

"You Can't Do Diddly-squat Without Jesus"

Mark 1:35-39

12 November 2017

IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU (LIKE JESUS) CAN'T DO LIFE ON YOUR OWN, THEN PRAYER MAKES COMPLETE SENSE.

That's what Paul Miller says in his book *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. It's the best book I've read on prayer. I highly recommend it. Chapter 5 was very helpful for me as I prepared this sermon.

So where do we get the idea that Jesus could not do life on His own? Where do we get the idea that prayer made complete sense to Jesus? Mark tells us that.

LOOK AT VERSE 35...

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Verse 35 is actually pretty shocking if you stop and think about it. Jesus got up very early in the morning. *To pray*. This was pre-Starbucks, y'all. As far as I know, they didn't have coffee back then. To get up early in the morning, *while it is dark*, that's shocking. To get up early in the morning, *while it is dark, to pray*, that is shocking. To get up early in the morning, *while it is dark, to pray, and you're the Son of God*, that is shocking.

It's shocking in the sense that we may find it hard to believe that Jesus needed to get up early, while it was still dark, and pray. Why? Why does He need to pray? He's the 2nd Person of the Trinity, the Messiah, the Son of God. Why does He need to pray? He's God for crying out loud! What need does God have?

It's true, Jesus is God. And as God He has no need. And as God, He had no need that morning in Capernaum when His alarm clock went off. But Jesus was and is not *merely* God. In the incarnation, He is a man too. He's a man, a human being. And as a man, as a human being, He had needs. He needed to eat. He needed clothes. He needed to go to the restroom. He needed sleep. But more than all of those physical needs, Jesus needed His Father. He needed to get alone with God and pray. He needed to pray more than He needed to sleep. He was dependent on the Holy Spirit to empower Him for His mission. And prayer was one of the ways that Jesus received the strength that He needed.

So it's true: Jesus needed time with God just as much as we do. Let that sink in. *Jesus needed time with God just as much as we do*. As the eternal Son of God. And He never used His "God powers" to override His humanity. Please don't think that way about Jesus. Jesus never used His power as God to get a leg up on His humanity. He was a human being and He was God in the incarnation. And He still is a human being and God after His resurrection. He is the God-man.

So what do we mean when we say that Jesus is the God-man? Here's what we mean: Jesus is 100% God and Jesus is 100% man. He is 100% God and 100% man. But that's not all. We can't stop there. There's more. We must also add this phrase when we talk about Jesus being the God-man: *with those 2 natures united together in 1 Person*. It's not enough to say that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. We must always, in the same breath, and in the same sentence say that *those 2 natures are united together in 1 Person*. That's Biblical, orthodox Christology.

Jesus is 100% God and 100% man with those 2 natures united together in 1 Person.

If we don't add that extra phrase, then we will be in danger of sliding into one of the 3 Christological heresies that popped up in church history: Nestorianism, Eutychianism, and Apollinarianism. And if you're interested, see my series in Hebrews where I covered them in detail. Jesus did not use His "God powers" to help Himself. His divinity did not override His humanity when He was in a pinch. As God, He had no needs. But as a human being, Jesus had needs: food, clothing, shelter, *and time with God*. In His humanity, He was desperately dependent on the Holy Spirit. And that's why He sneaks away to pray early in the morning.

And what Mark is telling us here in verse 35, and what Jesus says in other places, is that He is very dependent on his Father. In the incarnation, Jesus becomes childlike and has to depend on His Father. Jesus becomes childlike when He talks about prayer:

John 5:19

The Son of God can do nothing of His own accord.

John 5:30

I can do nothing on my own.

So when Jesus tells us later on in John's gospel that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), He is reminding us that we are children and we must live in dependence upon our Father too. And when Jesus gets away to pray here in Mark, He is telling us that prayer is a relationship. Prayer is about spending time with God.

Understand this, Grace: Prayer is a *relationship*. It is not a duty that must be performed. It is not a discipline. If we view prayer as a duty that we do, we won't want to pray. If we view prayer as merely a discipline that we must work out, then we won't want to pray. Or, we will pray and we'll just check off our "to do" list and go on our merry way feeling good about ourselves and how good we are at one of the spiritual disciplines.

Prayer is a relationship. It's about spending time with our Heavenly Father. It's about getting to know God. It's communion. Prayer is the tangible proof that you are taking Jesus at His word when He said that you can do nothing without Him. When you get alone with God to pray, you are acknowledging that you are a dependent child. That you can't do diddly-squat without Jesus. When we get away to pray, just like Jesus does in verse 35, we are telling ourselves that we are not in control and we desperately need God. Nothing could be more countercultural to our self-dependence than to pray.

