

Proclaimed

Jesus is worthy of us telling others about Him.

A pastor from Southeast Asia shared his testimony about how the message of Christ came to his village. He said that in his country, Buddhism reigned supreme as the chief religion in the land. From time to time, however, Christians would appear in his village, and they would talk about Jesus. They focused their attention on drawing a crowd and telling everyone about how they could be saved. After they collected an offering, they would leave for the next village. Before they left, they would tell the villagers to pray when a crisis would come their way. When they prayed, they could count on Jesus to help them.

In due time, a crisis would come along and torment the villagers. The villagers would pray and ask Jesus to help them, but nothing would happen. Eventually, people returned to Buddhism, gave up on Jesus, and distrusted the foreigners who told them about Him.

Later, a team of Christian missionaries came to the village, and they took another approach. They talked about Jesus whenever they had the opportunity. When people gave their lives to Jesus, the missionaries helped them to grow as believers, and they started a church. The missionaries opened a school for the children too, and they showed the farmers how they could produce a better harvest. They set up a medical clinic in the village as well.

The missionaries never asked for money, and they did not expect to be paid for any of the services they provided. Of course, villagers would ask the missionaries about the reason for their compassion. They wondered why the missionaries would leave their homes and move to a country far away so they could help strangers who lived in a distant village. The missionaries would always answer their questions in the same way. They would reply by saying, “Because Jesus loves you.”

The approach of these missionaries reflects the way that Jesus began His public ministry. His approach demonstrates the priority that He gave to His messianic purpose through both proclamation and compassion. As we study this episode in Mark’s Gospel, we will find that Jesus is worthy of our testimony about Him and the salvation He accomplished for us.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Mark 1:14–3:6

Jesus began His public ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist. Jesus’s priority was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God. He declared that being a citizen of God’s kingdom resulted from repentance and faith. As Jesus proclaimed the good news, He called four fishermen to be His disciples: Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John. All of them left their livelihoods and followed Him without hesitation (1:14-20).

Jesus and His four disciples made their way to Capernaum, a city located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. They went to the synagogue there, and Jesus began to teach the truth about God’s kingdom. Those present were astonished because they could tell that He spoke with unique authority. A demon-possessed man spoke up about Jesus’s messianic identity as “the Holy One of God.” Jesus drove out the demon. Everyone who witnessed it were amazed at the authority of Jesus, and they began to tell others about Him (vv. 21-28).

Later that same day, Jesus visited with Peter and Andrew in their house. They told Him about Peter’s mother-in-law, who suffered with a fever, and He healed her. By nightfall, people from Capernaum brought the sick and demon-possessed to Him so they could be healed.

Well before dawn the next morning, the disciples interrupted Jesus as He prayed in a deserted place to tell Him that a gathering crowd awaited Him. In response, Jesus led His disciples to the nearby villages so He could continue to preach the good news about God’s kingdom. That’s when a leper approached Him. He begged Jesus to heal him. Jesus healed him and directed him to go to a priest and follow the instructions given in the law of Moses to confirm that he no longer had leprosy (vv. 29-45).

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, a great crowd gathered at a home (most likely that of Simon Peter and Andrew) where He was staying. The crowd was so large that friends of a paralyzed man had to lower him down through the roof of the house so they could reach Jesus. When Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven, some scribes (experts in the Jewish law) questioned His authority to forgive sins. In response, Jesus healed the man. Those present were astonished at the healing and gave glory to God. After this, Jesus called Levi (“Matthew,” Matt. 9:9), a tax collector, to be His disciple. He invited Jesus to his house to meet his friends. Once more, Jewish leaders confronted Jesus, this time about

His willingness to be in the company of sinners. Shortly after this, Jesus was also questioned on issues related to fasting and the Sabbath (Mark 2:1-28).

Later, Jesus went to a synagogue on a Sabbath. There a confrontation with the Pharisees occurred, this time over Jesus's healing a man with a withered hand. This led the Pharisees and the Herodians (probably supporters of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea) to plot how to kill Jesus (3:1-6).

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

Focused (Mark 1:35-39)

As we follow Jesus, we are often confronted with people and opportunities that can draw us away from God and His purposes for our lives. As Jesus began His ministry, He had a clear perception of His messianic mission, and He worked diligently to remain faithful to it. However, His disciples did not share His grasp of His purpose, and they encouraged Him to embrace demands which would only serve as distractions to His mission. But Jesus refused to give in to such distractions.

