

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Looking for Jesus

Mark 1:34-45

Key verse: “When they found [Jesus], they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you’” (Mark 1:35-45).

Maybe you have heard this wise saying: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!” Here Jesus himself puts this important maxim into practice. He has gone out alone, before daylight, to pray. Suddenly Jesus’ prayer time is interrupted by Simon Peter and some of the other disciples. They have hunted him down to tell him, “Everyone is searching for you” (Mark 1:37).

I suppose the disciples were thinking, “Jesus should take advantage of his great popularity here in Capernaum.” After all, his popularity there meant He was suddenly in great demand by the people. Perhaps the disciples saw an opportunity for Jesus to gather a great movement around himself, to build a strong following right there in Capernaum.

However, Jesus immediately resists the temptation to build on his Capernaum success by putting down roots there. Instead, Jesus tells the disciples, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do” (Mark 1:38).

Dr. David McKenna says of this decision: “Security is always a temptation that stands off against risk. Yet, in the purpose of God, the movement is always forward through open doors and into wider horizons. Christians who have stopped going and growing are the most miserable of creatures. They clog up churches with undue caution and infect the Body of Christ with their own frustration. They are inventors of paralysis by analysis and the creators of strangulation by regulation. Thank God, Jesus chooses risk over security. He has no idea whether He will meet the rejection of Nazareth or the fame of Capernaum in the next town down the road, but to fulfill the purpose for which He came, He goes on.” (*The Communicator’s Commentary, Vol. 2*).

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” For Jesus, the main thing was to “proclaim the message,” by word and by deed (Mark 1:38).

What message was that? Well, Mark's Gospel tells us: "...Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus' core message centered on the *kingdom of God*, and his message revealed these four things about God's kingdom:

1. In the coming of Jesus, "the time is fulfilled." God's plan for humanity's redemption has now reached its fulfillment in the coming of his Son, Jesus. So, there is an *urgency* in how people respond to Jesus—the people of Jesus' day and people today.

2. In the coming of Jesus, God's kingdom "is at hand." No more waiting for some future messianic hope. In and through Jesus, God's kingdom has come to us, and we can enter it now!

Our response to Jesus involves these two things: "Repent and believe in the gospel."

3. "Repent." Change your mind about your life. Turn around and begin to go in a new direction—God's direction!

4. "Believe in the gospel." To "believe" is more than giving mental assent. Elton Trueblood said, "To be a Christian is to bet your life that Christ is right."

According to Mark's Gospel, this was the core message that Jesus came to proclaim. It defined his mission and purpose. So, he was able to turn his back on instant success and ego-deflating popularity in order to move on to "the neighboring towns" and "proclaim the message there also."

Jesus moves on from Capernaum, "proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons" (Mark 1:39). Suddenly, Jesus is confronted with a situation that reveals his *heart* of love and compassion. We have seen Jesus' passion to proclaim the *message*; here we see beyond the message into the *heart* of Jesus: "A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!'" (Mark 1:40-41).

Face to face with the neediest of the needy of his day, Jesus' heart toward all of humanity is clearly seen. McKenna puts it this way: "...*compassion* stands out as...the truest expression of the heart of Jesus. The word 'compassion' derives from the same Greek word that means 'viscera, bowels, intestines,' or in our vernacular, 'guts.' When we read that Jesus is moved with compassion, it means that He feels Himself so deeply into the sufferings of the leper that it is just as if He Himself is suffering as a leper. Jesus is not moved with pity—that is too condescending; not with sympathy—that is too superficial; not with empathy—that is too distant. Not just mind for mind, hand for hand, or even heart for heart, but stomach for stomach, blood for blood, gut for gut, Jesus feels his way into the leper's need." (*The Communicator's Commentary, Vol. 2*).

Today's text, then, gives us a revealing insight into both the core *message* and the compassionate *heart* of Jesus. His *message*, the message that he came to proclaim by word and deed, was that: *In and through Him, God's kingdom is available to all who will "repent and believe."* The text also reveals the *heart* of Jesus, a heart that beats with love and compassion for the needs of a lost and dying world.

Let's pray that Jesus' passion for sharing the kingdom *message* and his loving, compassionate *heart* for people would fill our lives and fill our churches!

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