And when you get alone with God to pray, you are launching an assault on your selfishness and self-dependence. You are sending SCUD missiles onto the independent territories of your heart. You're raining down bombs on those un-evangelized territories in your heart. And we all have those places of self-dependence that need to be destroyed.

Paul Zahl said this about the late pastor and theologian J.C. Ryle.-

"Yet like many spiritual people, there were still 'unevangelized dark continents' inside him." (PZ Podcast, Episode 108: J.C. Ryle Considered)

You see, no matter how much you have grown as a Christian, no matter how long you have been a Christian, there are still "unevangelized dark continents" inside every one of us. There are places in our hearts where the light of the Gospel is still needed. There are places in our hearts and minds where the radiance of the glory of God has not penetrated. There are places in our hearts and minds where the love of God has not penetrated. There are places, territories, dark continents that need to be blasted with the Gospel. And when we get away from the busyness of the world to pray, we are launching missiles and dropping bombs on those independent places in our hearts.

You see, by nature we are self-sufficient. Self-reliant. Independent. It's in our blood as Americans! We bleed independence in this country, right? And that's fine for a nation, but not okay for a Christian, not okay for a church. Part of the reason why many Americans don't pray is because it's in our blood to be independent. We don't want to depend on anyone. If you cut us, we bleed "standing on our own two feet."

But that doesn't jive with Jesus. The kingdom of God is not American. The kingdom of God wants nothing to do with independence. The kingdom of God, as demonstrated by Jesus here in Mark 1, is all about *being dependent* upon Someone outside of us. And prayer reminds us of that. Jesus reminds us of that. Jesus got away from the busyness of ministry to pray. And if He needed that, how much more do we?

Martin Luther was once asked what his plans for the following day were, and here's how he answered: *Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.*

And I'm sure Luther did have so much to do that he had to pray for 3 hours everyday. And there may be a season of life, perhaps, where God calls you to do that or you choose to do that. I don't know. I'm not quoting Luther today to make any of us feel bad, because if you're like me, I could always pray more. I'm not saying that you need to pray for 3 hours every day. That's between you and Jesus. In fact, I do not think it was an accident that the Biblical authors never tell us how long Jesus prayed. God knew that if Scripture told us that Jesus prayed for 5 hours everyday then there would be some Christians who would go around and try to make 5 hours the standard for prayer.

How long you pray is between you and Jesus. Let me say that again: *How long you pray is between you and Jesus.* I am not going to try and bind your conscience to something that is not Biblical. It's between you and Jesus. All I want to do today is encourage you to pray. This week, one of the prayers that I read out of *The Valley of Vision*, which is a collection of Puritan prayers, was this-

My recovery cannot spring from any cause in me, I can destroy but cannot save myself.

Because I know that I cannot save myself, that I cannot make myself recover in any way, that I can only destroy myself, then I should pray! If it were not for the grace of God, I would destroy my life. And because I know that I could destroy my life, it makes me want to pray! I know what a threat I am to myself! That scares me! So I need to pray, I must pray. And I hope you realize this about yourself too and it makes you want to pray. But I'm not going to tell you how long you should pray. That's between you and Jesus. But I hope you do pray.

But let me also add this: I think we could all pray somewhere between 3 minutes and 3 hours, right? Surely we could all find our sweet spot somewhere between 3 minutes and 3 hours, right? The point of all the passages in the Bible about prayer is that we would be encouraged to pray. Not to make us feel like losers because we don't pray for 3 hours like Martin Luther. The point of Mark in telling us that Jesus got away to pray is not to make us feel bad, or to heap shame upon us- his point is to encourage us to pray. To show us that we are needy children who are desperately dependent upon our Father. Mark is simply telling us this-

IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU (LIKE JESUS) CAN'T DO LIFE ON YOUR OWN, THEN PRAYER MAKES COMPLETE SENSE.

It just makes sense! You can't do diddly-squat without Jesus. If Jesus needed to pray, then I know that I need to. And I think there should be 2 ways that we pray. I think there are 2 ways that the Bible lays out for us to pray:

- * *short*
- * *long*

There are both short and long prayers in the Bible. There are quick prayers uttered and then there are times when we need to get away like Jesus for an extended period of time. That means that we can't simply just pray short prayers and expect to know God. Relationships take time. Time spent with one another. As Paul Miller says, *"You can't build a relationship by sound bites."* (A Praying Life, p. 49) You can't build a relationship with Jesus by sound bites.

But you also can't maintain a relationship just by having one conversation and then never talking the rest of the day. You can't maintain a relationship with God if you, like Martin Luther, begin each day with 3 hours of prayer and then never pray again all day.