VERSE 35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.

Jesus began His public ministry by proclaiming the good news about God's kingdom. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). He also called disciples, cast out demons, and healed sick people (vv. 16-34). His ministry took Him to Capernaum (v. 21). Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was home for those who made a living by farming or fishing. Seasoned fishermen like Peter and Andrew lived there. James and John had a fishing business that engaged them in the commerce of Capernaum. Before long, the city came to be an important center for the Galilean ministry of Jesus.

Early one morning during His ministry in Capernaum, Jesus left His disciples and went out by Himself to a quiet, **deserted place**.

In the seclusion of the pre-dawn darkness, He spent uninterrupted time in prayer with His Father. Mark wrote about two other instances in Jesus's ministry when He separated Himself from others to be alone so He could pray (6:30-31; 14:32-42).

VERSES 36-37

Simon and his companions searched for him, and when they found him they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

Simon and his companions searched for Jesus. The Greek word for **searched for** (*katadioko*) could also be translated “hunted for.” They found Him, interrupting the solitude that Jesus savored while He prayed. Jesus had called Simon to be one of His disciples at the beginning of His public ministry (1:16). Later on, Jesus would refer to him as Peter (3:16). Apparently thinking the news they brought to Jesus was of the utmost importance, they said, **“Everyone is looking for you.”** This is one of many times in Mark's Gospel when Jesus's disciples failed to understand the nature of His messianic mission. They believed that Jesus needed to return to His healing work among the people who had gathered that morning. The crowd had grown (“everyone”) because word had spread that Jesus could perform healing miracles.

VERSE 38

And he said to them, “Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come.”

In the thinking of Simon and his companions, the crowd awaiting Jesus demanded His immediate attention. However, Jesus's reply demonstrated that He had very different priorities. **“Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too.”** Jesus had no intention of placating the multitude who were eager to see and experience more miracles. He had not come into the world in order to draw great crowds of people by performing miracles. While Jesus's casting out demons and healing sick people would make a monumental difference to every person who experienced His miracle-working power, the greatest need in their lives had to do with their eternal salvation. He did not intend for Capernaum to be the capital city of His kingdom. His messianic mission called Him to pass on the tempting opportunity to build a vast ministry in the region. Rather, Jesus's intention (in keeping with His plan) was to *preach* about the coming of the kingdom of God (1:14-15) to the *villages* in the vicinity of Capernaum. The people in the outlying villages also needed

the opportunity to hear the good news about the kingdom of God and salvation available through Jesus.

VERSE 39

He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Mark details that Jesus traveled throughout **Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons**. The Greek word for *preaching* (*kerusso*) brings to mind the role of a herald who appeared with important news that everyone needed to hear and believe. The herald proclaimed the news with the expectation that everyone would embrace it and act on it. Jesus went throughout the region as God’s herald of good news of the coming of the kingdom of God in Messiah, and He shared His message in the *synagogues*. Along with the temple in Jerusalem, synagogues served a critical role in the lives of Jewish people in those day. The synagogue was the central meeting place in a town or village that was used for social, political, religious, and educational purposes. The Jews gathered in the synagogues on the Sabbath for worship and religious instruction. When Jesus preached in the synagogues, He gave His hearers the opportunity to hear the good news about the kingdom of God. Jesus’s preaching would make an eternal difference in the lives of those who heard, believed, and embraced His message.

Along with preaching, another aspect of Jesus’s ministry was the *driving out of demons* from those possessed by them. Also called “unclean spirits” (v. 27), the demons recognized Jesus as the Son of God (3:11) and He never failed to drive them from those the demons held in their control.

Explore Further

Read the article “Prayer” on pages 1291–1293 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Do you see your prayers as a dialogue between you and God? How much of your prayer time do you spend talking to God? How much time do you spend listening to Him? As you pray, try to be discerning about when you need to talk to God and when you need to listen to what He wants to tell you.

Compassionate (Mark 1:40-42)

The demands of life can sometimes lead us to ignore or miss opportunities to help others in the name of Jesus. Jesus took the initiative to go to the places where people could hear His message about salvation. In proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God, Jesus never lost sight of the needs of those to whom He proclaimed the gospel. Compassion moved Him to share the love of God by meeting those needs in keeping with His messianic purpose.

