

Gospel of Mark 3:- The reality of public ministry – Chapter 1, verses 29 – 45

In any kind of ministry there is a tension between being personally accessible to individuals; being available to the public; and being able to “retreat” for personal refreshment and recharging of spiritual batteries! In these verses we read of our Lord Jesus Christ coping with his very human “celebrity status” before he meets with opposition as his ministry develops. (Next week in Chapter 2!)

Chapter 1, verses 29 – 31:- After a morning preaching, a confrontation with evil in the man indwelt by “an unclean spirit”, Jesus leaves for “*the house of Simon and Andrew*”. Looking ahead to Chapter 2, verse 1 it would seem that Jesus made his home in Capernaum, most likely at the house of Simon Peter. It was not destined to be a time of relaxation! As soon as he gets through the door, he is told that his hostess is ill! His healing touch is needed, even here among his friends. Notice that there is another “immediately” implied in verse 31. The healing was immediate and total! The mother of Simon (sadly, we don’t know her name) got up and got on with her duties as hostess!

Chapter 1, verses 32 – 34:- This busy day in Capernaum was a Sabbath (verse 21). Mark is very careful to note that it was “*when the sun had set*” that the crowds gathered round the house door. No load was to be carried or healing take place on the Sabbath which ran (and still runs) from sunset to sunset. “*They brought to him . . .*” carries the meaning of continuing action. They kept on bringing them one after the other. Jesus “*would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him*”. This knowledge of his person is evidence that these were not merely cases of mental illness.

Chapter 1, verses 35 – 39:- “*a great while before day . . .*” refers to the early part of the last watch of the night, perhaps between three and four o’clock in the morning. His purpose was to spend time in prayer before moving on to other towns in Galilee. Simon and some of the other followers seemed to be concerned that Jesus was missing opportunities for ministry. “*Everyone is searching for you . . .*” can be taken to mean “we wondered where you had got to”! To be searched for as “a wonder worker” or “healer” is not the following Jesus came into the world to attract. He now has a wider mission field in that he moves into the neighbouring towns to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom in both word and deed. Compare the last phrase of verse 38 with Luke chapter 4, verse 43. Jesus came forth from heaven to earth – he was sent into the world!

The ministry of this example day in Capernaum – Mark 1, verses 21 – 34, repeated in other towns and villages in Galilee.

Chapter 1, verses 40 – 45:- Even leprosy yields to the power of the Lord Jesus Christ! Besides being a loathsome and disfiguring disease, leprosy involved ritual uncleanness and complete segregation from the community and religious life of Israel. The Law could do nothing for the leper, only protect the rest of the community against him. What therefore the Old Testament religion - the Law – could not do, was readily done by Jesus! Paul’s Letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verse 3 is a good comment on this passage. Note also that Matthew chapter 11, verse 5 and Luke chapter 7, verse 22 both list the cleansing of lepers as a sign of the Messiah’s arrival.

We need to recognise :-

- 1) The faith of the leper “*if you will, you can make me clean.*”
- 2) “*moved with pity*” is not strong enough to describe the emotion felt by Jesus. “*moved with anger*” is a better translation. Anger against sin and disease in a fallen world.
- 3) Jesus touched the leper. Breaking all conventions and laws. By doing so the Lord became ritually unclean, the leper should not have come to Jesus – see Leviticus chapter 13, verses 45 – 46.
- 4) The healing was immediate and total (verse 42).
- 5) In verses 41 - 44 the Lord is described as being “*full of emotion*”. The language Mark uses is one of anger and indignation. Why? Because of the ravages of sin? Because the leper had to come to him for healing, the Law was helpless in this case? He does send the man to the priest in order to comply with the Law (again the procedure is laid out in Leviticus chapter 14.)
- 6) We can read here of the man’s failure to comply to the command of Jesus. An alternative translation from the Greek could read “*He [i.e. Jesus] went out and preached [the gospel] constantly and spread abroad the word [of God] so that he could no longer enter any city openly . . .*”

The power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ comes over strongly in this first chapter of Mark’s Gospel. In chapter 2 we will find confrontation and opposition from the “powers that be”. It was ever thus!

O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel;
for some are sick, and some are sad,
and some have never loved thee well.
and some have lost the love they had;

Thy touch has still its ancient power;
no word from thee can fruitless fall:
hear, in this solemn evening hour,
and in thy mercy heal us all.

Henry Twells 1868