Imagine waking up in the morning and you only talk with your spouse over coffee as you are having breakfast. And then you go the rest of the day and never talk. You go to *Costco* together, but you don't talk on the way there or while you're in the store. And then you have lunch at *Chick-fil-A* but you don't talk about how awesome sweet tea is and how that's going to be the official drink of Heaven. And you don't talk about how glorious waffle fries are. The only time you open your mouth is to put the goodness that is *Chick-fil-A* inside it. And then the rest of the day you carry on and never say a word again until the next morning.

That's how we sometimes approach prayer: *"Oh, I just pray without ceasing all day long. Little bits here and there as I wait in the drive thru at Starbucks. And then a little bit later as I peel potatoes for dinner. Just little sound bites all day."*

Well, you can't build a relationship with Jesus by sound bites. Nor can you build a relationship with Jesus by only talking to Him in the morning and never doing it the rest of the day. *"Oh, well I prayed this morning. For 3 hours. I already talked to Jesus today. Do I need to again?"*

Sometimes you pray short, quick prayers. Sometimes you have extended periods of time for prayer. I think we need both.

And sometimes you'll just have to pray wherever you are and whenever you can make it happen. That's what Jesus does here in verse 35. Life is busy, especially if you have kids. Sarah Edwards, wife of theologian Jonathan Edwards, would sometimes just sit at their kitchen table and pull her apron up over her head and pray. She would make her own little "prayer closet" right there at the kitchen table, hiding under her apron, and she'd talk with Jesus. And her children soon learned that when mommy had her apron up over her head, and had a wooden spatula in hand, then you shouldn't bother her. The Edwards children learned that if mommy had her apron over her head and there was a wooden spatula in her hand, then to interrupt her would mean that you would have trouble sitting down on your bottom for awhile.

So here's the bottom line, and I don't want to bind any one's conscience: Pray for extended times, when time allows. And pray little prayers throughout the day, when needed. Short prayers. Long prayers. Don't focus on the length or how eloquent you are, just pray. Just talk to Jesus. Focus on Jesus, not *how* or *how long* you are talking to Jesus.

Let me say one more thing and then we'll get back to Jesus praying alone because His "quiet time" won't last very long. Jesus' prayer time is about to get interrupted like Sarah Edwards. One more thing about prayer.

As it relates to Grace, we're in a season where we are focusing on prayer as a church. We are in a season where we need God. And that's not a bad place to be. The sweet spot of life and ministry is recognizing and coming to grips with your weakness and trusting Jesus' ability to meet your need. It's realizing that 2 Corinthians 12 is the normal Christian life.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

That's the sweet spot in life and ministry. Realizing just how weak, needy, and dependent you are. It seems like a scary place to be, but it is reality. It's where we are, whether we admit it or not. The problem comes when we try and do life and ministry without Jesus. We don't want to do that here at Grace.

We want to continue what we started last Sunday evening. We want to encourage you to set aside time to pray for Grace, to pray for this church, in your small groups, your Sunday school classes, the ministries that you are involved in, etc. Whenever you gather as church family- at Starbucks, at Panera, at a deacon's meeting, when the worship team meets to practice songs, etc- set aside a few minutes to pray specifically for this church.

We want the doctrine that we believe on paper to really become who we are in our relationships. We want the Gospel that we love and cherish and affirm on paper to become our culture here at Grace. We want Gospel doctrine and Gospel culture. Both. So will you pause and pray with others? We want to reach our city with the Gospel. Will you pause and pray with others? Maybe you could do something like pray for Grace as a family every night as you eat dinner. Or, you could fast. How about every Friday you fast one meal? Fasting Fridays. Or take 10 minutes in your Sunday school class. And then one week in your Sunday school class, just spend it in prayer.

Let's all find some ways where we can focus on prayer for our church. I know there's a group that is going to be gathering to pray at 5:30, in the Education Building, right before our 6 PM service. That will start up, I believe, November 19th. Check the bulletin and come join us! All dependent, needy children of God are welcome!

Now, we need to get back to Mark because Jesus loves praying. But we'll see that He is about to get interrupted while He is praying and what He says just might surprise us.

LOOK AT VERSES 35-39...

