

Mark

Section 1 – 9 weeks

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This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

The message in this lesson, is one that was faithfully preached in the early days of the church; but somewhere along the way - and perhaps in multiple small steps - it has been abandoned. Preachers and teachers appear to have come to the place where we would rather give a message on current events or perhaps a message that will please the people.

If I have a complaint - my complaint isn't directed to the congregations; my complaint is directed toward the preachers and teachers who have abandoned the Word of God for the programs and messages of man.

Many of us in this congregation have enjoyed the blessing of a deeper experience with the Holy Spirit. As we moved from our traditional churches where the contemporary works and manifestations of the Holy Spirit were denied; we found ourselves in places where this message was abandoned. And the message was all about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit; or the message was all about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Some of you have heard me say this before - I am not ashamed to confess that I have been blessed to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. I am not ashamed to confess that I have been blessed to receive some divine gifts of the Holy Spirit. But it was never God's intent that we should abandon the message in this lesson for the message of the Holy Spirit. It was always God's intent that we preach them together.

So - what is this message ?

Read Mark 1:1-3 and make notes:

In the writing of the gospel, Mark mentions nothing about the birth of Jesus, and nothing regarding his childhood. Mark declares that the "gospel" begins with the preaching of John the Baptist. The "gospel", in its unfolding, has a beginning, a continuing middle, and an end.

The beginning of the "gospel" can be seen as either the Old Testament; with John the Baptist as its summarizing type; or John the Baptist as the final stages of the old covenant. There are many who believe that with Baptism, the old covenant ends and the new covenant begins.

The implications are that those who have not accepted Jesus Christ as Savior are still under the Law. And those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior are under Grace. The inauguration of the new covenant is in the ministry of John the Baptist. Take a look at Matthew 11:13.

John the Baptist is the crown of all the prophetic tradition. The "beginning" of the gospel is tied intricately into a single movement that consist of the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist - and the personal teaching ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is important for us to recognize that the word "gospel" was not a word coined by the early Christians. The term "gospel" - or the Greek word "*evangel*" was significant to both the pagans and to the Jews of that day.

To the Romans, it meant "joyful tidings." They routinely used this term to announce a favorable proclamation from the emperor or the announcement of a celebration. The Romans would hear Mark's words as saying the coming of Jesus' ministry was something that would be good for us and something we would be happy about.

The meaning of this term wasn't really that different for the Jews. But the connected statement by Mark gives considerable depth to its meaning for the Jews of that day. Mark proclaimed Jesus' ministry to be the fulfillment of old Hebrew prophetic promises of a coming Messiah.

Mark connected the coming of Jesus' ministry to the prophecies in Isaiah. This is an explicit reference to the "good news" of a salvation for the Jews, and indeed for all of mankind.

One interesting thing we can note - as you read through the gospel of Mark, you can't help but notice that Mark gives much less emphasis to the teachings of Jesus than the other gospel writers. Mark appears to be much more focused upon the historical content of the Messiah Jesus Christ and the message of salvation.

In the latter half of Isaiah's writings, there is a promise of a future salvation. Mark's opening statement indicates the proper understanding of Jesus' ministry is to be found in this context. We find in the opening statement of Mark a composite of quotations from Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1; and Isaiah 40:3. These passages clearly invoke the image of the forerunner - "Elijah."

I don't have any way of knowing if Mark was aware of this; but the rabbis of this day, had already connected these passages and decided that the "messenger of the covenant" is Elijah. This is determined from reading some of the writings of that era. And even though the rabbis had difficulty accepting Jesus as the Messiah - they did at least already have the concept that when Elijah did come - prior to the coming of the Messiah - it would indicate the coming of a "new covenant."

Read Luke 1:17 and make notes:

John the Baptist was prophesying in the wilderness; in the spirit; and in the power of Elijah. Mark 1, verse 3, tells us in summary form what John the Baptist was saying in the power and spirit of Elijah; "prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

Can you imagine the impact one like John the Baptist had upon the people of his day? He emerged from the wilderness clothed in strange garments. He didn't socialize with the people - and he didn't eat their customary food. He was "different."

John the Baptist was in the desert and wilderness from some time in his childhood until the day he made his public appearance as a prophet – about the age of 30 years old. He would come into town dressed a little strange for his day; proclaim his message; and then go back into the wilderness.

So here comes this man - prophesying among the people. He is wearing a robe made of camel's hair; eating locust and wild honey; and wearing his hair in the tradition of the Nazarite vow. This is something the common people had only heard about but had not seen in their lifetime. Can you understand how this man alarmed the people ?

For those who were more worldly minded - This man must be some kind of a nut case. But for those who were familiar with the Scriptures - this man had the markings of a divine messenger. They would have recognized the Nazarite hair style. They would have recognized the Nazarite dietary standards. They certainly would have connected his words with what the Scriptures say; "The voice of one crying in the wilderness."

We can make some interesting connections with the words in this verse. A "voice" could indicate preaching; while "crying" could indicate a call to repentance. A "voice" has the connotation of comfort - or maybe the singing of mercy. A "cry" has the connotation of declaring danger - or maybe announcing judgment.

The words in Mark's gospel take two prophecies - spoken by two different prophets - at two different times - and brings them together for one message: "as it is written in Isaiah" (Isaiah 40:3 & Isaiah 38:10-20); then from Malachi 3:1 - "I send my messenger before me."

The beginning of the gospel is undeniably connected with Hebrew Scripture. The opening words of Mark indicate the "good news" of Jesus Christ is inseparable from the preparation of the arrival of this "good news" that was provided through the ministry of John the Baptist.

The "good news" has everything to do with Jesus Christ. But this "good news" begins with the wilderness prophet we call John the Baptist.

Mark isn't just celebrating the ministry of John the Baptist. Mark is celebrating the redemptive activity of God that has provided salvation for mankind. The way of the Lord must be prepared within the heart. This is just as true today as it was in the day when John the Baptist first proclaimed it.

I know many people today just don't understand this. The objections go something like: "Jesus can walk on water" - "Jesus can walk through walls and locked doors" - "Jesus can just appear and disappear" - "it doesn't matter what obstacles might be outside the door to our heart" - "Jesus can just pass through them all."

These statements regarding Jesus' ability are true. The concept of the path outside our heart is ALL WRONG !

Read Revelation 3:20 and make notes:

Jesus is already outside the door to our heart. Jesus is knocking. Jesus is really hoping that we will open the door. And if we do, He will come in and fellowship with us.

The path to our hearts door needs to be prepared. It is this path that is on the inside. It is OUR PATH to our hearts door that needs to be prepared to receive the Savior of the world.

In the days when the gospel of Mark was written, the people had a clear picture of "paths" and what it meant to make them straight, and what it meant to prepare a path for someone. The low places would hold water and become muddy. These would become a place where people, animals, and carts would become bogged down and unable to go any further.

There were places where trees had fallen across the path and these were the places where a person might have to unload everything they were carrying and throw it over the tree and then try to climb over themselves. There were places where a huge boulder had fallen from the mountain side and is now blocking the path. This huge rock has to be broken into smaller pieces and each one removed or it had to be rolled out of the way.

When they heard that someone special was coming they would go out and "prepare the path"; it might be the path to their town; or it might be the path to their home. The idea was; they wanted the "special someone" to be able to get to them and they wanted to be able to get to the special someone. They would prepare the path by getting rid of the places that cause them to get bogged down; they would clear the obstacles that made it difficult to pass this way.

Guilt from past sins that we have not confessed, stand as boulders in the pathway to our hearts door. We might really want to get to the door of our heart but we just can't get to the door because of this guilt. A current sinful lifestyle that we just don't want to give up, stands as a muddy bog that stops us in our tracks and keeps us from being able to get to the door of our heart. Resentment - unforgiveness - or bitterness toward others, all are obstacles to us getting to our hearts door. Those who have loved someone and then have been really hurt by the one they loved; often have a hard time opening the door to their heart to another person. Unfortunately, they often are the one who pushed all this stuff in front of the door themselves.

By the time we become an adult - most of us have many obstacles that make it difficult for us to get to the door of our heart, in order to open it. For those who do not yet know Jesus as Savior; it is a matter of "life and death" that they get this message to prepare the way for the Lord - Make straight paths in your heart to him.

For a great majority of Christians; it is a matter of peace and joy that they get this message to prepare the way for the Lord - Make straight paths in your heart to him.

Jesus wants to be much more than “just our Savior.” Jesus wants to come in and fellowship with us and to make it possible for us to fellowship with Him.

There are so many more obstacles to be removed for adults than youth. There is so much more work to be done to prepare the way of the Lord in the heart of an adult, than there is in the heart of a child. If we can help the children prepare the way for the Lord; if we can help the children make straight paths for Him; not only will it be less work for them to receive Jesus as Savior; it will be less work for them to be able to fellowship with Jesus.

So we need to prepare, in our hearts, the way of the Lord. We need to keep the path of our life straight, so the words of God can enter in with little or no hindrance. And it needs to be more than just one preacher telling people "to prepare the way for the Lord" - "make straight paths for him." Everyone who is a Christian needs to be a part of the proclaiming of this message loud and clear; to everyone we come into contact with.

If you don't feel you have been equipped by God to be the one who literally speaks this message; then find a place in the support network of the church that makes it possible for others to be able to proclaim it. God has blessed this church with people who can boldly speak the Word of God to those they meet. But sometimes they are not available to speak to others because they are behind the scenes doing support work for the church.

We need those who can make sure the physical things of the church and its facilities are taken care of. We need those who can make sure that the church, its leaders, and its people, are constantly covered in intercessory prayer. We need those who can follow God's leading in how to make money to place into the offering. We need those who can visit the sick and the shut-ins.

There is a huge list of support jobs that are required to make it possible for the ones with the speaking gifts; to be busy "speaking the message:" "prepare the way of the Lord;" "make straight paths for him." When someone finally hears the message and responds to the message; and makes the path straight; and is able to get to the door of their heart; and open it to allow Jesus to come in - every person who provided one of the support positions gets as much credit in the eyes of the Lord as does the person who spoke the message to them.

