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.

And so we expect Jesus to sleep in, and He, in fact, does the opposite. He goes out somewhere very early, probably skipping some of the rest that He needs to pray.

Now, there's a lot of different directions we could take this. We could go really legalistic with it. And I could tell you, you know what? If you want to be a faithful Christian, you need to be getting up at 4.30 a.m. to pray.

Jesus got up early before it was dark. You need to get up early before it's dark, too. Oh, you're not doing that? You're failing as a Christian. Some of the morning people might be thinking, yes, we knew that Jesus was an early bird.

[4 : 41] He's like us. We need to be like Jesus. Now, if you say that, that's okay. You just need to be consistent, okay? So if we're going to follow Jesus in His model of getting up early in the morning, I just hope that you're also following Jesus in His model of staying up late with tax collectors and sinners, okay?

We just need to be consistent. Maybe if you're a night owl, you're feeling some shame and embarrassment, right? Jesus is able to get up early in the morning. Why can't you? So we could be really legalistic about it.

Another direction I could take this is I could just shame you all. That'd be really fun. I could say, when was the last time that you went to a desolate place to pray?

Oh, you can't remember? It's time to man up, get to work, okay? Everyone could say, yes, we're going to try so much harder. Legalism and shame here miss the point that Mark is teaching us in this passage.

And the point is simply this. Jesus made prayer a priority. Jesus made prayer a priority because, and as we follow Him, we make prayer a priority as well.

[5 : 52] We're going to see two points this morning, the priority in prayer and the peace of prayer. First of all, the priority of prayer. Here, Jesus is showing us the opposite of shame and legalism.

Jesus knew He had to stop. Prayer is not a performance here for Jesus. In fact, He is stopping performing. He is crying out to God for help. It would have been easy, perhaps tempting, for Jesus to just continue doing ministry, right?

It would have been easy for Him to just keep continuing healing and doing exactly what people wanted of Him. But as we see here, He disappoints them, right? Jesus does not meet people's expectations.

He decides to take a break. He here is doing the opposite of performing. He's crying out to God for help. Jesus is our model, right? We talked last week about the fact that the Gospels show us models.

Jesus needed prayer. How much more do we need prayer? Jesus made prayer a priority. How much more do we make prayer a priority?

[6 : 53] Of course, it's going to look different for different people, right? Not everyone is going to be in the position of getting up early in the morning before it's light and going to a desolate place.

Jesus had the advantage of being single. And Jesus, surprisingly enough, did not have any kids at home. And so, you know, different things look different for different people. There's a lot of great and beautiful and wonderful things that come with being single.

There's a lot of great and beautiful and wonderful things that come with being married. You may be familiar with the story of Susanna Wesley, who lived in the 17th and 18th centuries in England.

And she was the mother of the preachers John and Charles Wesley. Susanna had many challenges. She raised 10 children, several of whom were extremely challenging. Her husband was a liability to her, not an asset.

He was terrible with money. He would abandon the family from time to time. He was a pastor, and his congregation hated him so much that they burned his house down a couple times. So Susanna had a lot of challenges in front of her, and so she established this practice.

[7 : 57] Obviously, she couldn't get up early in the morning and go to a desolate place, and so she told her children that if she put her apron over her head, that was the sign for them to leave her alone because she was praying.

And so from time to time, Susanna Wesley would take her apron, she'd whip it over her head, create a little tent, and her children knew that unless there was a dire emergency, they shouldn't do anything to bother her, right?

And so in the midst of business, in the midst of life, she makes prayer a priority. So that's the first thing we see here. We make prayer a priority as well.

Now this passage, as I mentioned, isn't here to shame us. Instead, it simply shows us our need. Part of how we read the Gospels is we look for models, and conveniently enough, the disciples here are a negative model for us.

The disciples show us what happens when we don't pray. They show us why we need prayer. Look with me now at verses 36 and 37.

[8 : 59] It tells us we're with him, search for Jesus. We can assume this is probably Simon and Andrew and James and John. So these four brothers, two sets of brothers, are frantically looking for Jesus.

And there's sort of this frantic energy that they have in this passage. You can tell there's also a disappointment they have in Jesus. Verse 37, everyone is looking for you. And so they're ruled by something.

Maybe they're ruled here by fear and anxiety. What's going to happen if we can't find Jesus? There's all these needs around us. Maybe they're ruled by pride and ambition. There's something exciting about the fact that they're the ones who are close to Jesus.

Jesus is doing these amazing things. Probably there's even more people waiting at the door on Sunday morning, right? They're there to get a taste of the healing and experience of Jesus' power.

Wouldn't it be great if the disciples could be a part of that? The high could continue. Except that Jesus has disappeared. And so they're searching here.

[9 : 59] They're frustrated. They're ruled by the needs and the circumstances of the moment. They are not, like Jesus, tethered and connected with God and his greater plan.

And so they're in the wind, being blown in whatever direction it goes. Brothers and sisters, do you want to be ruled by fear and anxiety and ego?

If you do, make sure you never pray. Do you want to be ruled by fear and anxiety? Do you want to be ruled by the needs of the moment?

Make sure you never, ever pray. Jesus here has the peace of God. His disciples do not. Jesus here is filled with the peace of God.

His disciples are not. Jesus doesn't change his pace based on anxiety. There's plenty of people who need Jesus. There's plenty of people who are clinging for him and grasping for him.

[11 : 02] Jesus doesn't adjust his schedule based on that. He doesn't let that rule him. Jesus' pace and his focus are not determined solely by the circumstances around him.

Why? Because Jesus knows his identity. Remember, earlier in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, God comes, God the Father says, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

Jesus is securely attached to his Father. There's a calm and a peace that Jesus has here. Jesus has the ability to step away from things.

Jesus has the ability not to blow in the wind of whatever's going on at that moment. Jesus knows who he is. Jesus knows where he belongs.

Jesus knows who he belongs to. He belongs to his Father in heaven. Jesus knows why he's on the earth. Jesus knows exactly what he's supposed to be doing.

[12 : 03] Jesus knows exactly what he's not supposed to be doing. When there's a drought, Jesus has this deep reservoir that he can draw on.

This reservoir that's deep, deep below present anxieties, present circumstances. Jesus has access to a different water table.

Jesus actually has the peace of God. Jesus always responds. He never reacts. Jesus always responds.

He never reacts. He never reacts. You might think of life sort of like a kite, right? It's blown around by the wind. Whatever direction the wind goes in, that's the direction the kite goes in.

If you just let a kite go off by itself, it's going to just float off, right? It's going to escape you if it's a windy day. Unless what? Unless the kite is tethered to something. Unless it's tied to something.

[13 : 05] Jesus is tied. He's tethered. He's connected to his father in prayer. And so the winds that blow are not going to carry him away.

Jesus is able to stand calm. He's able to stand firm. Not so for the disciples. Jesus always responds. He never reacts. We're told about this in Matthew chapter 6.

Jesus is talking to his disciples and he asks them this question. Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

[14 : 14] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Jesus tethers his people.

Prayer connects us to him. There's a rhythm, there's a steadiness to the lilies of the field, right? They work with the seasons. Lilies aren't sitting out anxious about whether they're going to have the right colors.

Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. God wants his children to come to him in prayer, being reminded of what's true, taking trust and hope and confidence in him, so that no matter what happens in this world, we are firm and steady.

We have trust and dependence on our Father God. The psalmist in Psalm 56 says, When I am afraid, I trust in you. And the psalmist is saying that in prayer to God.

Psalm 112, For the righteous will never be moved. He will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news. His heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.

[15 : 22] Jesus is rooted and grounded in his identity through prayer to his Father. We can be rooted and grounded as well in our identity through prayer to our Father God.

Prayer reminds us that we're not in control. Prayer reorients us to reality. Prayer reminds us of who we are. Prayer gives us peace because, and as it reminds us of all of those things, God is the one who is in charge and takes care of us.

And so Philippians chapter 4 is true of us, right? That the opposite of anxiety is prayer. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And so we have not just the priority of prayer, but we understand our reason for prayer.

We have the peace of prayer. Jesus has peace here that his disciples do not. We can have that peace as well as we follow after Jesus, staying connected and tethered to our Father God.

[16 : 38] Now, I told you that we were going to have three points, priority or two points, priority of prayer, peace of prayer, and I notice we have some time. So we're going to do the direction of prayer as well.

Okay, 3035 verses 38 and 39. What's Jesus' response to them? They come with this anxiety to him. They know all these people want healing.

What does Jesus tell them? Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there, for that is why I came out. And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Jesus has clarity about his mission. Jesus knows why he's supposed to be there. Jesus doesn't get caught up in sideways motion. Jesus is moving forward with what his Father has given him to do.

Why? Jesus reorients himself in prayer. It is not a coincidence that Jesus returns from ministry to prayer and his Father and is then able to go out again with clarity about what it is that he's supposed to be doing.

[17 : 43] His prayer is not an end in and of itself. Jesus does not lock himself away in prayer for days and weeks. He knows that it is supposed to be something that's supposed to fill him up to send him out, right?

When I go to the gas station and I fill up my car, I don't do it because I'm a legalist or I'm very disciplined. I do it because I want to be able to keep going.

I do it because once upon a time, many years ago, back in I think it was 2012, I drove down to South Carolina to celebrate Easter with a friend and I stopped looking at my gas gauge and I ran out of gas and had to go off to the side of the road.

And the state trooper had to come pick me up, take me to a gas station. They loaned me a tank. I filled it up, had to take it back to my car to fill it up, and then I had to drive back to the gas station to give them the tank back.

And the trooper was very kind, except he gave me a talking to about giving the tank back because he said, I know these people at the gas station, so if you don't give them the tank back, I'm going to get in trouble. So fear not, I gave them the tank back.

[18 : 50] Why did I fill up? Because I had to keep going down to South Carolina, right? I didn't fill up my gas tank and then park in the parking lot of the gas station, turn on my radio and take a nap.

Prayer here serves a purpose. It reorients us and sends us back out on God's mission. Jesus has tremendous clarity about what he's supposed to be doing. He returns to his Father to be reconnected in his identity and his mission, receiving the help and the empowerment that he needs.

Remember, he's coming with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and so it's the entire Trinity that's at work in Jesus' ministry. As he prays, he's prepared and ready to go back out again. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us.

If we have any hope in this world of accomplishing what God has given for us in his mission, we must return to him in prayer. Jesus needed prayer for his mission.

How much more do we need it? And getting back to Jesus' peace, we see Jesus had a greater purpose here than simply healing people.

[19 : 58] It's been noted by many that Jesus could have stayed in Capernaum for a long time, right? He could have kept healing. And yet Jesus goes out because he knows he has a task to accomplish.

Tells us in verse 38 what that is. That is why I came, referring to going to the next towns, that I may preach there also. And so Jesus prays.

He makes it a priority, not just to give him the peace of the Father, but also give him the power of the Father for his mission that he's come to the earth to fulfill. And so we see him, verse 39, doing the same thing that he's been doing all along.

He came to Capernaum. He's healing and casting out. He goes out to the surrounding cities. He heals and he casts out. Jesus is our model for us.

He prays. We follow him in prayer. We follow him in prayer, not out of legalism. And we follow him in prayer, not out of shame. We follow him in prayer because we know that is the way that our Father God comes.

[21 : 03] And as we live in this life, he fills up our tank. He comes and gives us everything that we need so that we can keep going.

In his book on prayer, called *Prayer*, Pastor Tim Keller tells the story of he and his wife Kathy as they went through an incredibly difficult time in their life.

Kathy was struggling with Crohn's disease and Tim had thyroid cancer. And they had reached a new level of conflict and struggle in their lives, feeling the opposition and the challenge around them.

And so Kathy finally came to Tim and posed a thought experiment to him. And this was a thought experiment to explain how important it was that they as a couple pray together, not just from time to time, but every day.

And so she said this to Tim. Imagine you were diagnosed with such a lethal condition that the doctor told you that you would die within hours unless you took a particular medicine, a pill every night before going to sleep.

[22 : 13] Imagine that you were told that you could never miss it or you would die. Would you forget? Would you not get around to it some nights? No, it would be so crucial that you wouldn't forget.

You would never miss. Well, if we don't pray together to God, we're not going to make it because of all we're facing. I'm certainly not. We have to pray.

We can't let it just slip our minds. If we don't pray together to God, we're not going to make it because of all that we're facing.

Kathy wasn't longing for more prayer with her husband because she wanted to pat herself on the back for being a good and disciplined Christian. And she wasn't longing for prayer with her husband because she was feeling embarrassed about their lack of prayer.

Kathy was longing for more prayer because she knew it was the only way their tank was going to be filled for the journey that she and Tim had together moving forward. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us.

[23 : 17] Tim goes on to say that that was the point at which the other shoe finally dropped for him. And since that time, he and Kathy never missed an evening of prayer together, even if it was only for a few minutes over the phone.

They knew the importance of the peace of prayer and they desperately needed the direction of prayer. Now, if you're a close reader of Scripture, you might be thinking, Matthew, that sounds great that Jesus had all this peace, but what about the time that he didn't have peace?

What about the time that Jesus was praying and while he was praying, he was sweating drops of blood, as Luke tells us in his gospel? Well, yes, that's true.

Why? Jesus was sweating drops of blood there and only there. We see Jesus there and only there because it is then that he is facing separation from his Father.

If his peace comes from being connected and tethered to God, imagine what it's like knowing that connection is going to be cut. We see Jesus' pain and agony in being separated from his Father.

[24 : 39] And Jesus runs to him in prayer. If Jesus runs then, how much more should we? Brothers and sisters, Jesus gave up his access to the Father on the cross so that you and I could have access to him now forever and whenever we need it.

Jesus died and was separated from his Father God so that you could be connected to him. And so that is the reason and the only reason that we run to him in prayer.

That's why we make prayer a priority. That's why it's the place that we experience peace. And that's why it's the place that gives us our direction and our focus and our purpose.

Jesus sacrificed communion with his Father. He gave up his secure connection so that we could have it. And so, brothers and sisters, we pray to him and we worship him so that we can have the peace that Paul talks about in Philippians 4, the peace that passes all understanding.

Please pray with me. Our Father in heaven, we thank you now that we can pray to you and we ask that we wouldn't take it for granted. But instead, you would stir up in our hearts a longing and a desire to be more and more connected to you, that you would use our prayers in a powerful way to give us your peace, the peace that passes all understanding, and to give us your direction and your power for the mission that you've called us to.

[26 : 12] We thank you that it's not our mission, but it's something that we simply follow Jesus in. And so we pray these things in his mighty name. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.