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Why did Peter run out to find Jesus in the early morning hours, while it was still dark? Why did Peter and those who were with him scour the outskirts of Capernaum looking for Jesus? Because Peter just saw Jesus the day before, do an exorcism in church, heal his mother-in-law, and then do both of those for a bunch of other people inside his living room. Healing. Exorcism. Healing. Exorcism. That's what Jesus did that night. That's what Jesus did on Saturday night. Healing. Exorcism. Healing. Exorcism. Next! Peter saw it with his own eyes. So when Peter wakes up in the next morning, people are camped outside his door, sleeping in tents on his front lawn. They want to see Jesus. And Peter can't find Jesus in the guest bedroom so he scours the village looking for Jesus and still can't find him. And then Peter and Co. finally find Jesus out in a desolate place praying and Peter tells Jesus, *"Everyone is looking for you."*

Let's not rush past this, because what Peter says actually exposes one of those *"unevangelized dark continents"* inside all of us. Let's be honest: Don't we all long to hear words like this? *"Everyone is looking*

for you.” If we’re honest, we do. We want to be important. We want to be loved. We want to be known. We want to matter. We want to believe that if we left, then the whole place would collapse.

We want people to react to our Facebook posts. We want people to like our tweets and pictures. All of that is just another way that we really wish somebody would find us and say, “*Everyone is looking for you.*” But that is not the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is not popularity. The way of Jesus is obscurity. The way of Jesus is being invisible. Doing the mundane. With no cameras around. No social media posts. No hashtags. And that goes against our very nature. We want to be somebody.

If we’re honest with ourselves, in our own way and in the places where we live, we long to hear those words, “*Everyone is looking for you.*”

Jesus was so popular that He could not even enter into a town without causing a traffic jam. Shouldn’t He seize this opportunity? Shouldn’t He seize this *ministry* opportunity? “*It’s ministry, Jesus! Why not make a name for yourself? In the name of ‘ministry,’ of course.*” Well, Jesus will have none of that. Jesus doesn’t want anything to do with being a celebrity pastor, a celebrity rabbi. His way is the way of the invisible, behind the scenes, doing the ordinary and the mundane. Jesus doesn’t need a hashtag to do ministry. It’s not His way. Jesus didn’t take pictures of Himself serving at a soup kitchen with the hashtag #JesusServes. That’s not the way of Jesus. That’s not the way of the kingdom.

Zack Eswine tells us that, “*Jesus is fame-shy. Jesus seemed drawn not to the spotlight but from it. Disciples and friends had to search. He wasn’t tweeting. His blog lay unattended. His e-mail responses were not immediate. Where they often found him was alone and in desolate places praying (Luke 5:16). In fact, it seems that just when Jesus was at the right place at the right time, and the opportunity to advance his work through greater celebrity called out to him, he intentionally allowed the call to go to voice mail and disappeared for awhile (John 6:15).*” (The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy In Our Limitations through A Daily Apprenticeship With Jesus, p.60)

Listen, if we’re going to follow Jesus, we have to come to grips with the fact that Jesus is not interested in helping us make a name for ourselves. This is not the way of Jesus. Jesus is not interested in helping us make a name for *Grace Baptist Church* in this city. Jesus is not interested in making us the most popular, most talked about church in this city. Jesus is only interested in His glory. He is only interested in helping us make disciple-making disciples who glorify Him. Jesus does not come alongside us to help us build our own little kingdoms. That very idea makes Jesus throw up. It nauseates Him. His way is not the way of numbers and figures and crowds. His way is the way of the invisible, the mundane, the ordinary.

Jesus cares about *people*, not winning a *popularity* contest. He is not like us. We like to have our egos stroked. We would love to have someone publicly stroke our ego and then we respond like this: “*Stop. Please. Stop.*” We wouldn’t run from this fame stuff. We would relish in it. We would steer conversations so that they continue to be about us. Not Jesus. He wants nothing to do with this.

But the good news of the Gospel comes and raises a banner over our selfishness and over our desire to be famous and our desire to be liked. On the cross, Jesus took our desire for fame, He took our desire to be known and loved by many, He took our desire to be “somebody” and He gave us His humility, He gave us His meekness, He gave us His trust and rest in His Father. He exchanged His humility for our pride.

Jesus teaches us that the really “sweet spot” in life and ministry is being alone, away from the spotlight, with our Father in prayer. It doesn’t get any better than that. Jesus got away from the crowds because He knew that obscurity and being alone with His Father is what He needed. Obscurity is the sweet spot of ministry. Being alone, away from the crowds is where we find rest. It’s where we find meaning. Meaning is not found in how many followers you have, how many “likes” you get, how many re-tweets you get, how big your church or ministry is, how awesome you seem to be in the eyes of others. Meaning and purpose is found in being in relationship with God. It’s union with Christ. It’s being adopted into God’s family.

Jesus knew that He must get away and talk to God. Do we really think that we can survive by not doing what Jesus does here after a long day of ministry? Jesus tries to pray, early in the morning, and He gets interrupted!