And don't overlook this - sometimes - the best way to get a message to someone; is to "live the message" where they can see it and witness it - rather than just telling them. So - we really do need some people who are faithfully and openly living their life in such a way that it is clear to anyone who watches - that they are preparing the way of the Lord – and they are making straight paths for him.

If you need Jesus as Savior today - Won't you please prepare the way in your heart for him; please make a straight path to the door of your heart; and then open it to him?

Maybe you are a Believer today who just doesn't experience daily fellowship with Jesus any more. Maybe you are one who has allowed hurts, guilt, shame, or other things to block the path to your heart's door.

Even though you are a Christian - are you finding it difficult to get to the door of your heart? You just can't seem to open the door and allow Jesus to come in and fellowship together.

Won't you please prepare the way for the Lord? Won't you please make a straight path to the door of your heart and open the door wide? Won't you commit to help me get this message out?

Even if we hear and understand the message about being Baptized in the Holy Spirit - the message will not be useful to us if we cannot let Jesus into our heart. Even if we hear and understand the message about receiving Gifts of the Holy Spirit - the message will not be useful to us if we cannot let Jesus in to fellowship with us.

Now that you know what happens to people who were once working and moving in the divine power of the Holy Spirit; but today don't seem to do much of anything. Will you please "prepare the way for the Lord"? Will you please "make straight paths for him"?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

When John the Baptist came on the scene, his appearance, without question, was the most important thing to happen in the life of Israel for over 300 years. Many people believe and teach that the 300-400 years before Christ came was a time when Israel had no prophets. They often teach God was silent to Israel during this time. There are even those who have interpreted this alleged silence to indicate that the prophetic ministry had come to a close. They will usually say that the prophetic work was complete.

Personally, I am not willing to say God was silent during this time. While I have no proof that God continued to speak to His people. Something inside me tells me that God is unlikely to leave His people without an encouraging word or perhaps an instructive word. It is more likely that nothing new was said during this time. Nothing was said that needed to be written down to be included in our Bible. Whether God had prophets for His people or whether He was indeed silent during this time makes no difference to the message.

About the time John the Baptist appeared in ministry, there was a group of committed and dedicated followers of Yahweh that were called the Essenes. This was a group of men who were radical in their faith. They held strong beliefs that the Old Testament faith was best followed in the wilderness.

The Essenes established centers in the wilderness that were a lot like the monasteries in more recent times. They were trying with all their might to live a life in honor and worship of God. They did not marry - they did not partake of the pleasures of life - they shunned social contact with the average people.

There are a number of people who have suggested that John the Baptist was a member of the Essenes. It is easy to find some similarities in the lifestyle of John the Baptist and the Essene community. However, when we look closely at the two, there are too many differences between them - to say John the Baptist was an Essene.

John the Baptist was on a mission from God. The spirit of God was mighty upon him even in his mother's womb. For whatever reason, God had John to live in the wilderness for several years. It probably wasn't because he was member of the Essene community. It is more likely that it was necessary for John to live away from society at large, in order for him to maintain his Nazarite vows.

The ministry of John the Baptist was very short. His ministry career was of a divine appointment in the fulfillment of prophecy. History has shown that in many cases it doesn't take a lot of time to accomplish an assignment when divinely appointed.

Verses 4-8 of chapter one, briefly and concisely describe John the Baptist's ministry in the gospel of Mark. The things that are told to us in this short passage are:

- (1) John was a man of the wilderness and not of society;
- (2) John performed his ministry of baptism in the wilderness and somehow prepared the way of the Lord;
- (3) John announced the coming of one who was greater than himself.

Read Mark 1:4-5 and make notes:

John's invitation for people to come and be baptized was not something unique and special. Baptism in itself was not a new thing in particular. Gentiles who desired to follow the Jewish faith, were expected to take a ceremonial bath upon completion of the rites of initiation into the Jewish faith. What was special about John's invitation was that he was inviting people to participate in a "baptism OF repentance FOR the forgiveness of sins."

The Jewish proselytes took their ceremonial bath in a large stone pot. John was inviting people to be baptized in the Jordan river. The ceremonial bath was for Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. John was inviting Jews to be baptized. To the Jews who were paying attention and who were familiar with Scripture; they probably made the connection. The concept of "turning from their ways" was an essential element of prophetic words from those like Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah, among others.

John invited the people of his day to purge themselves of whatever contamination or impurity that had managed to sneak into their lives - their attitudes - their hearts.

John preached a "baptism of repentance FOR the forgiveness of sins." This was a reference to the future forgiveness of sin, not that the baptism itself provided forgiveness of sin. This baptism of repentance is a major part of "preparing the way."

If the people could repent for their sins - how much more easily they would be able to receive the forgiveness that was soon to be made available to all of mankind. If the people could NOT bring themselves to repent for their sins - how difficult they would find it to receive the forgiveness that was soon to be made available.

This invitation by John was a very practical aspect of "preparing the way for the Lord" It was not just a religious activity. We can't help but wonder how much it might have spoken to the Jews of that day; when John invited them to come out into the wilderness for their baptism of repentance

The Jews knew their beginning as a unified people began in the wilderness. The Jews also knew that as a whole, they had departed from the faith their forefathers had in the wilderness. The Jews knew that the daily fellowship with God which their forefathers had enjoyed in the wilderness was not being enjoyed by them today.

Did John's invitation sound like the prophets of old; calling the people "back" to where they had met God before? For many of them I believe it did!

The Jewish people had been separated from the sinful influence of Egypt by a pilgrimage through the water of the Red Sea. Now the Jews are being exhorted by this John the Baptist to come away from the society of that day. And to take a spiritual pilgrimage through water For the forgiveness of sin.

There is some significant symbolism in this for the Jew that many of us Gentiles can easily miss. For the people to respond to John's invitation was much more than an act of contrition and the confession of sin. To the Jew, going into the wilderness was a return to a place of judgment. The wilderness was also the place where Israel, as God's loved children, must exchange pride for humility.

For the Jew to willingly go into the wilderness was to admit that they recognized their disobedience and rebellion toward God. And that they had a personal desire to begin once again with God and His plan.

That is the major reason people are invited to come forward in the church today. It gives people an opportunity to admit that they recognize they need forgiveness; and they have a personal desire to begin afresh and new with God.

The next time the devil whispers in your ear "you can make things right - but don't go to the altar - just stay in your chair"; decide for yourself what this says about beginning with God and about your heart's attitude.

Read Mark 1:6 and make notes:

The mention of John's clothing and his food are not minor details. This clothing identifies him as a man of the wilderness - rather than a man of society - or rather than a man of organized religion of his day. The reference to the leather belt around his waist would not have been a small detail to the Jews of his day. This was a characteristic feature of another man of the wilderness who was significant to Israel – Elijah. Hair from sheep would have the smell and feel of luxury as compared to the hair of a camel.

John could have never worn a purple robe; let alone a linen garment. He was committed to a life of simplicity and frugality. His meals of locust and wild honey give us a similar message as did his camel hair robe. He was committed to a life of simple meals. He preferred the sweet spiritual food from God over the best seasoned earthly food. John the Baptist had a very spiritual mother and his father was a prominent priest among the Levites. It doesn't appear that the loving affection of a Godly mother nor the affluence and influence of his father; could entice him to live in his parents house; or any house within the society.

John the Baptist had chosen to keep himself focused on God. He did not want his eyes to be tempted; or his taste buds; or any other part of his flesh.

John appears to have seen the fine garments of the high priest to be of less value than those made of camel's hair. As far as we can tell from the Scriptures; John did not till the soil; he did not plow; he did not plant or reap for his bread; he did not tend a vineyard for his drink. John depended solely upon the Lord God to provide his physical sustenance.

Read Mark 1:7 and make notes:

John's statement that he wasn't even worthy to untie the "thongs of the sandal"; of the one who was coming; is a way of telling the people that the baptism he is offering, is not as valuable as the baptism that will be offered by the one who is coming. The ministry of the one who is coming later is far greater than the ministry I perform.

John's baptism is one that is "OF repentance - FOR forgiveness". The one who is coming will offer a baptism OF "forgiveness" and much more.

It is accepted that John said more words than these few. However, John's message has been summarized or at least focused to the main point of what he had to say.

Isaiah described Israel's pilgrimage through the wilderness as being guided by the Spirit of God. Isaiah also said it was the Spirit of God who gave the people rest in the wilderness. The Old Testament prophets also declared that there would be a time to come; a time in the future; when there would be a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit upon His people.

Read Mark 1:8 and make notes:

The baptism that will be offered by the one who is coming surpasses all of human powers to comprehend. It will contain a glory that is far beyond what man has hoped for and prayed for. John's baptism was one of water - that is a symbol of the Law. The baptism of the one who is coming - will be a baptism of the Holy Spirit - that is all about Grace. And that IS "the gospel".

When John the Baptist says that this "someone who is coming after him" will baptize them with the Holy Spirit; the message is not likely to have gone unnoticed. John's invitation was for the people to come to the wilderness to participate in a baptism of repentance; to prepare a way for the Lord. And that this "someone" was coming to baptize them with the Holy Spirit. This invitation had to fill their hearts with an anticipation of fulfillment of prophetic promise.

John's message didn't just say "okay, everyone, pay attention, the Messiah is on his way." John told the people that preparation to receive the Messiah; included an encounter with a decision!

Would they choose to remain in their sins and face the judgment that had been prophesied would follow the coming of the Messiah? Or would they choose to acknowledge their need for repentance ? And openly do so?

What is revealed to us in this short passage is not simply that John the Baptist came and announced the coming of the Messiah. He also included the message that the preparation for receiving Jesus into our life includes an encounter with a decision to be made!

Will we choose to face judgment for our sins? Or will we choose to acknowledge our need for forgiveness? And openly repent and submit to be cleansed from our sins?

