

## SPENDING A DAY WITH JESUS

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Mark 1:21-39

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Sometimes the things about which we say we are excited don't turn out just the way we expect. That was certainly true with the man who was admiring and bragging about the work of a high wire artist who walked a cable across Niagara Falls. The high wire walker went across the Canadian Falls and came back. It was an amazing feat and brought cheers from the crowds. A man on the front row had cheered more wildly about the feat than anyone else. He was bragging to all those around him about the abilities of this high wire artist. The high wire artist noticed the acclaim, came, and asked if the man believed he could push a wheelbarrow across the falls. The man said, "Absolutely! You can do anything you want. You are the greatest on a high wire." The high wire artist then turned to him and asked, "Do you believe I could push a wheelbarrow across with someone in it?" Again the man was certain, "You can do it. You are the greatest." Then the high wire artist looked at him and said, "Get in!" Suddenly his face grew ashen, and his voice went silent. He melted into the back of the crowd.

Some of us may have said, "I wish I could have spent one day with Jesus when He was on earth. Can you imagine what I could have learned in just one day with Him?" I confess having said it. As I did a Bible study in Mark's gospel, I discovered that the writer allows us to spend twenty-four hours with Jesus. This twenty-four hour period is stretched from the beginning of one morning into the next. Mark may have been relying on the recollections of Simon Peter, for Mark was not one of the early disciples. Yet, his account gives us a first-hand glimpse into a day in the life of Jesus. Spending a day with Jesus, however, may not be exactly what we expect. In fact, at some moments it's a little like getting into the wheelbarrow. It's a long journey to spend our day with Jesus, and his ways always challenge us as we experience them.

Very early in His ministry, Jesus had moved from his hometown of Nazareth to the seaside town of Capernaum. The incident we shared two weeks ago from Jesus' encounter with Nathaniel who asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" may help us understand why. The reception that Jesus received at home may not have been that favorable. Hometown folks looked at Him and could only see Jesus in terms of His family and as being one of the boys from their own town. They were not ready to hear something new from Him. Some of the local folks even thought Jesus was out of his head. Capernaum was a natural place for Jesus and a good place in which to continue His ministry. It sat on the side of the Sea of Galilee, the fresh-water lake that supported much of the fishing industry for that part of Palestine. It was the center for the fishing fleet and the commerce involved. Several of the disciples had connections to the area. It was also a center for the Roman collection of trading duties on goods coming into and going out of the area. Much of Jesus' ministry seems to have taken place in this region. There was a careful plan in Jesus' choice of a Capernaum.

The day we are following begins in the morning of a Jewish Sabbath, a day which ran from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, thus the report in Genesis "the evening and the morning were the first day." The day we are following begins about 9 a.m. Saturday morning and ends around 9 a.m. Sunday morning. It's an adventure to spend a day with our Lord. What do we find?

I. We first find Jesus actively involved worshipping God.

I have always intrigued by folks who say they can worship God as well out in nature or at home as they can in church. I had a man tell me once as his excuse for not coming to church, "Jesus went outside a lot for prayer." It was obvious that he was somewhat deficient in his reading of the New Testament. Jesus demonstrated a priority for being part of those assembled to worship God.

Luke reported that Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, "As was His custom." As Mark tells the story, as Jesus established himself in Capernaum, our Lord's new location, Jesus was in the synagogue. It was His priority to join with the people of God in worship. The synagogue was a lay-led worship without professional leaders and speakers. It was customary to ask guests to bring a word of greeting or to comment on the reading from the prophets. The prayers were fixed, and were recited by all the Jewish men in attendance. Jesus was clearly not there for the entertainment value of the synagogue worship or for some exciting program. He was there because His priority was to acknowledge His relationship with God the Father. Even there, worship was interrupted, but more about that later.

One of the questions often raised today is, "How entertaining should worship be?" It's not an idle question when our expectations are set by television preachers, at least one of whom boast an \$18,000 production budget for each week's extravaganza. I am personally grateful that this church has clung to a sense of order in worship, but that doesn't mean we should be dull or try to keep a sour face. One of the most popular preachers during my student days was the late Grady Nutt who some years later shared his stories on "Hee-Haw." His approach was to spice his message up with humor, but he never undercut the message to add another funny story.

Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer have provided a rich description of worship as a celebration of God. These are brief excerpts from what they wrote:

í we celebrate God when we allow the prelude to attune our hearts to the glory of Godí .we celebrate God when join earnestly in prayer and intensely in songí .we celebrate God when we give to God hilariously and serve him with integrityí we celebrate God when we enjoy and participate in music to his gloryí .we celebrate God as we hear His word gladly and seek to be conformedí to the image of our Saviorí .we celebrate God when we honor His Word with our wordsí .we celebrate Godí when we fellowship gratefully at the ceremonial meal that speaks so centrally of our faith in Christí *worship...is a celebration of God* (Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel, Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1982, pp. 18-19).