VERSE 40

Then a man with leprosy came to him and, on his knees, begged him, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

As Jesus preached the good news, He continued to heal individuals whose bodies were broken or sick. A man stricken with **leprosy** approached Him. In the first century, *leprosy* was a general term for a variety of skin diseases including boils, burns, itches, ringworm, and issues affecting the scalp. Such diseases could be dangerously contagious, so God gave strict instructions about dealing with anyone who had them. He directed those suffering such diseases to be quarantined. According to Leviticus 13:45-46, victims of leprosy would be required to wear clothes that had been torn, and they could not cut or comb their hair. Furthermore, they had to keep their mouths covered at all times and keep a distance away from other people. When they saw anyone coming their way, they had to send a warning by shouting that they were unclean. Worst of all, they had to live in isolation outside the community.

When the leper approached Jesus, he obviously violated multiple directives in Leviticus. He didn't isolate himself, and he didn't shout that he was unclean. Instead, he **came to** Jesus in desperation and knelt before Him in humility. Obviously, he believed that Jesus could make him whole. Therefore, he took the risks associated with violating the regulations and **begged** Jesus to heal him. He already knew that Jesus possessed the ability to heal him. He may have watched from a distance as Jesus healed others. He knew that if Jesus was **willing**, He had the power to cure him of the disease.

VERSE 41

Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. “I am willing,” he told him. “Be made clean.”

The leper may have expected Jesus to turn him away like others who had kept their distance from him. Being separated from others physically meant being disconnected from family and society. For that reason, Jesus must have surprised the leper with His response. **Compassion** for the leper moved Jesus to help the man instead of ignoring him.

The Greek word for *compassion* refers to the individual's bowels (intestines), meaning emotions coming from the deepest part of the person. To have compassion is to have sympathy or pity, and in this case it suggests an emotional response to the broken, desperate person kneeling before Jesus. Since He was altogether human as well as divine, Jesus experienced the natural, emotional responses of other human beings. Without a doubt, therefore, compassion for the leper filled the heart of Jesus. In conjunction with the compassion in His heart, Jesus may have felt indignant over the physical, emotional, and social damage that the disease had inflicted on the man. In any case, compassion clearly conveys the impression that the leper's request made on Jesus.

Jesus demonstrated His compassion by touching the leper's body. In those days, the Jewish laws about being ceremonially clean required everyone to avoid the possibility of coming into physical contact with a leper. Anyone who happened to touch someone with leprosy had to go through the rituals associated with being ceremonially cleansed. There was also the danger of possibly contracting the disease by physical contact with the leper. For that reason, Jews refrained from coming in contact with lepers. But compassion compelled Jesus to touch the leper anyway. The leper had most likely grown accustomed to the cold shoulders given him by those he encountered, so he must have been pleasantly surprised to hear Jesus say "**I am willing**" in response to his request that Jesus heal him. Jesus exerted His authority over sickness by making the leper's body **clean**. The power of Jesus mingled with His mercy.

VERSE 42

Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

When Jesus spoke His words of healing, the leper **immediately** was cured. The abruptness of the leper's recovery validated the fact that he had experienced a miracle. Immediate healing indicated that only God could have performed such a miracle for the leper. He came to Jesus with a body that had been wrecked by **leprosy**. With the command of Jesus, the dreadful disease **left him**. It vanished in the blink of an eye.

The touch of Messiah's hand had provided the leper with the opportunity to return to his family, his friends, and his community. He could get

back to work, and he could begin to enjoy everything that being a leper had denied him.

Explore Further

Read the article “Leprosy” on page 1004 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What were the consequences of a person contracting leprosy? How did Jesus’s perspective on what made a person unclean differ from that of first-century Jewish society?

Proclaimed (Mark 1:43-45)

One of the joys of salvation is sharing the message of the gospel with others. After Jesus healed a leper, He directed him to tell no one about his healing, but rather seek out a priest to make the necessary sacrifices to be declared clean. But because of the joy in his heart, the formerly leprous man could not keep silent about what Jesus had done for him and word of Jesus spread quickly.

VERSE 43

Then he sternly warned him and sent him away at once,

The stern warning that Jesus issued to the leper He had just healed could have come across as abrupt or even harsh. In this context **sternly warned** means to charge someone earnestly or threateningly. Granted, Jesus spoke sternly to him. However, the context of His statement provides hints for understanding the reason for Jesus’s severe warning. As noted above in Jesus’s response to the disciples seeking Him while He was at prayer (Mark 1:36-38), the miracles of healing and of casting out demons that He performed had caused everyone to want to see His healing power for themselves; others wanted to be healed. For that reason, they flocked to Him from all directions. Jesus responded to their misguided assessment of His ministry by withdrawing from them and continuing His proclamation of the gospel in the surrounding villages. He would not depart from His purpose, and His plan for fulfilling it would not accommodate the distraction that would come with being recognized only as a healer. He was Messiah, and His mission was to provide the way

for eternal salvation. He fully intended to remain focused on the work to be done in keeping with His mission.

Other Gospel writers shared similar insights into the devotion of Jesus to His messianic mission to make salvation possible. He kept His crucifixion and resurrection in view as He went about His work. For instance, He told His brothers on one occasion that He would not go to Jerusalem with them because His time had not yet come (John 7:6). With His statement, He meant that the time had not yet come for His death on the cross. However, later as He saw the cross coming into view, He declared that His time had come (12:23-28).

The news about the healing of the leper did not need to be shared. It would only draw unnecessary attention. Therefore, in an effort to prevent anyone from seeing that the man had been healed, Jesus made the wise choice to send him away at once.

VERSE 44

telling him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

Consistent with His plan, Jesus instructed the man He healed to **say nothing** about the miracle to anyone. Equally important, Jesus wanted the man to make the appropriate response dictated by Scripture in response to the restoration of his body to health. According to Leviticus 14:1-20, such a response would require him to go to the **priest** and comply with the law of **Moses**.

In Matthew’s Gospel account, Jesus told His disciples that He didn’t come to do away with the law (Matt. 5:17). His crucifixion would fulfill the demands of the law because He would be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of humanity (John 3:14-18). Therefore, Jesus intended to honor the law, and His instructions to the man demonstrated His intention.

In order to comply with the law, the man would have been required to make his way to Jerusalem and appear before a *priest*. While priests could be found throughout the holy land, such sacrifices as those required for being cured of leprosy could only be made in the temple in Jerusalem. He would also have had to bring an offering of two birds that had been set apart as ceremonially clean. One of the birds had to be sacrificed. The other bird would be released after it had been dipped in the blood of the bird that had been killed. Then the man himself would be sprinkled with the blood seven times by the priest in order to be declared as completely cured. Two male lambs were also sacrificed.

Through his testimony, the man would inform the Jewish religious leaders that Jesus had instantly healed him. Bearing witness to Jesus's miracle would indicate that something remarkable had happened to the former leper. The religious leaders would then be compelled to investigate the matter. By doing so they would come into contact with Jesus and hear His call to repentance and faith in Him.

VERSE 45

Yet he went out and began to proclaim it widely and to spread the news, with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But he was out in deserted places, and they came to him from everywhere.

Mark did not provide any details about whether or not the man had gone to the priest in Jerusalem. Instead, he focused attention on the man's inability to keep his testimony about Jesus to himself. The man **began to proclaim** the good news about having been cured, and he **spread the news** about the miracle-working power of Jesus everywhere he went. Of course, his testimony spread like wildfire. In turn, it drew people to Jesus once more. They flocked to Him again because He had performed a miracle of healing, not because of the good news about eternal life that He preached.

Just as Jesus earlier had to leave Capernaum due to the growing crowds seeking Him out because of His miracles, now He needed to remove Himself from public view once again because of the man's testimony. Except this time He **could no longer enter a town openly**. He had to create greater distance between Himself and the people who had misunderstood His messianic purpose. However, despite Jesus's attempt to seclude Himself, the people still **came to Him from everywhere**.

Explore Further

Read Leviticus 14:1-20. Notice the way that birds and lambs were used in declaring a leper to be cured. In light of the messianic mission of Jesus to provide the gift of salvation, in what way do the birds and lambs foreshadow God's redemptive plan through Jesus (see John 1:29,36)?