It should not have to be explained. Those who are lost need to repent of their sins in order to prepare to receive Jesus into their hearts and life. It is time for Saved People to acknowledge that we sometimes SIN! It is time for God's people to grow up and mature enough to acknowledge that we need to repent of our sins in order to prepare to receive Jesus into our daily life.

If we cannot admit that we have sinned; if we cannot repent of our sins; how difficult is it for us to receive Jesus into our life for daily fellowship? How difficult is it for us to receive the daily ministry and divine working of the Holy Spirit in us and through us?

When we can admit that we have sinned and repent of our sins; we will discover that we are prepared to receive Jesus into our daily lives for fellowship; and for divine working of the Holy Spirit in us and through us. And then, we will begin to see our communities change for the good!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

If we were to baptize an object in blue paint - what would it look like? If we were to baptize an object in yellow paint - what would it look like? If we were to baptize an object in green paint - what would it look like? Can we agree; that when something is "baptized" in something else, that it takes on the "look" of that in which it is baptized? With that simple concept in mind, lets look into then verse for this lesson.

Read Mark 1:9 and make notes:

Earlier, in the gospel of Mark, Jesus was introduced in an indirect manner; "a greater one is coming." Here, He is introduced more directly as "Jesus who comes from Nazareth in Galilee." And specific reference is made to the Jordan river. It is as though we are expected to make the connection between Jesus being baptized and the earlier ministry of John the Baptist.

In the previous verse, John has made it clear that there is a distinctive and marked difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of the one who is coming after him. And now in verse 9 - it is revealed that this very same one who is going to offer mankind such a powerful and life changing baptism; is the one who is presenting himself as the lowly penitent person.

By Jesus submitting to John's baptism, Jesus is acknowledging God's judgment upon the people of God. In verse 5, it was the people from the "Judean countryside" and the people from "Jerusalem." The regions named are those where the recognized people of God reside. These are areas where it is respectable to be from. In verse 9, Jesus is identified as coming from Galilee. He is mentioned singularly, as though he is the only one from Galilee that has come for baptism. While there were crowds of respectable people who came for baptism; only one is mentioned from the non-respectable region of Galilee.

By Jesus being identified with Galilee, he is identified with the rebellious people who are unquestionably in need of redemption. And of all those respectable people, not one of them received any public affirmation from heaven. It was only this one who represented the region of people whom everyone knew needed redemption that received public affirmation from the Heavenly Father.

Read Mark 1:10 and make notes:

Read Isaiah 64:1 and make notes:

In the words of Mark 1:10, we can't help but recognize the distinctive echoes of Isaiah 64:1. In the Exodus from Egypt, God could not come down to them until they were consecrated. Now Jesus had consecrated himself in the baptism of repentance on behalf of every person who would believe in Him.

In the wilderness of their Exodus, the people of God had been declared as a Son of God. Not only the prophet Isaiah, but the prophet Hosea also declared a time would come when God would restore the son-ship of his people.

Here in the baptism of Jesus, in the wilderness, we find the fulfillment of several ancient prophecies concerning this issue. The audible and visual confirmation from heaven leaves no reasonable means of doubting. It takes away any legitimate argument against this not being the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Through the years, the Jewish people have always held the dove to be the symbol of the community of God's people. The Jews have always seen the dove as a symbol of Israel. To all those Jews who were present when Jesus was baptized, this descending of the Holy Spirit like a dove upon Jesus, would not have gone unnoticed. And it certainly would not have gone without having significance. For the symbol of the nation of God's people to descend upon one individual was to tell them that his person is a true Israelite. And the audible voice from heaven left no question about him being the object of God's divine love.

This signified to them that he would be competent to fulfill messianic tasks. Unfortunately, it appears as we read the New Testament; the majority of them failed to make the connection until after His resurrection.

From the other gospels, we learn that John the Baptist tried to tell Jesus that he did not need to be baptized by John; but rather John needed to be baptized by Jesus. Can you imagine what blessings you and I would have lost if Jesus had listened to the exhortation of John and had declined his baptism?

The heavens had been shut for a long time. They most likely would have remained shut. Before Jesus' baptism, there was an inaccessible aspect of heaven to earthly man. Earthly man did not have a daily personal fellowship with the Heavenly Father.

When Jesus was baptized, this gate that had been closed for such a long time was opened. Jesus opened the way for the alienated earthly man to come under the umbrella of adoption.

In the opening of heaven, a reconciliation has taken place between Creator and creation. And yes, personal fellowship with the Heavenly Father. At that very moment, a reconciliation took place between the visible and the invisible. And certain enmity was restored to amity.

Can you imagine how nervous John the Baptist might have been. He had a sense that this Jesus was someone divine and even said that Jesus should baptize John instead. And then the divine Jesus insisted that John baptize him.

A number of Bible scholars and theologians through the years have offered several theological reasons why a voice was heard from heaven, and why the Holy Spirit manifested in a visible sign. Since the Bible doesn't tell specifically why these things took place, any one of them might be the right reason. But allow me to share what I believe to be the most likely reason. A reason that is not of a theological nature.

When John baptized Jesus, don't you imagine that there were those who would come to the conclusion that John must be greater than Jesus? Doesn't it just seem reasonable that the greater would baptize the lesser?

If there was any of this kind of thinking and talking going on at that time - wouldn't the voice from heaven and the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit correct this kind of wrong reasoning? This voice from heaven calls forth the message that "Jesus", and not John, is the beloved Son of God. It is the "one baptized" and not the "one baptizing." It is Jesus who was begotten of all time and not John who was begotten of Zechariah.

John was something of a miracle himself, after all he was born of Elizabeth after all reasonable expectation of conceiving had passed. But Jesus was born after the flesh of Mary, and her virginity was still preserved when He was born.

What could possibly have gone through John's mind when this happened? John had already sensed that Jesus was divine and now this public confirmation that Jesus is indeed the beloved Son of God.

Read Mark 1:11 and make notes:

Jesus had no external need of baptism, and yet he freely submitted to John's baptism of repentance. In the baptism of Jesus, the father bore witness, the Son received the witness, and the Holy Spirit gave confirmation.

Jesus did not become Son only at his baptism, for he is eternally the Son of the Heavenly Father. Jesus is Son in an abiding son-ship that the minds of earthly man can only approach in wonder and awe.

From time to time, there are trouble makers who come to a church and say things like "the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in the Bible." There are a number of Scriptures that reveal the ignorance these people have. Or maybe it reveals their intent on causing strife and division within the church. But this passage is one of those that should help you know that these people need to be shut out.

You clearly have the Father, in the voice from heaven; you have the Son, in the form of a man being baptized; and you have the Holy Spirit, descending in the manner of a dove. Here, all three aspects of the Trinity are clearly distinguishable. And yet we must never forget that the Lord is One. We do not have three Gods - we have one.

We have the Father's voice from heaven; the Son in the bodily form he took from a virgin; and the Holy Spirit manifesting in the manner of a dove. The audible manifestation of the Heavenly Father and the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit, affirm the divine Son who is in the physical form of a man.

As we read the rest of the New Testament, we discover that cloaked in this simple statement from the Heavenly Father is a series of very powerful messages, such as:

He is the one who has been named the son of Joseph,
yet I call him my beloved son.

He is the one who will be seen as being hungry,
yet I tell you he will feed countless others.

He is the one who will be seen as one who becomes weary,
yet I tell you he will give rest to the weary.

He is the one who will be seen as having no place to lay his head,
yet I tell you he is the one who bears up all things in his hand.

He is the one you will see as beaten,
yet I tell you he will give liberty to all who come to him.

He is the one you will see pierced,
yet I tell you he is the one who will repair the side of Adam.

This visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit carries a very valuable message for Believers today. The dove is a simple bird. The dove symbolizes innocence, simplicity, and grace. Those who study the habits of the dove learn peace. Anyone who attempts to copy the lifestyle of the dove would indeed be seen as an innocent person. The dove is a stranger to malice. You just don't find any symptoms of bitterness, anger, or indignation in the dove. The dove injures no other creature with its mouth or its talons. The dove doesn't nurture itself or its young on other creatures. It makes its diet of grain and seed.

It was the Holy Spirit that descended. It was simply that the manner of the Holy Spirit's descending was in the manner of a dove's descending. Something of the nature of the Holy Spirit was revealed that day.

The dove was the bird of innocence that proclaimed the earth was delivered from the wrath of God. When Noah sent out the dove, it returned with an olive branch, which is a universal symbol of peace among nations. The dove helps us understand the nature of the Holy Spirit. The dove helps us understand the purity of the Holy Spirit.

The world was once in danger of perishing. A common disaster had overtaken the world and it was consuming the world in sin. When Noah's dove returned, it announced the deliverance had come. When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the manner of a dove, it was a sign that deliverance had come to mankind. This time a dove didn't bring an olive branch; this time "one like a dove" descended upon "the olive branch" for all mankind. In Noah's day, a dove led one family out of an ark. On this day, one like a dove, was pointing out one who could lead the whole world to heaven.

Jesus appeared in the form of man to show a pattern of living. The Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove to show the bestowing of a divine gift that will enable excellent living. Words are sounds that we hear and then quickly fade away.

We can later be convinced that what we think we heard, is not what we actually heard. But have you ever tried to convince someone that what they saw is not what they actually saw?

God gave mankind a visible message that day to accompany the audible message. The image of a dove was given by God so that we may learn the simplicity of life that He desires from us.

Let us learn the principles of an innocent lifestyle. Let us learn the principles of keeping our lifestyle simple and not complicate it so much. Let us make sure that our mouths and hands do not become weapons of devouring others or even injuring others.

Had the Holy Spirit descended like an eagle, how differently we might visualize the type of lifestyle God desired for followers of Christ Jesus. But the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, and this gives us the picture of the type of lifestyle, that followers of Christ Jesus should strive for.

When we truly realize that we are followers and servants of the one who has already defeated the host of hell. He has already defeated death and the grave. He has already defeated sickness and death. We don't feel the need to pull out all our weapons and run into battle in every situation that appears to come against us. We are more likely to feel compassion for those who take up positions against us. For we know that we serve one who is the Lord of all. And He has made us more than conquerors; and He has promised us that we will reign WITH HIM in His victorious "forever".