Why did Jesus refuse to sign a book deal with *Crossway*? Why did Jesus refuse to give in to all the accolades and attention of the crowds? Because Jesus wanted to see the Gospel go forth. He came to preach good news to weary sinners. He came not to be famous, but to cry out “It is finished,” on the cross.

Mark is telling us 2 things about Jesus’ ministry that we would do well to emulate:

- 1) Jesus prayed to God.

2) Jesus preached the Gospel.

There's some free alliteration for those of you who love alliteration. Jesus prayed to God. Jesus preached the Gospel. And that's exactly what I believe that Jesus wants us to be focusing on right now at Grace. Of course, we always want to be doing this. But we are in a season where we need to make a concerted effort to pray more while we preach good news to our city.

So who wants in? There's the cycle in verses 35-39: Pray. Preach. You begin praying and you align your heart with God's so you want to go preach and share good news with your neighbors and co-workers. Then, when you see some people reject this good news, and you become aware that only God can change hearts, and you encounter the brokenness of this world, then that makes you go back to prayer. And that's the cycle. That's what Jesus is doing in the gospels. He prays. He preaches. He prays. He preaches.

LOOK AT VERSES 38-39 AGAIN...

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

Jesus came because there aren't supposed to be demon-possessed men, or children with cancer, or neglected spouses. He came to be the Second Adam because the First Adam messed it all up. And that's why Jesus doesn't just plant a church in Capernaum. He knew there were more people who needed help. More people needed to hear the good news that God is kind and loving and merciful to sinners. More people needed to be released from demonic oppression. He wasn't interested in planting a church in Capernaum and being a celebrity pastor.

Jesus is determined to preach the Gospel to weary sinners. He is determined to get to the cross. The ultimate meeting place of these 2 aspects of Jesus ministry- *preaching and exorcisms* - was at the cross. Jesus died for us and he made a public spectacle of the devil (see Colossians 2).

Yes, Jesus did not mind healing people. Jesus did not mind casting out demons. But His main mission was to live and die for sinners, not become the cool, hip church in town that everybody was flocking to. That's why He didn't set up shop in Capernaum. He came to die. He didn't come to mainly work miracles, He came to be a Savior, a Redeemer. He came to heal the deeper wound that we all have: *sin*. That's our sickness. And Jesus came to save us and forgive us. On the cross. That's where He was headed. The cross. Not church planting in Capernaum. He was on mission.

And part of the reason why Jesus is praying is so that He will have strength, through the Holy Spirit, to go to the cross to complete His mission of being the Second Adam. So in one sense, our salvation is related to the prayers of Jesus in these quiet moments alone with His Father. In one sense, *we are saved* through the prayers of Jesus because His times in prayer empowered Him to resist temptation and go to the cross to die for our sins. Have you ever thought about that? His prayers played a role in our salvation. Our salvation is dependent on the fact that Jesus got away to desolate places to pray early in the morning when it was dark. We wouldn't be saved if Jesus wasn't an early riser! We wouldn't be saved if Jesus was one of those people who push the snooze button 20 times.

I'm so glad that Jesus prayed. And-

IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU (LIKE JESUS) CAN'T DO LIFE ON YOUR OWN, THEN PRAYER MAKES COMPLETE SENSE.

In other words, you can't do diddly-squat without Jesus.

"You Can't Do Diddly-squat Without Jesus"

Mark 1:35-39

Sermon Study Questions

1. Why did Jesus need to pray? Why did prayer make sense to Jesus?
2. Why is it not enough to say that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man? What phrase must we always include with this?
3. Paul Zahl said this about the late pastor and theologian J.C. Ryle- *"Yet like many spiritual people, there were still 'unevangelized dark continents' inside him."* (PZ Podcast, Episode 108: J.C. Ryle Considered) What are the "unevangelized dark continents" in your heart that need the Gospel today? Fear? Worry? Unbelief?

4. Quotes to discuss:

Paul Miller

"If you know that you (like Jesus) can't do life on your own, then prayer makes complete sense."

"You can't build a relationship (with God) by soundbites."

Zack Eswine

"Jesus is fame-shy. Jesus seemed drawn not to the spotlight but from it. Disciples and friends had to search. He wasn't tweeting. His blog lay unattended. His e-mail responses were not immediate. Where they often found him was alone and in desolate places praying (Luke 5:16). In fact, it seems that just when Jesus was at the right place at the right time, and the opportunity to advance his work through greater celebrity called out to him, he intentionally allowed the call to go to voice mail and disappeared for awhile (John 6:15)."