

Everyone Is Looking For You!

HOW TO DEVELOP SPIRITUAL PRIORITIES

by Ron Ritchie

My high school music teacher Mrs. Lodge taught the school choir all the newest musical scores, both from the Broadway hits and the current movie musicals, and we sang these melodies at the school assembly. Many of those songs remain in my memory. One in particular, which I find myself humming lately as I speed along our California freeways, is the song which the White Rabbit sang in the Walt Disney production of Alice in Wonderland. In one scene, Alice wanted to talk to the White Rabbit but the rabbit was in such a hurry he began singing,

I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date,
I have no time to say good-bye, hello,
I'm late, I'm late, I'm late.

When I wave, I lose the time I save.
My fuzzy ears and whiskers took me
too much time to shave,
I run and then I hop, hop, hop,
I wish that I could fly.

There's danger if I dare to stop
And here's the reason why,
You see, I'm overdue, I'm in a rabbit stew,
Can't even say good-bye, hello,
I'm late, I'm late, I'm late.

As I look at my own life as well as how others live in our community--the very young, newly-married couples, established yuppies, "empty nesters" and retirees--I am becoming more aware of the ever-increasing pace of life. But those of us who live in this intense, fast-paced, high-tech society are not the only victims of the rapid pace. The church of Jesus Christ also is being greatly affected by the "White Rabbit" syndrome. This is happening to such an extent that I am tempted to suggest that we make this song the national anthem of our country as well as that of our churches. If we were honest with ourselves, we should consider putting these lyrics on the front doors of our homes because they are already in our hearts.

When we consider the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, however, we find none of this frantic pace either in his life or ministry--and he faced all the pressures and temptations that the world, the flesh and the devil confront us with every day. In his ministry with individuals and with crowds, even in the face of the ever-present Pharisees, many whom were seeking a reason to put him to death, he lived out his life and ministry with a calm spirit and a clear focus. He knew where he had come from, why he was on earth, and where he was going. Who could better model for us how we can live in this hectic world and yet not be consumed by its false philosophies and value systems?

How was our Lord able to keep his priorities so well in order that no one ever could accuse him of singing, "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date./Can't even say good-bye, hello,/I'm late, I'm late, I'm late"? And can we learn his secret so that we too may live a life of resting faith in God, and stop singing and acting like the White Rabbit? Let us look at one 24-hour period in the life of Jesus, found in Mark 1:21-39, and see if we can find the key to his lifestyle.

Our Lord had already entered the second year of his ministry. In the synagogue of his home town of Nazareth he had read Isaiah 61, and declared that he himself was the long-awaited Messiah. The Jews accused him of blaspheming and they grabbed him and led him out of the city to a hill to be killed. Jesus, however, was able to escape and pass through their midst. Then he took his four disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, and walked some 20 miles to the city of Capernaum, located on the north shore of the lake of Galilee. On the Sabbath, they went to the local synagogue. This where he will take up our story.

I. The Secret of Living a Full Day (Mark 1:21-28)

And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. And just then there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him!" And immediately the news about Him went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.

Saturday was the day which God had designated for mankind to rest from all their labors, just as he himself had rested from his labors (Gen.2:1-3). The Sabbath was observed in Israel before the Law was given, and its observance later became the Fourth Commandment. The Jews were not to work on the Sabbath. They could not gather food, or wood for a fire, or even build a fire. Should they break the Sabbath they were liable to be stoned to death (Ex.31:14). The priests, however, could carry on the certain activities in the temple.

In Jesus' day, the local synagogue was the place for teaching and instruction. Services consisted of a time of prayer, reading from the Law and the Prophets, and exposition by a rabbi or competent Israelite, either a community member or visitor. Four times each year the temple in Jerusalem was the place of worship and sacrifice for the whole nation.

It was customary for Jesus to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath and thereby uphold the authority and validity of the Law, yet his emphasis was not on the eternal observance but on a spontaneous performance of the will of God which was underlying the Law. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus illustrated the true purpose of the Law in the beatitudes: "You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say to you that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt 5:27-28).