We KNOW that we Can Indeed Afford to live the simple and innocent life; for it is the Lord of Lords that watches over us day and night.

When someone comes against us; is our first response to attack? Is our attitude one of arrogance or pride? Is this what we see in the Holy Spirit?

Are you one who claims to have been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Then show your lifestyle to be one that is being patterned after the Holy Spirit!

Are you one who would like to have a lifestyle that is patterned after the Holy Spirit of the Living God? Then come to Jesus in repentance of sins. And the allow Jesus to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. Then you will have the power and divine help to live a life patterned after the Holy Spirit.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Maybe you have been taught that it is possible. Maybe you have never heard such a thing. Do you wish we could get to a place where Satan simply couldn't tempt us anymore? Wouldn't it be great; if we could grow to a place where we would become immune to temptation?

Read Mark 1:12 -13 and make notes:

The account of Jesus being baptized is followed by the account of Jesus being tried and tempted in the desert. The phrase "at once" connects the event of Jesus' baptism and his desert temptation.

God did not intend for us to simply see these as two events in Jesus' life; or as two experiences of Jesus. These two events are tied together and it is important that we do not separate them.

It might be a reasonable question for us to ask; "why would God want us to be sure and connect Jesus' baptism event with his being tempted in the desert" ?

The very same Spirit that descended upon Jesus in such a gracious manner; is now the Spirit that sends him into the desert to be tempted by Satan. A number of Bible scholars all but dismiss the temptation account in Mark because it is so brief. They suggest we are much better off reading and studying the event in Matthew or Luke because there is so much more detail.

I believe God had this Bible written the way He wanted it to be written. I am convinced we need to look closely at the account in Mark; as well as the account in the other gospels. And when we see the account in Mark is short and gives what seems to be the most brief of details; then we should say "let's check this out, what does God want me to see here?"

Since there isn't a lot of details, then it is probably safe to suggest that God does not want us to get so involved with the details that we miss some bigger – overall point. Not having a lot of details here in Mark to ponder; we are left with the very basics of the events. One thing this helps us grasp is that even though Jesus was just publicly acknowledged in a divine way; that He is indeed the "beloved Son of God." And that God "is well pleased with him." However, this does not exempt him from being tempted.

This will come as a slap in the face to those who teach that we arrive at a place of being "above temptation" once we "get right with God." I don't know about you; but I am certainly willing to say that "Jesus was right with God" at this point. So right with God in fact, that God was willing to say it out loud.

This should serve as a caution for us today. When we have one of our "mountain top" experiences with God; we need to be careful that we are not tricked into taking on the attitude that we have stepped up to some higher plane and can't be tempted. The truth is; we seem to be tempted the strongest following a significant experience with our Heavenly Father.

This text clearly says "the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert." The Spirit didn't send Jesus into the public arena; not even into the city; but the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert area. That is very different from what we customarily do to those who have just experienced some affirming event from God. We tend to want to send them into the public arena don't we?

This account can also serve as a valid reason why people who "just got saved;" should not be pushed into the ministry immediately. Regardless of how "filled with the spirit" they are; and regardless of how excited they are; those of us with some experience; or at least those who are familiar with this account; know that this person IS Going To Be Tried by Satan!

I have witnessed many exuberant and excited souls become the downcast and dejected discards of the Christian community. They had a significant experience with God. Their church friends and family said things like "wow - you've got a special touch from God"; "you need to be preaching - or you need to become a pastor - or you need to go to the mission field" - "you are so filled with God's presence - Satan can't touch you" - "go get them tiger."

And it looks good when they start. Because we all like to see someone excited about their Lord. But these New Believers are not prepared or equipped to handle the trying and testing and tempting by Satan that will come!

This text tells us that Jesus was in the desert for 40 days. This is a time of symbolic importance to the Jewish people. Moses stayed on Mount Sinai for 40 days; and Elijah wandered in the wilderness to Mount Horeb for 40 days.

The Bible doesn't say these men were in a lush forest. It doesn't say these men were in a land of great bounty. The desert in Jesus' case and the wilderness in Moses' and Elijah's case; indicates a very harsh place to exist. It is one thing to go to the desert and spend a little time there; but it is another thing to be there for an extended period of time.

When you first go to the desert and you get a little thirsty. And the only water you see is dirty. Or even if it is clear; maybe it has an offensive odor or it has a bitter taste. It is easy to pass up the water and continue; after all - we have a standard don't we.

But let us be in the desert for a few days, and our level of thirst is not just huge - it is paramount. How difficult will it be to get us to drink dirty water? How difficult will it be to get us to drink bitter water? Especially, if we are convinced that this foul smelling water is all that is available. Don't you think most of us would drink it?

One of the main points of this text; is that Jesus stayed in the desert for 40 days. That is a long time to be in the desert. That is more than enough time to be really tired; really hungry; and very very thirsty. Surely his resistance would be low at this point and this is the time when Satan came against him.

But please remember; we don't just become weak and vulnerable; only when we are tired, hungry, and thirsty. The truth is that we are quite vulnerable to temptation immediately following a mountain top experience with God. This is often true because we are so much less vigilant. We tend not to be "on guard" for the schemes and traps of Satan.

This text should serve as an example to us. When we have just received forgiveness; let us be vigilant to prayer and fellowship with God. We want to be ready and prepared for the attack of Satan.

When we have just had one of those mountaintop experiences; or we have just been affirmed by God; let us be vigilant to watch after and attend to our Spiritual relationship with Jesus. And to our worship and praise of our heavenly Father.

Satan put forth a considerable effort to frustrate the work of God where Jesus is concerned. That is exactly what Satan tries to do with each and every person who sets out to follow God. And certainly those who set out to serve God.

It is also important for us to recognize that this gospel account DOES NOT record Jesus having a decisive victory in this temptation event. Jesus was sent into the desert to be tried, tested, and tempted by Satan.

This is the point: Believers will be tempted by Satan!

Mark records several attacks by Satan during Jesus' ministry. Believers today will be attacked by Satan during their walk with Christ. While the other gospels give more details overall; Mark does tell us something the others don't.

Jesus was with the wild animals. The wilderness and the desert in both the Old and New Testaments; often refer to times or areas of struggle and hardship. The wilderness and the desert are even associated with the curse; as a result of man's sin in the garden. So the wilderness or desert stands as a symbol of man's lost paradise.

For Jesus to be in the desert, or wilderness, AND to be with the wild animals; is symbolic of peace being restored between man and animals. In the Old Testament, blessing is always associated with cultivated or habitable land. And curse is associated with desert or wilderness.

In the desert, you don't find seed, fruit, water, or growth in any significance. It is very difficult for man to live there. The animals that dwell there are frightening and dangerous.

The Old Testament has several prophecies that tell us the wilderness will one day be transformed into a paradise. This simple little statement in Mark's account gives a small but significant clue. This transformation is being made possible; in some way - or some how - by something in the life of Jesus.

This simple short account in Mark tells us something more than the specific facts of the specific events. It tells us that Jesus confronts the horrors that man faces. Jesus confronts the loneliness that man faces. Jesus confronts dangers that man faces.

Something else is revealed in this text. The angels were there to minister to Jesus. This reveals to us that God's angels are ready to minister to us; if we will just remain faithful. Especially in the wilderness or desert times in our life.

As pointed out earlier; Mark doesn't record Jesus having decisive victory over Satan's temptation. Neither does Mark record an end to the wild animals being with Jesus. Nor does Mark record an end to the angels ministering to Jesus.

Through this simple and concise account in Mark; we are left with the idea that Satan will continue to tempt Jesus. We are left with the idea that the wild animals might just continue to come to Jesus. And we are left with the idea that the angels might just continue to minister to Jesus.

If we will be tempted following a High Point in our spiritual walk; then it is understandable that we will be tempted at any time in our spiritual walk. We, as Believers, are to remain faithful; in our prosperous times AND in our desert times.

Oh yes, we will be tried and tested by Satan; as Satan tries to frustrate God's plans; but we will be affirmed by God. And God will send His angels to minister to our needs. And God may even send wild animals to meet our needs. All of this is to symbolize that He is giving us victory over the curse. Man will have to work; and our work no longer has to be painful. But rather, our work will be fulfilling as well as fruitful.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

There is a bumper sticker that reads; "If you are too busy to go fishing - friend you are too busy." This little saying could be applied to several different things, couldn't it? Pretty often, we allow the circumstances of life to make us too busy to do the important things of life.

Read Mark 1:14-15 and make notes:

I don't know that we should make too much out of it; but it is at least interesting to note. Jesus didn't publicly enter into his ministry until after John the Baptist was arrested. The way the text reads here in the Gospel of Mark, it hints at the possibility that Jesus might have been restrained by the Heavenly Father until the one who proclaimed his coming was removed from the scene.

Whether or not this is the reason, by Jesus not entering into his public ministry until after John was arrested, reduces the reasonable possibility that people might think that John and Jesus were in the same ministry.

Again, just reading the text in Mark, we get the idea that John being arrested might have served as the indicator that "it is time" for Jesus to begin his public ministry.

Please note what it says in Verse 14 - After John was arrested - Jesus went into Galilee preaching. Where did the earlier scripture in Mark say that Jesus came from? Now it makes a point to tell us that Jesus went back to the place where he was from!

Jesus did not begin his preaching in a new place or a strange place. Jesus began his preaching of the Gospel in his home area; among people who knew him and among people he knew.

"The time has come!" We should not read so lightly the words of Jesus recorded here. And we certainly should not be so quick to passed over them.

Jesus is recorded as saying "The time has come." This focuses our attention upon our God who acts; our God who has in the past elected to redeem his people; our God who has in the past pledged a future activity to redeem his people.

Jesus says; this long awaited Critical point in history has arrived; "The time has come."

