

Mark - a Pattern for the Followers of Christ

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon highlights Jesus as a model for his followers, emphasizing the importance of communion with God, receiving direction, and showing compassion to others.

Duration: 38:09

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:35-45

Topics: "Following"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having compassion in order to bring people to God. He asks the congregation if they are attractive to God and if they draw people towards Him. The sermon is based on Mark 1:35-45, where Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and become fishers of men. The speaker highlights three main points: the need for personal communion with God, the importance of having a heart for God, and the sense of direction in spreading the gospel.

Transcript

Would you like to turn in your New Testaments to the Gospel recorded by Mark in chapter 1? We have rather a longer text today than is normal perhaps. We are going to base our message on verses 35 to 45. May I make a confession to the congregation that one or two things have been trying to get me away from this today.

First of all, when we were meditating on the theme from Simon to Peter about two or three years ago, we covered this subject and we covered this passage and insofar as one was in any way loyal to the scriptures on that occasion it'll mean I'll have to repeat some things today and one doesn't like to repeat. But then when John Bowen got going I thought he was going to steal my thunder right here in the pulpit. However, he stopped short and I believe that must have been the providence of God.

Now our subject then, taking the whole passage from verse 35 to 45, is what I would like to speak of as a pattern for Christ's followers. There are at least three interlaced strands in the method that Jesus employed to teach his disciples. First of all there is the obvious strand of instruction.

Now this occupies so much territory in the New Testament. Our Lord is teaching. He is revealing certain things that the Father had given him to declare and to disclose to men and he is also elucidating certain truths that they knew in part or in measure.

So our Lord's ministry involved instruction but it also involved something else. It involved illustration and inspiration. And I guess one thing that makes our Lord so utterly unique, not the only thing of course, but one thing that makes him so unique as a teacher is this, that you find these three strands combined.

The teaching he imparted, the illustration he gave of the way in which the teaching should be applied, and then along with the illustration the inspiration to obey. Would to God that we today could capture something of these three strands and weave them together in the ministry that is given us to do. Jesus provided throughout his life an illustration of what he taught.

Whatever he was teaching you saw it illustrated in his own life, in his life, in his character, in his conduct, even in his death. You have quite a number of illustrations of this. I can only refer now at this point to John 13-14 when he has washed the disciples' feet.

This is merely an illustration. He turns to his disciples and he says, if I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. In other words, you see, he's done something significant and now he wants them to see it as an illustration of what they ought to be doing.

And let me bring it up to date, something that in principle you and I ought to be doing likewise. But then you have this amazing capacity of our Lord to inspire others to want to do as he did. For example, and this is purely illustrative, you remember that when he had been apart praying, Luke tells us that when they had overheard their master in prayer, they come to him and they say, Lord, teach us to pray.

Now, of course, they'd been praying before. You can hardly envisage disciples of John the Baptist who'd never prayed or indeed good Jews who had never prayed. But there was something new in his approach to the Father in the way in which he held communion and converse with God.

And they said, look, we feel as if we've never started. Teach us to pray. Now, in this passage that we've taken this morning, the element of illustration and inspiration plays a tremendous role.

We've got to go back to that word of our Lord when he called his disciples, four of them, two sets of twins, and he said, follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men. Now here in verses 35 to 45 in the first chapter of Mark, we have an indication of the way we must go if we are to be followers of his. And I want you to notice three main landmarks.

Or should I put it in this way? Our Lord's disciples need to emulate him in at least three different but related respects. One, our Lord began the day in a place of communion with God. Two, Jesus went out into a new day with a sense of direction from God, communicated to him in that place of communion.

Thirdly, armed with such a sense of direction that he merged in communion with his Father, he was charged with a sense of compassion for men. Now let's look at these three, albeit briefly. First of all, I want you to focus your gaze with me upon this, his place of communion.

Look at verses 35 to 37. And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place and there prayed. And Simon and those who were with him pursued him.

And they found him and they said to him, everyone is searching for you, which is of course a mild reproof. As if to say, why are you spending all this time here? Everybody's looking for you. And that's the important thing, to be available for man.

Now I want you to notice that Jesus found this necessary. He found it necessary to have a place and a time of communion with God. He, the incarnate Son of God.

He who was in the beginning with God and was God, without whom nothing was made that was made. He, in the flesh, found it necessary to commune with his heavenly Father. And in order to do that, I want you to notice what he found it necessary to do.

