

In December of 1914 the Western World was at war – WW1. But as Christmas Eve and Christmas drew near something remarkable occurred. It's been called the “**Christmas Truce**” – British, French & German soldiers arose from their trenches and began to inter-mingle. They talked, shared greetings, food and souvenirs. Some of the meetings ended w/ Christmas Carols. There were prisoner exchanges and even a few soccer games in what was called, “**no man's land**” between the trenches.

And so there was a *notable pause* in the action in numerous places along the frontlines in 1914.

Today we come to a notable pause in the action in the Gospel of Mark. It occurs in **ch. 1, v. 35**... **“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”**

I call this a “**Prayerful Pause**” because the day before was swamped with intense activity. It begins in **v. 21** with Jesus coming into the synagogue at Capernaum and teaching w/ astonishing authority. His teaching was qualitatively different from the scribes [directly from the Scriptures, penetrating, weighty] and the people knew it. Then a man with an unclean spirit begins to cry out right there in the synagogue. Spiritual warfare erupts on the Sabbath, but Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit –**v. 25**

“Be silent, and come out of him!”

v. 26 describes the battle – ***“And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him”***

Once again, the people were amazed – “a new teaching with authority” - what a morning!

Then Jesus comes to Simon's house and his mother-in-law is bedridden with fever. Jesus is told about it. He comes over, takes her by the hand, lifts her up --- and the fever leaves her. Yet another example of Jesus' power & authority.

But the day is not over – look at vv. 32-34 [read]

I picture a line of people waiting to see Jesus well into the night. – So starting that morning Jesus taught, healed and cast out demons. What a turbulent day! Including spiritual warfare!

But that brings us to **v. 35** – **A Prayerful Pause in the Action.**

Jesus had **a heart for people**. He also had **a heart for prayer**.

In the midst of all the busyness and craziness, Jesus retreated to a solitary place to pray. In his humanity he must have been truly tired from the day before. **[personally I'll be a couch potato tonight after preaching/ the annual meeting & AWANA]. No 4am wake up**
And yet Jesus gets up early, after a day of extreme spiritual expenditure, so that he can pray alone to God the Father.... so that He can fellowship with His Father in heaven, talk to Him, listen to Him, be strengthened by Him thru the Holy Spirit.

This was His desire, His commitment, His need. It was truly important to Him and so he gave himself to prayer.

And if the Son of God [who became a man] gave himself to prayer [and needed to pray] – **shouldn't we? don't we?**

It's been said that the world is run by tired men, but the One who co-rules the world was a praying man! He was & is the King but He was totally dependent on God the Father in prayer.

He paused to pray.

And a fair question to ask yourself is **“do I pause to pray?”** Even when I'm busy or tired. Do I retreat to a solitary place to be alone with God?

Which is not to say you shouldn't pray with others. Later on Jesus invites 3 of his disciples to pray with him in Gethsemane. But that said, there is a time and place for us to be alone w/ God. Just to be in His presence, to thank Him, to enjoy Him, to share our hearts with Him, to pray for others, to pray for yourself.

It really starts when God becomes your Father in heaven thru faith in Jesus Christ – in Jn. 14:6 Jesus says, ***“I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except thru me.”***

Once that is settled you can truly begin to pray to your ***Father, who art in heaven...***” That was true for my dad. He didn't genuinely pray for over 60 yrs., but then he became a Christian, that's when he began to pray [which is simply talking to God]. ^{1st time} John Piper said “if you don't pray, you don't love God” – To know Him is to love Him and to talk to Him in prayer.

This was true of Jesus and he shows us in today's passage that there is a time and a place and a necessity for solitary prayer. Just you & God. A prayerful pause in the midst of a busy day or at the beginning of your day or at the end of your day [or all 3]

Jesus had a heart for prayer – do you?

Jesus thought prayer was important – do you?

Worth getting up early for? Worth breaking away from the hustle & bustle of life for? Worthy prioritizing?

Yes, and yet surveys show American Christians pray an ave. of 1 minute per day

That's a real problem –so consider this perspective >>

If you're a Green Bay Packer fan and had an opportunity to talk with their great quarterback Aaron Rodgers would you get up at 5am if you had to? Or your favorite musician, author, actress, etc. Would you prioritize 5 minutes for the greatest person in the universe?..... God!

When are you going to pray? Morning, noon, evening? [plan]

Where are you going to pray? kitchen? Bedroom? On a walking path?

Start with 5 minutes – thank God for who He is and His work in your life/pray for others/and then pray for yourself – confess your sins, ask for forgiveness, ask for Christ-likeness and then pray for the day ahead// pray for priorities and God’s leading.

By the way, praying about the day [and days] ahead was surely part of Jesus’ prayer in v. 35. Look at what transpires next....

[read vv. 36-39]

Simon Peter and others hunted for Jesus to bring him back to Capernaum right away. There was a swell of excitement from the previous day – Peter and the others wanted Jesus to ride the wave of popularity. He could be *The Greatest Showman* if he kept doing his miracles in Capernaum [it would be great theater, a great circus] – matinee at 1pm –showtimes at 4 & 7pm.