This is that most wonderful of historical times when our Sovereign God BEGINS to bring about the fulfillment of all those promises of his people being restored to fellowship with him. This is indeed an awesome moment in time!

Many people declare that the New Testament nowhere defines exactly what is meant by the "kingdom of God." While I do disagree with this view; lets just focus for now on what Jesus states in this passage. "The kingdom of God" - whatever that means exactly - "The kingdom of God is NEAR"! However far away the kingdom of God has been, Right now; the kingdom of God is NEAR!

John had proclaimed "the kingdom of God is near." And he used this as a reason why people should come in repentance; to prepare the way of the Lord. Jesus is declaring that "the kingdom of God is near." And He says this is a reason to "repent and believe the good news"!

Just to split hairs for a moment, at this very point, the kingdom of God is still to some degree; in the future for these people; but it is very near. It is in no way as far in the future as it was just a year before.

While it is very likely that none of the people listening actually understood the full message of what Jesus was saying; never-the-less, this is what he said. And we have the advantage of the New Testament to help us grasps the enormous significance of his declaration.

The Anointed One is now present among God's covenant people. And through Him the royal act of redemption is going to take place; very, very soon!

God has invaded the history of man, to secure man's salvation and to deliver it right to where man lives. The kingdom of God has literally drawn near to man in the person of this Jesus.

The prophets of old had cried out for God's people to repent. John the Baptist had cried out for God's people to repent. So this plea for repentance from Jesus was not something new. I suspect it had a sense of urgency in the tone that the others did not have?

There are a couple of recorded events in the life of Jesus that seem to emphasize the urgency for repentance. Jesus stands before man as sort of a final summons from God. People will either submit to this summons and repent; or they will refuse this summons and follow after the way of this world.

Jesus becomes the crucial term by which men either enter the kingdom of God; or choose to exclude themselves from the kingdom of God.

Man is indeed a strange creature. It is very common to hear people say in many different ways; that the humility of repentance is just too much to endure; for the promise of salvation.

The pride of man leads us to think that giving up complete control to another person - even if that person is God - is just too much to ask. And at the same time man has routinely risked the perils of the sea; in hopes of gaining some treasure. Man has routinely endured the bitterness, and sometimes even the nausea, of medicine, in hopes of gaining health. Man has routinely endured the difficult task of removing the husk from a coconut; in hopes of enjoying the milk and meat inside. Man has routinely endured the difficulty in removing the shell from the hickory nut; in hopes of enjoying the tasty kernel inside.

There are many other examples. Man will endure physical discomfort; man will endure social humiliation; man will endure many unpleasant experiences; all in the hope of gaining something from this world. And yet this same man, finds it difficult to endure the humility of repentance, in order to gain everlasting life with the Heavenly Father.

When we study the life of mankind; it should become obvious that the argument that; "Repentance is too much to ask;" will not be acceptable as an excuse as to why we are not saved.

Read Mark 1:16-18 and make notes:

Other than the verbal proclaiming of the kingdom having come near; and "it is time to repent;" the first act of Jesus' public ministry; is to call the brothers Simon and Andrew to come and follow him. He told them he would make them "fishers of men."

To simply read this passage as a play on words; isn't just to miss a message; it is to pervert the Word at this point. In the Old Testament there are a number of passages that indicate God is the "fisher of men." Places such as Ezekial 29:4, Ezekial 38:4, Amos 4:2, and others; record where God says he will catch men as one catches fish. And in each of the passages of the Old Testament, where this particular imagery is used, they all carry an ominous tone of judgment. To those who were familiar with the Old Testament passages; such a statement would not have been taken lightly.

I can't tell from the Scripture texts whether Simon and Andrew were familiar with these Old Testament passages or not. I can tell from the texts that Simon and Andrew displayed a radical obedience in their response to this call.

Whether they fully understood or not; they were responding to a call to do "God's work;" with some kind of relationship to end times promises recorded in the ancient sacred text. The immediate duty of Simon and Andrew in responding to Jesus' call was to simply follow Jesus.

Let me share something that might sound like an echo from an earlier message. The immediate duty of people who respond to Jesus' call today is to simply follow Jesus! Those early disciples were to spend time with Jesus; they were to observe and witness how he ministers; they were to observe and witness how he responds to the various kinds of people; and the various kinds of situations.

And that is still what is expected of believers today. We are expected to observe and witness how Jesus ministers. Not just to one or two people or situations, but to a variety of people and situations. And to see how he handles a variety of circumstances.

Read Mark 1:19-20 and make notes:

On this same occasion that Jesus called Simon and Andrew, He also called James and John. The specifics of how they were called is not recorded here; so it isn't the point we are to dwell on at this time. However, since their call is recorded with that of Simon and Andrew; it is reasonable to think James and John were probably also invited to be fishers of men.

What this texts does tell us is that James and John were in a boat working on preparing the nets for another fishing expedition. And at the call of Jesus, they LEFT their father in the boat; and responded positively to the call of Jesus, to follow him - and to become fishers of men. This indicates there was some kind of authority in Jesus' voice; or at least in Jesus' invitation, that these men recognized.

Did these men hear the urgency in Jesus' invitation? Did these men hear a tone of authority? Did these men recognize the Old Testament connection to the phrase "fishers of men"?

Who is this man who summons others to follow him? Who is this man who is able to get people to abandon their livelihood and follow after him? Who is this man who calls people to follow him as an act of grace? Who is this man who promises to make those who follow him to become fishers of men?

I certainly do have an idea of who he is; but the point I wish to make is this: this same Jesus is inviting people to come and follow him today. And the "kingdom of God" is even closer to us today, than it was in the day when he invited Simon, Andrew, James, and John. So the urgency for us to respond is at least as great as it was then. But in reality, it is even more urgent today.

Those who respond to the invitation and choose to follow after Jesus; have the promise of becoming something, and that something is; they will become "fishers of men." And if we claim to have been followers of Jesus for a long time and we are not yet "fishers of men;" it might be a prudent thing to re-examine our "following after Jesus." For if we have been a believer for some time and we are not yet a "fisher of men;" maybe we haven't done such a good job of following Jesus! Maybe we need to make some adjustments in our life! It is still as true today as it was then; those who follow Jesus will become "fishers of men."

There is one other thing that can be seen in this passage; that can be backed up by other New Testament passages. Jesus did not look around for people who were doing nothing. Jesus did not seek out people who appeared to have time on their hands. Jesus called people who were busy.

I have met a number of people who claim God has called them to a ministry; and they refuse to do any kind of work. They won't take a secular job, claiming they want to be ready when Jesus shows them where they are supposed to be ministering.

I think I do it in a kind way - at least I think so - but I tell these people there is a spiritual sign that hangs outside the entrance to the kingdom of God. And it reads "lazy people need not apply." In the Old Testament, it appears God always called those who were busy. In the New Testament it appears Jesus called those who were busy.

Being an obedient Christian is simply no place for a lazy person. There is much to be done in the kingdom and a lazy person simply won't be able to be a faithful follower of Jesus. A lazy person will never become a "fisher of men."

If you are lazy, it would be a great place to start by praying and confessing to God; "I am lazy, please Lord, help me become healed of being lazy.'" When you are delivered from being lazy, then you can get on track toward becoming a "fisher of men."

Don't misunderstand and think this message is about lazy people. This message is about Believers becoming "fishers of men." If you have been a Believer for some time now and you are not a "fisher of men;" it is time to repent. It is time to pray "Lord, forgive me for not paying attention." "Father in heaven, please forgive me and show me again how I can be a fisher of men."

There is no condemnation in these comments. So, don't let the devil put any in the way you read this invitation. But there is an urgent plea for God's people to wake up - get serious - and get about the business of being a "fisher of men."

Rather than the churches being filled with "lazy people" today; our churches are too often filled with people who have become so busy with the "things of this world;" that we are too busy to be fishers of men. The majority of those who claim to be Believers in Jesus Christ today, are too busy with the things of this world, to take the time to follow after Jesus and see what it is that he wants them to do.

Our problem isn't so much with Lazy Christians! Our problem is with Christians who have allowed the world to make them "too busy." Friends; "If you are too busy to be a fisher of men" - "then you are far too busy."

On a commercial fishing vessel there are a number of specific jobs and assignments. There is a variety of skills that are needed in order for the fishing vessel to be successful. There is the mechanic who keeps the motor running. There are those who keep the nets or cages repaired. There are those who cook the meals for the crew to eat. There are others who serve in some area of the boat that does not directly “catch fish.” But, the main purpose of all these jobs is to work together so that the crew will ultimately “catch fish.”

Have the people in the church today become so narrowly focused on their distinct job – or gift – that everyone has lost sight of the main goal? Each of us, whatever our gift or assigned task, is expected to work together, so that we collectively “catch fish.”

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the last lesson from Mark, we looked at the account of Jesus calling his first disciples and telling them plainly what it was that he was going to teach them to do - or to become. Just to make sure that we don't separate the message of this gospel into disconnected portions, let me point out - that what happens in Jesus' earthly ministry was intended to help his disciples become the Fishers of Men that Jesus said they would become. So whatever we see Jesus do, and whatever we hear Jesus teach; it is intended to help his disciples to become Fishers of Men.

Mark is inspired by the Holy Spirit to begin the account of Jesus' earthly ministry by teaching and ministering in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Read Mark 1:21-22 and make notes:

We should accept the simple fact that at least the four men Jesus called to follow him are with him in Capernaum. Right after we have the account of them being invited to come and be trained to become Fishers of Men; it says "They" went to Capernaum. If there are any who want to argue this view - just look down a couple of verses to v29 - and all four of these men are named saying; "they" left the synagogue.

It is worth our time to notice how the congregation was astonished by Jesus teaching. These people listened to teaching every week. Teaching in the synagogue was not something new. The usual teachers simply presented facts, data, and some application.

The typical method of Rabbis teaching was to quote previous Rabbis; or to refer to what previous Rabbis had said about particular parts of Leviticus or the Prophets. The typical Rabbinical teaching appealed to the rational mind. Jesus stands and teaches as "one who has authority."