II. As we experience a day in the life of Jesus, we also sense the urgency of His message to the people.

A generation ago, Dr. George Buttrick offered a little book entitled Jesus Came Preaching. Dr. Buttrick described the urgency with which Jesus came to share God's message in the midst of the hunger for that message all around him. Some were looking for a military deliverer as God's Messiah. Others waited for a new king like David who would restore the grandeur of Israel. Still others expected one who right all wrongs in the world by force. Jesus came instead declaring that God was already at work, but His work was like the rising of a lump of dough as the yeast worked within it or as a seed growing secretly until the plant emerging. He was inviting all who heard His message to join in what God was doing. It was not just a recitation of the past but a new challenge from God to move into what God was doing at that time.

Some Baptists have spent the past thirty years quibbling over who believed the Bible most fervently. It's time to quit spending time just talking about the Bible and begin to grapple with

its message. It's easy to believe the Bible "cover to cover" as long as you never uncover its message. Jesus gave people God's message to respond where they were most in need. He did not spend His time simply quoting other authorities to justify a position, nor did he attack others to make his own message sound better. Jesus went to the heart of human need and brought God's word of hope in the midst of them told in ways that people could understand.

We as Christ's church need to be sensitive that we have the message our world urgently needs to hear. It's always disturbing our comforts and challenging our assumptions, it demands justice, mercy and love in a "get even" and "get for yourself" world. We have a hope to give and promise to offer to others. Our job is not to tell them of what the church was half a century ago. It is not to give our opinions about the Bible. It is to tell them of Jesus and all He waits to do in all of our lives. A day with Jesus should help us sense his urgency.

III. Jesus also responded to the urgent human need around Him. We find Jesus dealing with several different human needs in our day with Him. First, there is a man in the synagogue who is described as bound by Satan. I can't help wondering how many people each Sunday feel themselves bound by forces outside and inside their lives. Jesus had to deal with an interruption to worship to respond with God's grace. He did so with a concern for the man's need. Then our Lord headed to Peter's home and found Peter's mother-in-law sick with a fever. He responded to her needs, and she in gratitude began to serve Jesus and the disciples. When sunset came, the door was surrounded with people bringing those who were in need to Jesus. There was no evening of relaxed conversation around Jesus. Instead, the meal and everything else was being interrupted by the comings and goings of those in need. Jesus' acts of healing underscored that He had the power and authority to deal with diseases and human needs.

Our lives are always pressed by needs. You don't have to search very far to find people in need. I took a walk in downtown Hampton this past week, and there were a number of people out there with obvious needs. People were walking in and out of the courts, a teen was being taken to juvenile probation next door, and a family was leaving the jail in tears. Our role is to be those who respond to human needs with God's grace. He comes to make us whole, and he calls us to share that wholeness with others. We are called to respond with His care in the face of needs. The needs are many. How will we respond to those needs? Jesus' day was bracketed by human need.

A friend sent me a small drawing yesterday that pictures a man on his knees and before him stands Jesus with a group of people all in obvious need. The man kneeling asks, "Why is it that whenever I ask Jesus to come into my life he always brings his friends?" That is indeed how we will experience Jesus.

IV. Because of the pace of activity, Jesus needed to spend time alone with God the Father.

Mark reported that at the end of this 24-hour period, Jesus did something for which they disciples were not prepared. *"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."*<sup>36</sup> *And Simon and his companions hunted for him.*

<sup>37</sup>*When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you"* (vv. 35-37 NRSV). It had been a full day for Jesus and the disciples. They were probably all snoring heavily when Jesus slipped away from them. While they slept, He prayed. When the disciples came searching, Jesus challenged them to move to new possibilities in other villages. He would not settle for simply being a wonder-worker and teacher in Capernaum. He was ready to head to the wider world.

Going with Jesus for even one day will challenge a lot of things in our lives. First, Jesus challenges us to avoid mere activity without prayer. It's so easy for us to be caught up in the immediate without a concern to pray. Then, Jesus challenges us to keep moving out of our comfort zones. We tend to settle down in doing what we have always done the ways we have always done it. Jesus challenges us to keep learning, growing, and tackling new opportunities even when these stretch our comfort. The church is not here to keep us comfortable. It's here to challenge us to move beyond the places that are always comfortable. Spending a day with Jesus won't leave us just resting on our blessed assurance. We will have to rise up and follow Him even to places we do not want necessarily to go. Yet, if God's people are going to meet our challenges and be effective, we must continue to move beyond our comfort zones.

### Conclusion

Mother Teresa once said, "I am but a small pencil in the almighty hand of God writing a love letter to the world." (*If Jesus Lived In My Neighborhood, Part 2, Dave Stone, Willow Creek Association, 7/20/5*). Maybe the chance to spend a day with Jesus has given us some surprises. I hope it has, because we need the surprise of our calling to serve our Lord. Will we dare from our day with Jesus to hear His call for a lifetime of following Him? Every day won't be like the one Mark described - it will be better and more challenging, exciting and more frustrating than we have imagined. But, it's worth the journey when you're spending your days with Jesus. Will we dare to be a pencil in the hand of God writing a love letter to the world? He wants us to be.