“Come on Jesus, everyone is looking for you”

Jesus, however, knew this was a dangerous direction. Reminds me of a documentary I saw about pop singer Justin Bieber.

What was his mother’s greatest fear? That fame would lead him away from the Christian faith. And if you’ve read the news at all you know that at least some of her fears have been realized.

In v. 28 it says that Jesus’ fame was spreading, but in prayer God the Father clarified his direction – so Jesus said,

***“Let us go to the next towns, that I may preach there also,
for that is why I came out.”***

Yes, Jesus worked many miracles and these showed that God’s Kingdom & King & Rule were breaking into the world, but these miracles were never meant to replace the preaching of the

good news, the forgiveness of sins – that’s the greatest miracle [a cleansed heart/ a new life/ an eternal hope].

May God grant us clarity about our days – our pursuits, our plans, our perspective, our pitfall of pride, our purpose in proclaiming the good news to others....

So Christ comes out of that *prayer time* with God the Father focused and empowered and prepared to preach the good news of God’s salvation, while at the same time overcoming the demons he encountered... look at the summary statement in

v. 39 [read]

So Jesus is prayed up and on the move; good thing, because here comes his next challenge.... a leper. **v. 40 [SLIDE]**

!And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean!"

This form of leprosy was probably the dreaded disease that’s both contagious & degenerative. The OT purification law was protective of the community of faith from contamination, but it was also instructive that God is holy & perfect, perfectly set apart from all impurity and imperfection – including disease, death and sin. He must be approached properly!

Typically, uncleanness was temporary, but not for this leper. He couldn’t attend the temple and he had to live in isolation.

So while he wanted to be healed of his disease, he also wanted to return to his family, society & to God’s presence at the temple This is why he said to Jesus, “If you will, you can make me clean”

The man had probably heard about Jesus’ power so he comes [perhaps speaking the required “**unclean, unclean**”] and he

bows before Jesus and asks to be made clean. He didn't know if Jesus would do it, but he had faith that Jesus could do it.

What happens next is astounding – v. 41

Moved with pity [or compassion and maybe some anger at the impact of a broken, fallen, sinful world upon this poor man], he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."

Dr. Luke's Gospel tells us this man was **in the fullness of leprosy**.

This meant that he was probably grossly deformed and hadn't been touched in man years. Max Lucado imagines him separated from his wife and kids. **And what is the first thing Jesus does?**

He touches him. Deeply moved w/ care & compassion, He touches him and he says, **"I will; be clean"**

According to OT Law, Jesus was now unclean for touching a leper. But the mighty Son of God once again exercises His authority and makes the man clean by healing him-the purity & power of Christ overcomes the uncleanness of this man.... v. 42

"And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean."

The compassion, The touch, The authoritative words and this deformed leper is transformed before his eyes & others. He was healed and now He was clean! **"I'm clean/I'm clean"** He could return to His family, society and to the temple. Jesus tells him to go the priest and go thru the purification process involving a blood sacrifice and cleansing w/ water.

And while this leper probable wasn't unclean because of a specific sin in his life, the healing and purification of Christ points to a deeper problem all of us have, an internal leprosy of the heart the bible calls sin – this leper is a parable for us.

In Mark 7 Jesus says, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Jesus had a heart for prayer and a heart for people, but the bible says that the heart of every person is defiled & diseased w/ sin. But the good news of the kingdom is the forgiveness of sin – Christ came to heal us and cleanse us by His blood sacrifice on the cross. **Is. 53 “By his stripes we are healed”**

The leper came, bowed before Christ and in faith asked to be made clean – **have you? Have you asked him to forgive your sins?** Jesus touched the leper – **has he touched you? Has he touched you thru the Holy Spirit w/ his risen//nail scarred hand and made you clean before God because of his sacrifice on the cross?**

He is willing if you ask Him in faith to forgive you.

And when that truly happens – **can you stay quiet about it?**

The leper couldn't stay quiet about his healing. In vv. 43 & 44 Jesus sternly warned him to only tell the priest about the healing of his leprosy. Jesus didn't want to feed the Rock Star narrative that would bring the crowds and make it harder for him to move and preach in other locations. **[It reminds me of Elvis in his day who would rent out an entire amusement park or a theater to avoid the crush of crowds].**

But this leper was so overwhelmed by what Jesus did he told everyone about it – Mark even uses some Christian missionary terms like “proclaim” and “spread the news” to describe what he was doing, so I don't want to be too critical of this man for not following Jesus' instructions to hush.

His healing was such good news he couldn't stay quiet about it.
How about us? - Are we amazed about being cleansed from our sins for all eternity and one day living with God where there will be not more sin, sickness, tears or death? Are we so thankful about that good news we have to tell others?

I got a promotion. I got engaged. I got a job. I'm going to be a grandmother. Can you say, "Jesus touched my heart"?

W+2 priorities - [witness]

Jesus had a heart for God & prayer

Are we following His example?

Jesus had a heart for people.

Has He touched my heart? Am I amazed and vocal?

And along those lines....

Am I following His example of compassion and touching the lives of others?

Let's pray!