Jesus taught the Word of God in a manner that left little, if any, room for debate. There was no reasonable place for theoretical challenge. Jesus confronted the congregation with the absolute authority of God's Word. Jesus' teaching touched the hearts of the people and called for a decision. A decision of the heart more than a decision of the mind.

In the presence of God's Word - proclaimed in it's pure form - undiluted with the interpretations of man - the heart of man is disturbed. For some it is disturbed in a positive manner; and they can't wait to run into the presence of God and to embrace him.

But for some, their heart is disturbed in a manner of conviction and guilt. Their disturbed heart cries out for reconciliation.

By the way - that was not only true in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. It is still true today. If you can sit through a teaching service and your heart is not disturbed one way or the other; then you have only heard the words of man and not the words of GOD! This is also true of the Praise & Worship Service.

Read Mark 1:23-24 and make notes:

Jesus' Sabbath activity includes teaching. Okay, that seems to be in-line with what most of us think ought to be taking place on our "church day." But Jesus' Sabbath activity also include exorcism and healing.

At the very outset of Jesus' earthly ministry, we see Jesus initiating acts of God; restoring men to wholeness. And the reaction of the people of that day is just like they way people respond today. Some reacted with excitement - and others reacted with alarm.

The authority of God's Word as presented by Jesus; disturbed the heart of a demon possessed man. But it isn't the demon possessed man who is speaking. It is the demon that controls this man's life. And this demon does not speak with words that express any dignity of Jesus. It uses words and phrases that indicate opposition and maybe an attempt to disarm him by calling him the "Holy One of God."

There are a couple of ways to read verse 24. One way is to read it as if the demon does not know and is "asking" Jesus: "What do you want;" "Have you come to destroy us"?

But another way to read V24, is as if it were a taunt or challenge: "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?"; "I know who you are" - you "the Holy One of God!"

Depending upon the tone of voice you use, these very same words can indicate an acknowledgment of who Jesus is or they can indicate mockery in an attempt to lead the people to doubt Jesus' authority.

The demon's words are noticeably similar to those of Peter's confession as to the identity of Jesus. The major difference is that Peter's words were spoken out of love and respect; while the demon's words were spoken out of contempt and disrespect.

Also, you can read v24 as though the "us" is referring to many demons; or you can read v24 as though the "us" is referring to the demon and the man whom he is possessing. Another way is to read v24 as though the "us" was intended to sound as if the demon was speaking not only for himself but also for all those in the congregation.

The people are already alarmed - first at the authority of Jesus' teaching; and now by the interruption and challenge by this man. And the congregation, as a whole, doesn't appear to see the demon. They see the man who is standing. The words coming out of his mouth - they take them as the words of this man; one of the congregation. And they are hearing this man challenge Jesus' intentions for being here; and is planting the suggestion in the minds of this people that Jesus is planning on destroying "us." The demon is trying to get the congregation to be in fear and to possibly think that Jesus is a danger.

This demon was not acknowledging Jesus for who he was. This demon was clearly mocking and resisting Jesus; while trying to plant seeds of doubt and rejection in the hearts of the people. This can be seen in Jesus' response to the demon.

Read Mark 1:25-26 and make notes:

How many of us stop someone who is speaking highly of us? How many of us stop someone who is saying we "are a great person."

Jesus' response to the words of the demon are just what you would expect in the case of mockery and doubt planting. The mockery, the challenge, the resistance, the rebellion of the demon; were absolutely powerless against the sovereign authority in Jesus' command.

Jesus spoke only a few direct words. This is so unlike what so-called and self-proclaimed exorcist of that day would have done. The people were accustomed to "exorcist" using special charms, special potions, magical words, and usually a variety of arm movements or dance steps.

But Jesus spoke with the authority that he had. Jesus said "come out!" The demon could do nothing but come out. Jesus said "be silent!" The demon could do no more talking. The most the demon could do; was to make the man's body convulse to the point the man screamed.

Read Mark 1:27-28 and make notes:

The response of the congregation leads us to believe that they did not fully understand who Jesus was. But they did recognize he had an authority that they were not accustomed to seeing. Consider for a moment; what do you think was going through the minds of those men Jesus had invited to follow him. The ones he told that we would make them Fishers of Men?

In the gospel accounts we can see that Peter had faith as to the identity of Jesus; and he was praised and called blessed when he expressed his faith. This demon had faith as to the identity of Jesus; but the demon was rebuked when he expressed his faith.

Both Peter and the demon spoke pretty much the same words of truth Concerning the identity of Jesus. The Huge Difference: Peter's words of truth were spoken in love; the demon's words of truth were spoken in contempt and challenge.

This should serve – at least as a guide to us – if not a warning! We should speak the truth; but it Must Be In Love!

There are some things we should take home with us from this passage:

First – speak the truth “in love”.

Second - Casting out demons is a part of what "Fishers of Men" will do !

Third - Don't be trying to interrogate demons - they lie!
Instead, command them to be silent.

Fourth - Knowledge in itself is not enough.
There must be a personal relationship -
and there must be a sincere love and respect.

Demons know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; but the demons are not saved. If you need some relief from demonic activity; or demonic oppression of any kind; there is freedom in Jesus Christ. And being free from the influence of demons is a valid part of what Jesus has provide for us. Don't hesitate to take advantage of it.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Read Mark 1:29-31 and make notes:

It certainly isn't worth arguing about; but as we read this account, it reads as though this also happened on the Sabbath; "as soon as they left the synagogue."

This account of the healing Peter's mother-in-law is noteworthy. There are several important keys for us in this text. As we read this account, the first thing we notice is that there is the clear impression of complete UN-pretentiousness.

There is no fanfare - no calling forth a special group of people - no gathering of an audience to observe - not even special words of prayer - or rebuking - or even words of command. Jesus simply took her hand, helped her up, and the fever left her!

This healing account has another noteworthy aspect to it. Have you ever had an ailment that caused you to have a high fever? When the fever finally subsided - how was the level of your physical strength? Usually after our body suffers from a fever; it leaves our body very weak!

Look at verse 31. This woman began to wait on Jesus and his disciples as soon as the fever left her! There was no hint of weakness.

There is another aspect of this particular healing that is also noteworthy. And we will return to this other aspect in a few minutes.

Read Mark 1:32 - 33 and make notes:

As we mentioned in a previous lesson - the gospel record in Mark is brief - it doesn't have a lot of details. In many places the accounts read more like a summary. This is certainly one of those places. But if a summary account is the way the Holy Spirit had it recorded; then we need to look closely at the summary account; and try to get the message the Holy Spirit wants us to get. If a lot of details are left out - then it is meant that we don't get bogged down by the details and possibly miss the message.

At this point, we don't know if some of the disciples went around town and invited people to bring their sick family members; or if one of the servants went out and told about the miraculous healing. Or perhaps one of the caring neighbors stopped by to check on Peter's mother-in-law, and saw her up serving the evening meal. All we know is that after supper a lot of sick people were brought to Jesus for healing.

Since it was after sunset; that would mean it was no longer the Sabbath. So there were no longer any restrictions about travel distance or restrictions about work - like carrying a sick person, etc. The people of the town had a freedom to move about.

Before we move on; let us note that a distinction was made between those who were sick with physical illness and those who were afflicted with demons. We do not want to pervert God's Word by declaring all sickness and disease as being caused by demons or being the work of demons in a person's life. Nor do we want to cheat mankind out of real relief by declaring there is no such thing as demon activity. That would leave a lot of people without real help for their troubled lives.

To stay true to God's Word, we will acknowledge that some people are sick from physical illness that has nothing to do with demons; and some people are afflicted by demons.

I had kidney stones some years ago and the pain was so intense that I wanted to blame it on demons. But the truth is that demons had nothing to do with it. It was due to my diet and perhaps some genetics. And of course I would rather blame demons than to take responsibility for the way I eat and drink. At least blame somebody - right ?

Read Mark 1:34 and make notes:

The word "many" used in this passage is also noteworthy. We are not told that Jesus healed "every" person with a disease; and there is no reason even hinted at as to why "everyone was not healed." But the why isn't as important as noting that it says "many."

The same thing applies to those afflicted with demons. It says "many" - which leaves open the reality that some people who had demons in their life did not experience the relief that was available through Jesus.

There is another thing important for us to take note of in this passage. Jesus "would not let the demons speak." This is the same way he treated the demon possessed man in the synagogue. The demon was commanded to "be silent."

This is the second recorded time Jesus dealt with demons since calling the disciples to follow him; with his promise to make them fishers of men.

While he may have dealt with them in different specific actions; the fact that Jesus would not allow the demons the privilege to speak; was the same way he handled them before.

These disciples - who were in training to become Fishers of Men - were being shown something. When dealing with demons - command them to be silent - don't allow them to speak!

I said that we would return to another significant thing about this healing account. Let's take a look at this now. Maybe it jumps out at me more than it does for some people; but it is an important message for all of us.

This healing account makes a point of telling us it was Peter's mother-in-law. This man, Peter, who had just answered the call to follow Jesus, and to be trained to become a Fisher of Men; had a family. Peter had worldly responsibilities. Peter had people depending upon him to provide physical sustenance. And it is reasonable to understand that many of the other disciples did as well.

This healing of a family member for one who has committed to follow Jesus in ministry was a BIG Message to his disciples. Later on they would hear Jesus say what he just demonstrated in actions; "seek first the Kingdom of God - and all the worldly things you need will be provided."

It is really sad, but I have met a number of men and women who have been "called" of God to ministry; and they have concluded that they cannot afford to be active in the ministry calling they have received; because they have fiscal responsibilities. And this doesn't just refer to "pastor", "missionary", etc. This refers to all levels of ministry in a local church where people feel they cannot take a few hours off from work to perform some ministry in their local church or community. The person who can't stop working one Saturday a month; the person who can't stop working one evening a week; etc.

In this account of healing - not only do we see that being Fishers of Men is going to include healing the sick; it includes the message that the needs of the followers of Jesus will be met.