Our text from Mark's gospel says that the Jews were "amazed at His teaching for He was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (v.22). They were struck with astonishment. Here was one who did not teach as the scribes did. The scribes, of course, were the biblical scholars, the zealous guardians of the Law. With regard to the administration of justice, they held undisputed supremacy over the people. No scribe, however, decided a case by himself. He always prefaced his remarks with the words, "there is a teaching that says..." Then he would go on to quote the various authorities. The last thing he ever did was give an independent judgement. When Jesus spoke, however, quoting no other authority, either past or present, he spoke with the authority and the finality of God himself.

John 7:14-16 explains where Jesus got his authority from: "...Jesus went into the temple, and began to teach. The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, 'How has this man become learned, having never been educated?' Jesus therefore answered them and said, 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent me.'"

Right in the middle of our Lord's teaching, a man with an unclean spirit began to cry out. A conscious, spiritual, intelligent being who had taken up residence in this man's body and had full control of his mind and actions began speaking to Jesus. Such spirits were called "unclean" because their activities led their victims into immoral conduct (I Tim. 4:1-2). The demon asked Jesus two questions, and made one statement. First, he asked, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?" It's interesting to note that the Jews in Nazareth

did not know who Jesus was but the demons did.

Second, the demon asked, "Have You come to destroy us?" The demons recognized the Lord's supreme power over them even in his humanity. Then the demon made the statement, "I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" Here he was saying that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. Immediately, Jesus rebuked (muzzled) the demon, telling him to be quiet, and then he ordered him to come out of the man. Our Lord did not want the demons to testify to his deity. He had been given a program by his Father, and this announcement was coming too early in his overall plan. Also, it was inappropriate that Jesus' Messiahship should be proclaimed by representatives of the evil one.

Was Jesus breaking the Sabbath by healing the demon-possessed man and thus placing Himself in a position to be stoned to death? Without a doubt he was. But our Lord had six different confrontations with the Jewish authorities on the question of the Sabbath and in each case he was able to take them beyond the letter to the heart of the Law, saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). He thereby showed the Jews that he placed human need above the external observance of the Sabbath, and thus prepared the way for the abolishing of all the external laws and ordinances of the Old Testament. The provision of the New Covenant would be as God had declared in Jeremiah 31:33: "I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

As far as God was concerned, of course, the Sabbath was never meant to be observed according to the letter of the Law. Rather, it was to be a picture of the rest into which the believer enters when he ceases from his own works and trusts Christ for a Sabbath life (Heb 4:4). The rest of God is the goal that the whole of creation is destined to reach. As Jesus said, the Sabbath was designed for man's welfare and not as a legal requirement. The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath, in other words. Consequently, "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28).

The Jews reacted in amazement to such teaching, authority and power. Here was not only new teaching, but a new power source over demons. Jesus' words had a freshness about them. They rang true and cut to the hearts of his listeners. As a result, news of this event spread quickly throughout the surrounding villages and countryside.

In this incident, Jesus demonstrated the Old Testament truth that by the power of the Spirit he able to set men and women free from the evil powers of the kingdom of darkness, powers they could not free themselves from.

While the Jews were amazed at what had happened in the synagogue, I'm sure the formerly demon-possessed man was more than a little pleased that Jesus, upon seeing him in his tormented state, did not start singing, "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date,/Can't even stay to teach or heal,/I'm late, I'm late,I'm late."

But the question remains, why was our Lord willing to teach in this synagogue and heal this man at this particular time?

Now that we have seen what he did on the Sabbath morning, let us read on and see what he did that afternoon. Verse 29:

And immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Him about her. And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she began to wait on them.

Ancient ruins on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in the city of Capernaum suggest that the home of Peter's mother-in-law was but a few yards to the left of the door of the synagogue. According to Jewish custom, the main Sabbath meal came immediately after the service, at the sixth hour. As Jesus and his disciples entered the house, fully expecting to be served a meal, they heard the news that the woman of the house was sick with a high fever. The men turned to Jesus and asked if he would look into the situation. Our Lord responded in

grace and mercy and raised her up, rebuking the fever, which left her at once, and she began to wait on them.

Here we have another healing on the Sabbath day. On this occasion, however, the synagogue officials were not present to condemn Jesus. But in Luke 13 they were quick to condemn him for healing on the Sabbath a woman who had an 18-year bout with a sickness which was caused by a spirit.

As this incident demonstrates, Jesus was willing to minister in the humblest of circumstances. And very early in his ministry the disciples learned, because of their own weaknesses and inabilities, to turn to him with their troubles, needs and concerns as well as the problems of others.

I am sure there must have been tension in the home when these men arrived from the synagogue, hungry and ready to eat, only to discover that there was no food because mother was sick. Of all days to get sick! Just when they had a special guest! What were they going to do? Several of them may have been in a hurry, rushing about the place and thinking of Plan B, but not Peter's mother-in-law. She was thrilled that Jesus remained calm in the midst of the confusion. He did not look at his watch and say, "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date./Can't even say, 'Hello, you are healed.'/You see, I'm overdue, I'm in a rabbit stew./Can't even say good-bye, hello,/I'm late, I'm late, I'm late."

Once again, we must ask, why was Jesus willing to minister in this situation?

Now we come to the evening of this Sabbath. Verse 32:

And when evening had come, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

"And when evening had come, after the sun had set,..." The Sabbath began on Friday at sunset and continued until sunset on Saturday. In his account, Mark makes clear that the people were waiting in crowds as though behind an invisible screen, all looking at the horizon for the the sinking of the sun. Jesus had broken the Sabbath twice in one day (a capital offense), but the common people were not ready to join him in doing so either by asking for personal healing or by carrying a sick man to him to be healed.

But "after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and demon-possessed." The people who had witnessed the healing of the demon-possessed man in the synagogue that morning, together with those who had heard about the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, spread the word throughout the district. A stream of men and women, boys and girls, began assembling outside Peter's home, and in quick time the "whole city" of Capernaum gathered at the door. According to the other gospel accounts, Jesus responded by healing many among the crowd, as well as casting out demons. Where did all these sick people come from? Some, of course, came from the immediate vicinity of Capernaum, but the majority must have come from the Roman city of Tiberius, located some ten miles away on the Lake of Galilee. Tiberius attracted people from all over the area because of the city's hot mineral baths for the physically ailing. (A few of these spas remain even today.) While these spas were able to relieve some physical pain, however, they were powerless to cure the pain of people's hearts or rid the possessed of demons.

But our Lord "was not permitting the demons to speak." According to Luke 4:31, the demons did a repeat of that morning by continually crying out, "You are the Son of God." Again, Jesus would not allow representatives of the evil one to announce his Messiahship. Had he allowed it, he would have given grounds for a charge brought against him later by the Pharisees that he was an ally of Satan (Matt.12:24).

What was our Lord's motive for healing all these people at this time? Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4, "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases" (Matt.8:17)

Most people would love to be healed physically by Jesus, but they are not willing to acknowledge him as Lord and Savior of their spiritual lives. God still is willing and able to offer physical healing today, but even that is very temporal in light of eternity. What our Lord desires is for men and women to be healed spiritually, and

that can only occur when they invite Jesus to become Lord of their lives; then he saves them from sin and eternal death.

It had been a busy day and an even busier evening for Jesus. But we can be certain that all those people who were formerly ill with all kinds of diseases, and those who had been demoniacs, were delighted that he did not run off that Sabbath afternoon before sunset, checking his watch and muttering, "I run and then I hop, hop, hop, I wish that I could fly./There's danger if I stop to heal, and here's the reason why./You see, I'm overdue, I'm in a Pharisee stew./Can't even say good-bye, hello, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late."

These incidents demonstrate the Lord's calm availability in difficult situations. We have seen his wisdom, knowledge and power in sharing the scriptures. And we have seen his heart of compassion in healing the demonic, Peter's mother-in-law, and the sick and possessed of the city of Capernaum and surrounding areas. All of this took place either on the Sabbath day, or following sunset on the Sabbath, a period of 15 or 16 hours. But we still have not seen clearly the secret of how Jesus lived through this full day. He must surely have been physically weary, yet we do not sense any urgency, panic or impatience on his part.