He found it necessary not simply to turn away from his foes, we could well understand that. He found it necessary to steal away even from his friends. This is significant.

Even from his disciples. And he found it necessary even to turn away from his Father's world and his world. I say that because nature was so eloquent for our Lord.

He saw his Father's handiwork in every blade of grass, in every breeze that blew, in the rising of the sun and the setting of it. He saw his Father's handiwork. But I want you to notice.

He, the incarnate Son of God, living among men as men, found it necessary to get alone, to go apart, and there to commune with God as God. Now let me underline this. I think this is tremendously significant because, you see, if there ever was a person in the whole course of human history whom we might have expected to say, well, I can do with a minimum time of prayer, and I can do with a minimum of communion with my Father, surely it must have been Jesus.

He knew what he had come to do from eternity. He knew what God wanted him to do. There was no question about knowing the will of God as such.

He had power, he had wisdom, he had so much that is not given to the rest of us. But listen, my friends. Jesus found it necessary to commune with his Father.

See, the long and short of it is this. Jesus had not come into this world simply to do the Father's will. He had not come into this world simply to be an errand boy for God.

Would you pardon me for putting it like that? As if he received his orders from the Father and came into the world and left the Father behind and went on with the job. No, no, no. That was not his concept of service.

His concept of service was this. He came forth from the Father, but as he came forth from the Father, he came in the fullness of the Spirit, and he would work with God. He would receive his commands every day.

In principle, he got it all in eternity. In practice, he got it all every day. And whatever he's going to give out to men, he first receives from the Father.

Now, you find this in John's Gospel very specially. He receives the words that he's going to give. He receives the command for the given day.

So that you see, he found communion with God a necessity. Do you find it any the less necessary? Not only was it a necessity, it was a priority. You will notice this both in his teaching and in his example.

For example, right here in this passage, we have a particularly telling illustration of the priority he gave to the discipline of prayer and communion with God. Now, look at the context. The previous day has been a

Sabbath day.

We were there last Lord's Day. We were following him on the Sabbath day in Capernaum. Well, now, all that has just taken place yesterday.

It was a busy day in the synagogue with an inhospitable people listening to his teaching, and then a demon-possessed man that he had to deal with. Then he must have spent the afternoon rather leisurely with the disciples in Peter's house. He healed Peter's mother.

Then in the evening, you remember, the crowds gathered. They couldn't come in. There wasn't enough room for them.

And he healed their sick and he exercised their demons. So that the Dr. Luke tells us that there went virtue out of him. You can't engage in teaching spiritual things and in involving yourself with the powers of darkness.

You can't involve yourself in these disciplines without something going out of you. And as the RSV put it, power came forth from him. His energies were drained as he gave of himself on that Sabbath day.

But I want you to notice, early next day before it was dawn, he was up and he was apart to pray. He can't even stay in on this Monday, on this morning after the Sabbath. I mustn't come into our Christian era too soon.

He finds that it is necessary. It is essential. It must have priority.

Not only was it a matter of priority and a matter of necessity, may I put it differently, Jesus found it a matter of consistency. Let me put it like this. Why did he go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day? Did he go to be seen of men? No, a thousand times no.

Did he go to make a parade? A thousand times no. Why did he go? I'll tell you. God was the attraction, the only attraction.

It was the place where the godly, the God-fearing men met to read the scriptures and to pray, and he must be there. The sole attraction was God and the doing of the will of God in that place. But you see, if God was the attraction that took him into the synagogue, God is still an attraction on the morning after.

This is a real challenge, isn't it? What brings you to the house of God? If God is the attraction, then God will attract you tomorrow morning and will attract me likewise. It's a matter of consistency. If you and I make our Sunday services as the sum total of our religious exercises, then we are just here, hold it, hypocrites, actors.

Jesus was not. He wasn't acting. When he went to the synagogue, he went to meet his God, and because he was going there to meet his God, God was quite as important the day after, because the whole of life finds God at its center for him, so he will be consistent.

A matter of necessity, a matter of priority, a matter of consistency, a place of communion. My good friends, we differ so much. It's not everybody that wakes up before midday.

I know people who are about in a dream until midday, and if they got up at six o'clock in the morning to have their time of prayer and Bible study, they would neither learn anything nor get anywhere. But do you

have a place of communion? Whether it comes at the end of the day or in the middle of the day or the beginning of the day, better at the beginning if possible. But my friend, do you presume that you can go through a day without getting alone and apart and in within the veil with your God, shut in, when Jesus needed it? A place of communion.

Now look at the second thing that emerges out of this, that's the heart, that's the key, that's the center of it all. Now look, the next thing I notice is a sense of direction. They found him, that is the disciples, they found him, they missed him you see.

They found him and they said to him, everyone is searching for you. And he said to them, let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also. And the King James puts it like this, for therefore came I forth.

I like that. I guess I'm a little archaic in my ways, but I like that King James. Therefore came I forth.

Can't you feel it? This is why I'm come. Why am I come? It's to proclaim the gospel. It's to declare the truth.

You see, Jesus was a preacher. Everything else was necessary, but this was the heart of his business. It was to proclaim in life and in death the being of God and the way of salvation and of destiny.

Therefore came I forth. But now look at the picture. Moving out of that place of communion with God, there glowed in the Savior's breast a manward and a Godward attitude that kept him living on a plane of genuine fellowship with God and with people, with his own.

It's important to be clear about the fact that Jesus Christ did not come, as we have said, simply to do errands for God, but to receive each new day his direction and his directive and to be told what to say, where to go, how to react. Jesus puts it beautifully in one place when he says, my father is working hitherto. It's difficult to put this into English, but my father is going on with his work.

My father's busy and I am working. And the point is, you see, my father is working and I am trying to synchronize all I say and all I do with my father. We had duetists playing the piano here on Friday night.

You'd have enjoyed them if you were here. But they were synchronizing, they were moving together. That says Jesus is what I'm doing.

My father's working. He's got a plan for today. He's going to do something today.

And my task is to be moving with my father. He's working and I'm working. This is what he got in the place of communion.

His prayer was not a matter of saying a few shibboleths. It was not just a matter of going in the corner at the dawn of day and saying, thank you, Lord, for a good sleep. Please help me now.

I'm a bit weary and be careful, care for me as I drive through the busy streets and so forth. You know, it was a matter of touching reality and communion. There in that communion, he had a sense of direction.

The reason for our Lord's constant conference and communion with his father then became obvious. He would do his father's will in the father's way and at the time and behest of the father. He would work with God.

You see, Jesus, as it were, had two calls, should we say. Perhaps that's not the right way of putting it. But he was aware of the original call and summons to become our Savior.

He was chosen, he was the elect of the father in eternity to become the deliverer and the Savior of men. And that he did. And when the time to move out into that arena had come, having been born of the Virgin, ultimately he came and stood by the banks of Jordan and dedicated himself to his public ministry.

But now you see there's something different. There was a call, as it were, that he received every day for today. Today's work.

Today's program. Today's ministry. Where I go today? What am I going to do today? And he's in communion with his father to get the orders for today.

Now you find that Mark gives us here a positive and a negative illustration of this sense of direction that came in communion with God. Negatively, he says, when these disciples went to Jesus and said rather rudely, Master, where on earth have you been? Everybody's looking for you. He answers the question before they fully put it.

He says, look, come, let us go into the next towns to preach. For therefore came I forth. In other words, whereas they go on to tell him that all the people of Capernaum want him to come back there.

He says, no, that's not my sphere for today. Capernaum saw me yesterday and I blessed the people of Capernaum yesterday and I taught in their synagogue yesterday and I healed their sick yesterday and I exercised the demons from people yesterday. But today is not Capernaum.

There are other places. There are other villages. There are other towns.

He hears the bleating of the other sheep and his heart goes out for the lost in other towns. He says, not here today. Oh, men and women that we could have a little of this.

Not Capernaum today. Well, what today? Let us go into the next towns also. For therefore came I forth.

You see the positive? I've got to leave here now. I've got to go out. I've got to get involved.

And there are these other towns, these other villages, these other communities. Our sense of direction. We need to be sure that the Lord has called us and we've replied to that call.

First of all, to follow him and then to become involved with him in being fishers of men. My friend, are we all there this morning? Have you heard the voice of God calling you from sin and Satan's dominion to be his follower, to share in his salvation, to receive what he gives? What a tragedy, should there be someone among us this morning who's never heard or never responded to that call. Now implicit in that call, there is the summon to become involved with him in caring for others and passing on the word of life.

Have you received it? What is your life's involvement this morning? What are you here for? What am I here for? What are we living for? Men and women, what is our prime business in living? Is it not to be involved in fishing men for God? We need to hear and to heed and to respond to that call. But I say to you, we need something even beyond that. Even beyond that, because Jesus needed it.

We need to have our years daily attuned in communion with God so that we know where to go today. And we know what to say today. And we shall have grace to meet the circumstances of today.

I know and I tell you with all my heart opened to your gaze, when there are days in my life that I rush my communion with God, I don't know how to respond to the problems of this world. And the Lord is not glorified and men are not blessed. But there is a place, there is a place of communion with God where his word comes through for today.

But now come to the last hour. You see, I'm only taking the principles here. Come to the last.

The last is this, a heart of compassion, a place of communion, a sense of direction, a heart of compassion. Look at verses 40 to 41. And there came a leper beseeching him and kneeling down to him and saying to him, going on saying to him repeatedly, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him and saith unto him, I will be clean. Now we've got to understand, of course, we've got to remember that leprosy was a veritable curse in New Testament times with no known cure. We don't remember that.

We don't get the point here. That helps to explain the ardent pleading of this man. He was, as I've indicated, repeating the plea.

If you will, you can. If you will, you can. You can make me clean if you want to.

And he was repeating it. Somehow or other, this leper, even before he was fully convinced that Jesus would heal him, he knew that he could. Now, I don't know how he got that.

We don't know, but he knew it. He knew himself that Jesus could. There was no question about his ability.

The one question that remained in his mind was this, will he? Why should he be different from everybody else? You see, this leper was ostracized. He was an outcast. He couldn't come near.

The wonder of it is that he's come thus far near to the Lord Jesus at all. He was kept not only at arm's length, he was kept at a distance. And of course, why should Jesus be interested in him? And why should Jesus want to do anything for him that other people don't? Well, he's heard something or he's seen something.

I don't know how he got it, but he's got it. And he has a sense of a hunch in his soul. If I can get near to him, if he can see me and if he can hear me, he'll do something.

I know he can. The question is, will he really do it? Before we go further into this main point and my last point, let me just put something that is necessary to get the background. Now, it's quite a time, you see, since Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

Quite a few days have gone by now and Jesus has been in the other towns preaching. Now, where did he preach in the other towns? Verse 39 tells us, he preached in their synagogues throughout Galilee. This has been quite a long tour and it's all compressed here.

Throughout Galilee, in their synagogues, and he cast out devils. Now, my friends, think of it like this. The synagogues were not hospitable places for Jesus, ever.

Things got even worse later on, but at this time they were hardening. They were suspicious of him. And the Jewish leaders sent people from Jerusalem to quiz him and to question him and to try and trip and trap him.

And they went to the synagogues because they knew that he went there. And yet, you see, the mercy of our Lord is such he would go to the synagogues. He knew that they didn't want to see him and they didn't want to hear him, but he went to the synagogues.

He went to the spiritually dead and inhospitable. He went right there. What's more, he involved himself apparently in the casting out of many demons.

Now, whether this happened in the synagogue or outside the synagogue, we're not quite sure. But this was his ministry. Now, he comes back.

How would you feel after a ministry like this, preaching for a number of days, maybe even weeks, to an inhospitable, unwelcoming congregation who grind their teeth at you and say quite clearly that they don't want you nor your message? And then you get involved with demons and devils. Tell me, my friend, how would you feel if you were just ordinary, natural, normal people? I tell you, you'd be jaded. You'd be tired.

You'd be weary. Apart from the grace of God, you'd be short-tempered and you'd say to anybody and sundry, keep away from me. Let me have a little rest.

Let me get alone in the park. Now, it's in that climate that a leper, a leper, of all people, a leper, with the hideousness of his disease, comes right up to the Lord Jesus and accosts him and says, if you will, you can. I know you've got the power.

I know you can do it. It's a question. Do you really care for me any more than anybody else? No, the heart of God reveals itself in the heart of his son when Jesus does two things.

The first is great, but the second is more precious still. With his word of power, he says, I will. Reminds you of Genesis 1. Let there be and there was.

I will, he says, be clean and he was clean. He declares the sovereign word that miraculously brings healing with it. Jesus healed the man.

Now, that's wonderful, but I want to say to you, it was the least of two miracles that happened that day or of two indications of grace. You say, what could there have been greater than that? Oh, listen. He touched him.

He touched the leper. Have you got the point? You see, this man has been ostracized. No one has touched this man for weeks and months, possibly for years.

He's been separated. He's been away from society, away from men, away from people. And everybody that saw him coming near said, keep away.

Then here comes this Jesus of Nazareth. He has the word of power to declare to his disease begun. But more than that, he touched him.

You see, Jesus could have got rid of the disease and he would have had all praise from everybody without doing anything else, but he did something more. Why? Shall I tell you? It's because he would reveal the father in his deeds as well as in his words. And you see, our father, our God, our God, our father is a God of compassion.

Can I compress it into one illustration? Think of the prodigal father, the prodigal's father in Luke 15. This is a picture of God. How does he welcome that character that went away from his home and spent his money and his substance and riotous living with harlots and in other places? Do you remember this story? Oh, may the thrill of it come home to us.

What kind of a welcome did he have? Now, remember, he's coming from the pigs will, he's coming from the pigsties in a far country, and he hasn't had a change of clothing since he was feeding the pigs in their troughs and eating with them. And he comes with all the smell and all the stench and all the things that put a man off. And he comes to Jesus and he says, I'm sorry, he comes to the father and the father says to him, keep off, son, don't come too near.

No, no, no. You know what we read? He fell on his neck and he put his arms around him and he kissed the wretch. Now that's our God, you see.

He's a welcoming God to the vilest and the most wretched and the most needy and the most depraved and the most God forsaken man or woman anywhere. So that you see for you and for me simply to declare that God receives sinners is not adequate. We've got to put our arms around men and women.

Jesus did. He touched the leper. I was reminded this week and with this I close of an incident in Scotland.

It's good to have some Scots people with us and we have them today. And the great Firth of Forth Bridge was completed. You may have read it, you may know about it very well.

You know the two arches coming from either side had been completed and tomorrow the whole thing was to be opened. But it was a cold day when tomorrow arrived. And there was only one thing that remained to be done that morning.

The riveting of the two sides together and the rivets had to be in before the opening. But it was a cold day. You know what happens when it's a cold day? Iron contracts, does it not? I think so.

And though they lit fires and brought fires up under these massive iron girders, nothing would tick. And so they had to abandon the day's program. The day after was a lovely sunny day, even in Scotland.

I'm sorry, I shouldn't say that, should I? But it was even in faraway Scotland. It was a beautiful sunny day. There was no commotion, no blowing of fanfares.

But the two halves came together and the riveters went up with their bolts and whatever they had, and they just looked. And there were the holes, and they were just in the right place. And I just had to let them through, put things on, and screw them up.

Oh, men and women, if you and I are to bring people to God, we've got to have the compassion that draws. Are you an attractive person for God? Do you attract or do people freeze in your presence even when you speak about God and his love? Come after me and I will make you to become fishers of men. How? Well, on the road somehow, I've got to have a place of communion with God.

And it must have priority in my life. There, in the place of communion, I need, and I must get a sense of direction. Many of us need to know what guidance is, and it's only to be found there, in the place of communion.

My friends, we talk about problems of leading, problems of guidance, and it's all because many of us don't have a place where we really commune with God. When we commune with God, the problems dissipate very generally. And there, along with a sense of direction, God pours his own heart's compassion into us as much as we need for the day.

And he's there waiting us again tomorrow morning. And as thy day, so shall thy strength be. Would you follow the master? Would you like to be? Have you been called to be a fisher of men? Are you successful? Well, if you're not successful, you dare not miss the point.

This is the way. Walk in it. Let us pray.

Father in heaven, thank you for your word. May it teach us what we need to know, and may its message linger with us and live within us and be a fire in our bones, drawing us onto the main highway of devotion to yourself and to your Son. We would be channels of blessing, our Lord.

We would be available to seek the lost and to win them and to love them in your name. But we haven't got the love. It is not in us to love as you loved and to welcome as Jesus welcomed.

We thank you that there is an appointment whereby day by day we may be flooded and saturated to overflowing with the provisions of the throne of grace. Grant us to know that. We ask it in our master's worthy name.

Amen.

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