Later in chapter 6 we will read the account of Jesus miraculously feeding 5,000. Many people are familiar with this account. Do you remember that it tells us that "12 baskets" of bread and fish were left over? That would give each disciple a basket of bread and fish to send home to their families.

This particular account is a very important healing account for us to take note of. As it is recorded at the beginning of Jesus ministry; and at the beginning of the book of Mark; it establishes a window of how we are to see the rest of what is recorded in this book.

There are at least three things we should take notice of from this account:

First - Healing is something that Fishers of Men will do.

Remember - Jesus is training his disciples to become Fishers of Men.

Second - Jesus performed the healing in a noticeably unpretentious manner.

There was no fanfare and no public audience - just healing. We should be praying for healing as though it is as natural as sitting down to eat together and not be trying to make it into some circus side show.

Third - Jesus healed a family member of one of his disciples.

Those who are obedient to Jesus' instruction - will not have to worry about the physical needs.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Jesus is teaching his disciples how to become Fishers of Men. In the previous lesson, we saw a few things about being a Fisher of Men: Fishers of Men will pray of the sick to get well; Fishers of Men will cast out demons; and Fishers of Men will have their needs met. In this lesson, we are going to see another thing that will be a normal part of our everyday life when we become Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 1:35 and make notes:

This account begins early in the morning; following the night when a crowd of people were healed from sickness and disease and many were delivered from demonic oppression. There are two things to note regarding this prayer account: first - Jesus began his day with prayer - it was so early in the morning that it wasn't even daylight; and second - Jesus sought out a "solitary place" in which to pray.

The literal Greek words used here can be interpreted "wilderness place" - "desert place" - or "solitary place." There was no desert around Capernaum. The whole countryside around Capernaum was well cultivated during this time. There was no "wilderness" around Capernaum. So the better interpretation is that it was a "solitary place" or a place where one could be all alone.

Getting off to a quiet place - or a place of temporary seclusion - was a customary practice for Jesus during his earthly ministry. There were many people who were seeking Jesus for his ministry gifts, but he withdrew from the use of his ministry gifts from time to time.

There are some who use these references to teach that Jesus went into the cities, used his ministry gifts, then retreated to the wilderness places in order to draw the people out of the cities into the country. Jesus knew they would follow after the gifts.

From what I have witnessed in my life of ministry - people will certainly follow after the gifts and follow after those they believe have gifts. But as we read and study the Gospels in the New Testament, this interpretation seems to miss the personality and the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

I am willing to put my neck on the chopping block and say that Jesus had no reason to draw the people out of the cities into the countryside. In fact when we consider that the whole countryside around Capernaum was well cultivated; wouldn't such an intentional action be rather inconsiderate of those who owned the cultivated fields? Large crowds of people tramping through the fields would destroy the fields, rows, orchards, vineyards, etc.

And if a person wanted to draw the people out of the city into the countryside - like some kind of pied piper - wouldn't it make more sense to slowly move out of the city while the crowds followed you - than to get up and get out of the city while everyone else was sleeping?

We know from the other Gospels that Jesus prayed many times. But in Mark, we only have three accounts of Jesus praying. One is in this account at the beginning of his ministry - a time when his ministry is being defined for his followers. The second is about the middle of his ministry when he feeds the 5,000 (6:46). And the third is near the end of his ministry in Gethsemane (14:32-42).

All three of these events have the character of a critical moment. In each of these accounts, Jesus prays in the quiet of the night and in a place of solitude. It would be easy to conclude that the strength of Jesus' ministry is somehow connected to his prayer life - and if you were to draw this conclusion - you would be very close to the actual point.

Read Mark 1:36-37 and make notes:

There is a tone of rebuke in these words, kind of like; "don't you realize a whole lot of people are looking for you - what in the world are you doing way out here by yourself?" The words are not recorded, so we will believe they didn't say them - but don't you think something like this was going through the disciples mind - "with the special gift that you have, shouldn't you be where the hurting people are?"

Wouldn't it be the normal way of thinking - if you found someone with a special gift - that was able to relieve the suffering of people - and the crowds were beating a path to this person's doorstep - wouldn't you just expect that person would want to be where the crowds are? We would almost expect the person with "the gift" to say; "oh, let's get back there, I didn't realize there was a crowd."

Read Mark 1:38 and make notes:

Please don't miss this: Jesus did not just heal the sick and cast out demons in Capernaum. Jesus preached in Capernaum!

Jesus' answer indicates his disciples failure to understand his mission. Jesus' ministry was not just about healing sick people and delivering people from demon possession. Jesus' ministry was all about proclaiming the nature of the kingdom of God.

Healing the sick and casting out demons was merely a means of proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God and getting people to make a personal decision.

If you have ever been sick or hurting; then you know how natural it is to want to be healed. If you have ever had someone torment you; then you know how natural it is to want to be delivered from their influence!

If all the people wanted was healing - then they are missing the message. If all the people wanted was to be delivered from demonic influence - then they are missing the message.

The indication is that Jesus recognized the people were anxious to seek out and follow this miracle worker; but there is no indication these people were interested in repentance.

It was never the mission of Jesus to heal as many people as possible. It was never the mission of Jesus to deliver as many people as possible from the demons. Jesus had the power and the authority to cast out every demon on earth. Jesus had the power and the authority to rid the earth of every sickness and disease.

It was always the mission of Jesus - to bring people to the Heavenly Father through repentance and a changed life. It was - and is - the purpose of Jesus to confront people with a personal decision - in regards to God and his purpose for mankind. "That is why I have come." - to preach the gospel.

It isn't the purpose of a minister to make us feel good about ourselves. It isn't the purpose of a minister to comfort us in our time of trouble. It is the purpose of a minister to bring people to a place where they are confronted with a personal decision in regards to God and his purpose for their life.

Read Mark 1:39 and make notes:

In obedience to his mission - Jesus went throughout Galilee - preaching in the synagogues - AND driving out demons. We have already stated that driving out all the demons possible was not Jesus' mission. But do you notice in this passage that it makes a point of saying that Jesus went throughout the country "preaching - and driving out demons"? This gives us a clue that driving out demons is an important part of preaching the gospel.

There isn't any mention of healing the sick in this summary statement of Jesus preaching throughout the country. Healing is a part of the ministry of preaching the gospel; but healing doesn't demonstrate the power of God OVER the power of Satan as graphically as does the casting out demons.

The Jewish historian of that era – Josephus - tells us something that is noteworthy concerning Galilee:

"The cities lie very thick and the very many villages that are here are everywhere so full of people, because of the richness of their soil, that the very least of them contained more than fifteen thousand inhabitants."

Jesus made a strategic move by preaching in the synagogues of Galilee. Each one was in a location where there was a high concentration of people. By going to the synagogues in Galilee - Jesus had the potential to preach the gospel to a large number of people - while traveling short distances between each one.

Later in the gospels we see where his disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. We can't help but wonder - how many times did they see Jesus pray - or see him pull aside from the ministry to a solitary place to pray - and the ministry they witnessed - until they came to the conclusion that there was some kind of connection between Jesus praying and Jesus ministering.

As an individual; we will never be more effective in ministry than the amount of praying that we do to the Heavenly Father. As a local church; we will never be more effective in ministry than the amount of praying that we do to the Heavenly Father.

There are those who have been called to a ministry of prayer. Praying is the ministry work they have been called to. Many of these people will do little more than pray .

There is nothing to compare to the power released by those who are faithful in intercessory prayer. We should never complain about the intercessor not doing other things as well. We should encourage the intercessor and thank them for their faithfulness in praying.

But the truth is that every one of us - regardless of the ministry we have been called and gifted to do - we cannot perform the ministry without it being undergirded in prayer. Show me a church that is not praying - and I will show you a church that is dying. Show me a church that is seeing lives changed - and I will show you a church that is faithful in praying.

When we are ready to be used of God - in some way - then we need to become faithful in prayer. When we are ready to be effective in the ministry that we have been called to do - then we need to become faithful in prayer.

When we are ready to see our local church make a real difference in the live of the people – then we need to become faithful in prayer for the church. When we are ready to see the pastor become more effective - or simply better in some way - then we need to become faithful in prayer for the pastor.

I have witnessed first hand - in more than one church - in more than one state - the difficulty in getting church people to be faithful to prayer. There is so little personal recognition - most of the time there is so little “hoop-lah”.

And there are so many distractions! The obstacles of everyday life that just plain make it inconvenient to take time out to pray. Satan realizes the importance of prayer to the being effective in ministry. Is it any surprise that Satan would make sure that there are obstacles to our taking out time to pray? Is it any surprise that Satan would make it inconvenient for us to get together with other Believers to pray for each other, our church, and our church leaders?

Satan is mean, he is devious, and he lies - but he is not stupid! Satan does not want God's people to pray!

We had several groups of people who were meeting together every week to pray for the church. After just a few weeks of these groups meeting to pray - things begin to change - and for the better. We began to see answers to some of the things we were praying for. And Just At That Time - everyone began to realize all kinds of obstacles to getting together for prayer. Everyone began to realize how inconvenient this prayer time was. So just about everyone quit getting together for prayer. How long will we as a church - remain alive and active - if we don't support the ministry with prayer?

If anyone would have been able to minister without praying - certainly it would have been Jesus - God who had come in the flesh. But Jesus never neglected prayer - even when he was the most popular with the crowds. Even to the point of getting up early - before others were awake to distract him.

Whether we get up early or stay up late - whether we pull away to a quiet place in the middle of the day – first thing in the day – or last thing in the day - the one thing that is constant for us all - we need to pray !

If we want to become a Fisher of Men – then we need to become faithful in prayer. If we want to be able to pray for the sick and see them get well - then we need to become faithful in prayer.

If we want to be able to cast out demons and bring relief to those who are tormented - then we need to become faithful in prayer.

If we are going to remain in the ministry - if our ministry is going to make a difference - if our ministry is going to stand up under the attacks that Satan will send from time to time - then we will need to be constant and faithful in prayer.