In order to understand his secret for facing each new day we need to look at,

II. The Secret of a Full Life (Mark 1: 35-39)

And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. And Simon and his companions hunted for Him; and they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for you." And He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for." And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

"Everyone is looking for you." After a long Sabbath day, Jesus and the four disciples went to bed. But apparently not all who were healed went to bed. Instead, they gathered all their friends who were sick and brought them to Jesus. When they all arrived at the door of Peter's home, asking for Jesus, the Lord was not to be found. So the disciples began hunting for him, telling everyone to wait. It seems they too got caught up in the excitement of the Sabbath healings. They wanted Jesus to make the most of a golden opportunity to be acknowledged as the Messiah.

Sometime between 4:30 and 6:00 a.m., however, our Lord slipped out of the house and went to a lonely place by the lake, and there and began to pray. The gospels show that Jesus prayed about every area and every event in his life. He prayed before he chose his disciples; before the Transfiguration; after the return of the 70 disciples; before he taught the disciples to pray; for his disciples before they denied him; in the garden on the night when he was betrayed; and finally, he prayed as he languished on the cross, to use just a few examples.

"Everyone is looking for you!" Indeed! How was Jesus able to sort out which way to turn? Should he return to Capernaum on a wave of popularity as a healer, or should he plough new territory as a preacher and healer? Here we discover the secret of our Lord's life and ministry. It was prayer. Knowing where to go, what to say and what to do all was determined by his praying to his Father.

Jesus did nothing without first checking in with His Father:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38;14:3;17:4)

Jesus said nothing without first checking in with His Father:

"For I do not speak of My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment what to say and what to speak" (John12:49-50; 7:14-24)

Jesus went nowhere without first checking in with the Father:

"Let us go some where else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach."

Our lives and our ministries should not be determined by the press of the crowd, by popularity or availability. As servants of Jesus Christ we are to have the same attitude our Lord had in his relationship with his Father, "Not my will but your will be done." By the time Jesus prayed to his Father in the garden on the night in which he was betrayed, there were many who were still blind, dumb, lame, imprisoned and downcast (Luke 4:16-19), yet he was able to say to his Father, "I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou has given Me to do" (John 17:4). On the cross, he would say, "It is finished."

The secret to living a full day that will be pleasing to the Lord, one that will bring eternal consequences to all that we say and do, is contingent on our understanding the secret of living a full life. And here is that secret. Jesus said to his disciples that "at all times they to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Let me suggest that the secret of living a full day, one that will please our Lord and produce eternal consequences, is to understand the secret of developing a lifestyle of prayer. We are encouraged by our Lord to pray about everything in life.

- Pray about whom we should marry;
- pray for each other once we are married;
- pray about where we should live and work;
- pray about our life styles and ministries based on our talents/spiritual gifts;
- pray about children; how many we should have, and what kind of schools, activities, etc., they should be involved in;
- pray about how our home should be functioning; should the telephone be a servant or master; should we open our doors to all interruptions;
- pray about neighborhood, extended family, and work-place relationships;
- pray about correcting course at different seasons of our lives;
- pray about the activities of this day, week, month , year, and life.

We should pray and then wait and listen for the answers that will come only from our risen Lord. If we do this, we along with the Lord will be able to say, "The fact that everyone is looking for me will not determine my day, my ministry or my priorities; for before I do anything, as a servant of Jesus Christ, I will check in with my Lord about what I should do and say, and where I should go."

In his book *Talking To My Father* , Ray C. Stedman writes,

We must either be praying or fainting--there is no other alternative. The purpose of all faith is to bring us into direct, personal touch with God. True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need, an acknowledgment of divine adequacy. For Jesus, prayer was as necessary as breathing, the very breath of His life. Although God certainly knows all our needs, praying for them changes our attitude from complaint to praise, and enables us to participate in God's personal plans of our lives.

Prayer will enable us to kill the busy-dizzy, hurried "White Rabbit" of our daily lives and enter into our Sabbath rest; a life of resting in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ for all of life on this earth and the life to come.

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