We cannot be successful in any ministry or even survive on this earth - without prayer.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

We have been looking into Jesus' demonstration of what it is like to be a Fisher of Men. In this lesson, we are going to read another account where Jesus healed someone. But the lesson is not about healing.

We are going to see one more thing that we should take care to do; if we are going to be a Fisher of Men; and one thing to take great care NOT to do.

Read Mark 1:40 and make notes:

In those days, any chronic skin disease was lumped together into the category of "leprosy." This man could have had the disease we know today as leprosy - but he could have had any number of painful, continuously recurring skin diseases.

Regardless of which specific skin disease - anyone who was identified as a leper - was reduced to a most pitiful state of existence in that society. In addition to whatever level of physical discomfort his "leprosy" may be causing him - his social impurity may have been the most painful. According to Leviticus 13:45-46;

“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.”

The Rabbinic law had interpreted this passage, and others, to a point of imposing significant practical difficulties upon the lepers by the time Jesus came in the flesh. Even a chance encounter between a leper and a non-leper would render the non-leper person to be unclean; and this would require them to remove themselves from the community - and as anyone would come near them, they would have to call out "Unclean, unclean." And this was their case until a specified amount of time had gone by without any noticeable skin problems.

The restrictions upon the leper - and the person who had come into contact with a leper - made it impossible for them to work for a living - care for the family - or even have fellowship with their friends and family. Lepers were allowed to attend some synagogues - but only if these had a screen installed that not only kept the lepers from coming into contact with the others attending the synagogue, but also kept the others from being able to see them.

Leprosy brought deep physical and emotional anguish into the lives of those afflicted and into the lives of those who loved them. So, whether this man had what we know as leprosy today, or another skin disease - this is the social and financial situation in which this man was living - this is the kind of daily isolation and rejection he was experiencing.

We are not told in this account whether this leper had seen the miracle working power of Jesus - or if he had only heard of it. What we are told is that this leper came near Jesus believing that Jesus COULD HEAL HIM. He had faith in Jesus' ability to heal him - and yet he voiced his lack of faith that Jesus wanted to heal him.

Was it because this leper had heard that Jesus did not heal everyone before? Was it because this leper had lived with being an outcast to his community and family for so long that he had come to believe he wasn't important enough to help?

He didn't ask Jesus to pronounce him ceremonially clean - something only a priest was allowed to do - he simply asked Jesus to heal him. He asked Jesus to do something that had already been determined to be impossible according to human ability - cure him of this disease.

Read Mark 1:41–42 and make notes:

The Greek words used at the beginning of this statement can be interpreted a couple of ways. These Greek words are used to speak of strong emotion or strong passion.

Some English translations have interpreted this to say "moved with indignation" and this leads people to see the following words of Jesus more as a rebuke to the leper - suggesting that perhaps the leper forced his way to Jesus and touched him. While the Greek words used in this passage can technically be interpreted as being moved with indignation - when we read - and study - the rest of the text, as well as the rest of the gospel - we see a great deal of evidence that the other interpretation of these Greek words is more accurate; that Jesus was "filled with compassion."

Jesus was aware of the social and economic plight of those with leprosy. Jesus was aware of the rejection and loneliness these people lived with on a daily basis. Jesus - being filled with compassion - did the touching. Jesus touched out of a heart of compassion.

For this leper, who had been starved of physical contact - who had probably not had a hug in a very long time - this touch from Jesus must have seemed like some level of ecstasy. For Jesus, who would later teach his disciples that the ceremonial law must give way to the law of love - this touch was a demonstration of the very fact that the law of love supersedes the ceremonial law.

Surely, Jesus reaching out and touching this man - and his being healed - would have been sufficient to do away with any doubts about whether Jesus was willing or not. But Jesus, not only acted love, he spoke the words of love, "I am willing." Jesus was demonstrating something really important to his followers in this healing. Jesus had already demonstrated his ability to heal, but now it is time to show his followers something else.

There is the story about a man who spoke very little. He was a hard worker, lived a good life, provided for his family, but he didn't have much to say. One day, his wife dragged him to a marriage counselor and his wife complained that he doesn't tell her that he loves her. The counselor asked the man if he loved his wife. He looked at his wife and said, "didn't I tell you that I love you when we got married?" She responded, "yes." He said, "well if it ever changes, I'll let you know."

We, as followers of Jesus are too often much like the man in this story. We seem to think that as long as we do what is required, and fulfill our obligations, surely the other people in our Christian Community will know that I love them. But, just like this leper needed to hear the words as well as receive the care, people today need to hear the words as well as receive the care.

The first thing we need to take home with us from this account is that, as believers, we need to tell people of our love for them.

We will be told later that believers should not be "hearers only - but doers also." Right here we are being told that we should not be "doers only - but tellers also."

Read Mark 1:43–44 and make notes:

This text has been mangled by some. Those who interpret the earlier verse as Jesus being mad - naturally take this text to connect with that and say that this was Jesus rebuking the leper - and kind of commanding to get away from him. Others, have taken this whole passage to be one of compassion, but they take this instruction to "not tell anyone" as Jesus using reverse psychology on the leper. There are those who teach that Jesus knew this man would do the opposite of what he was told to do. So Jesus told the man not to tell anyone, to ensure that the man would go out and tell everyone.

Interpreting this passage as "reverse psychology" puts Jesus in the place of using a level of deception. Telling the man to do one thing, when he really wanted the man to do another. The Bible tells us Jesus is "the truth" - so if we didn't consider anything else, this should be enough to say that "reverse psychology" is not the proper interpretation of this text.

However, there is more evidence to indicate Jesus was doing something other than using "reverse psychology." Jesus actually instructed this man to go to the priest and follow the requirements of the law - for a "testimony to the priest." Jesus wasn't trying to minister and serve outside the established religious community. Jesus wanted the priest to also hear the gospel.

Try to imagine the situation this would place the priest in. If the priest declared the man as being healed - and accepted the prescribed sacrifice - they would be accepting the miracle healing - for they all knew there was no cure for leprosy. If they accepted the miracle healing - but did not accept the miracle provider - where would that leave the priest? If they accepted the miracle healing - and this made it easier for them to accept the miracle provider - where would this leave the priest?

Can you guess where Jesus wanted them to be? And also - socially, it was important for this man to comply with the law - for without the pronouncement from the priest - he would not be accepted back into society. He would not be allowed to work, couldn't buy or sell to others, etc.

Spiritually, it was important for this man to comply with the law - for God did not desire that any should perish - not even the priest.

The firmness in Jesus' voice - or the strong warning - was more likely from the fact that Jesus saw into the future and foresaw this man's disobedience. He could see that this man was not going to be obedient and that is why he used words of a "strong warning."

As we look at the next verse - we see that there was a reason Jesus did not want the man to go out and tell everyone.

Read Mark 1:45 and make notes:

We cannot tell from this summary account, whether the man obeyed and showed himself to the priest, but it does tell us that he disobeyed the instruction to keep quiet about his healing. By the text saying "instead" - leaves us with the impression that this previous leper skipped the trip to the priest and began rejoicing in his healing and telling everybody he could find about his being healed.

Can we blame him? Isn't it just like us today? When something wonderful has happened to us, we are not only glad about having received something wonderful; we are also glad to tell everyone what God has done for us !

As a result of this man running all over and telling everyone what had happened; Jesus was hindered in his efforts to bring the gospel to the people. He "could no longer enter a town openly." Jesus now had to stay out in the lonely places most of the time. This was not the mission Jesus had come to fulfill.

The second thing we should take home from this account is that our disobedience can hinder the work of God in our community.

Earlier, we were given the insight that the lonely places were where Jesus would go to pray and to get spiritually refreshed. So that he could go into the cities and minister the gospel in word and action. Now, the people are coming to the lonely places ! It is so easy for us to justify our not obeying God's instruction to us. I'm not referring to the Ten Commandments or other instructions in the Bible. I'm referring to the specific instructions we receive from God from time to time; that we, as an individual, are supposed to do a certain thing or that we are not to do a certain thing.

We can look at this thing we are told to do and it really doesn't look all that important. In fact, it may look rather insignificant. But how can you and I see what an important little part this thing might have in some bigger picture God is working on. How important can a single, simple nail be; when we are considering the large scale attack of the enemy? For the lack of a nail - the shoe was lost. For the lack of a shoe - the horse was lost. For the lack of a horse - the war was lost. Alas, if only we had a nail!

If our instruction is as simple and small sounding as finding a nail and bringing it here; we should do that job as though you were doing it for the Lord Jesus Christ - because we are!

What about the instruction for us NOT to do a certain thing? When we consider the thing - it isn't a bad thing. It isn't forbidden in God's Word. It isn't against the laws of man and just about everybody else does this thing. No one would even begin to suggest this is a bad thing. Like this leper being told "Don't tell anyone about your healing - but go and show yourself to the priest and give the prescribed sacrifice according to the law." The man probably looked at the instructions of the law as the means of being healed.

Now that he is healed - what good would it do to go and show myself to the priest? He doesn't need them to tell him he is healed. He has been touched by the Son of God. He KNOWS that he is healed.

And about that instruction "not to tell anyone?" Surely, this is a good thing that has happened. Surely, it is a good thing to give God glory for what he has done. Surely, it is a good thing to tell others that Jesus has healed me of an incurable disease. When I think about it, my testimony might just give some other person the hope that they can be healed.

This has got to be a good thing. How could this excited and healed man possibly see the outcome of his disobedience? Now the priest doesn't have the testimony of Jesus' miracle healing. And now Jesus can't openly go into the cities of Galilee anymore to proclaim the gospel. The disobedience of this man - actually hindered the proclaiming of the gospel by the Son of God !

You and I certainly do want to give God glory. And we certainly do want everybody to come to know Jesus as Savior. But we need to be obedient to whatever it is that Jesus has asked of us – personally. Because our disobedience - even our disobedience with good intentions - can wind up hindering the Work of God.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: