

September 18/19, 2004

The Good News About Jesus According to Mark

Jesus: Purpose Driven & Compassion Given

Mark 1:29-45

Pastor Andy MacFarlane

North Church Update:

As many of you know, we are continuing to take steps toward planting a church in north Lincoln. This Sunday at 9:30 a.m. in D-103 we have a SuperGroup starting for those who are interested in becoming a part of the North Pointe Community Church. It's a time we are coming together around tables to discuss the book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. Our heart and our hope is that out of these groups we will begin to build community, which will be the fiber of our church, and then launch small groups in and around north Lincoln. There are probably 50 or so people meeting together in the SuperGroup, and it is very, very encouraging. We continue to be excited about what God is doing. If some of you here are thinking, *Boy, I'd like to be a part of North Pointe*, we invite you to join us next week at 9:30 a.m. in D-103. We will be meeting in September and all through October in this SuperGroup.

The other thing I'd like you to know about is that last week we had our prayer meeting—an evening of prayer and praise—at North Star High School, where we will launch the church next September. We had about 80 folks show up. That's the biggest prayer meeting I have been to—maybe ever, but certainly in a long time. We just came to ask God for His blessing and His favor, because we know without that the church plant just won't happen.

One piece of news: Just so you are up-to-date on the “lingo”—my wife was in one of the prayer groups as we broke into smaller groups to pray. Someone was praying for Lincoln Berean and they referred to it as the “South Church.” So from now on, up at North Pointe, this church will be considered the South Church, and when you hear that phrase, you'll know what that means.

Ernest Hemingway, born in 1899, was the epitome of the twentieth-century man. At age 25 he sipped champagne in Paris, attended bull fights in Spain, enjoyed game hunts in Africa, and hunted grizzly bears in America's northwest. At age 61, after seemingly having it all—wine, women, a distinguished literary career, including a Nobel Prize—Hemingway chose to end his life, leaving a note saying, “Life is just one thing after another.” He had all the experiences, but he just couldn't make sense of it, so he tragically took his life.

Hopefully none of us will go as far as Hemingway. But at times we all struggle with, *What is the point?* to all of life's activities: job, family, recreation, etc. Henry David Thoreau wrote “The mass of men live quiet lives of desperation.” As followers of Jesus, are we part of that mass of humanity? Is life just one thing after another? Do we, like Hemingway, have *this* experience, *this* experience, and *this* experience, but we put them together and we can't make any kind of purpose of it?

As followers of Jesus, I believe there is real purpose and significance to everything we do. In our text, Mark 1:29-45, we are going to see Jesus living with real purpose. I think we can adopt that purpose and find meaning and significance in even the most mundane of activities. We are going to try and answer the question: What is our purpose in life?

Our passage opens with Jesus leaving the synagogue. Let's pick it up in verse 29:

And immediately after they came 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 Jesus about her. And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. (vs. 29-31, *NASB)

We have seen, and we will continue to see throughout the Book of Mark, that Mark is presenting Jesus as the Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He will give us evidence after evidence of that fact. And here we have Jesus taking authority over illness. The woman is caught with a fever. Jesus simply takes her by the hand and raises her up. And I think the detail that is very important that Mark adds for us at the end of verse 31 is "...and she waited on them." If you have ever had a fever, you know there's a process to get over it. It takes a few days. But not here. The healing is complete, and Simon's mother-in-law is waiting on the others. This is a statement of Jesus' authority. He speaks and the fever is gone.

Word of this gets out pretty quickly, because we read in verse 32:

When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon possessed. And the whole city 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. (vs. 32-34)

We have Jesus taking complete authority over the demons. First he casts them out of the person, and then he says, "Be silent!" And there is no argument; they have nothing to say. Jesus is in complete authority in the spiritual area of life over the demonic.

One thing that leaves us scratching our head a little bit is that Jesus silences the demons because they know who He is. Why silence some would-be witnesses? Why not have them help in the proclamation of the message? We don't know for sure. My suspicion is it has something to do with the perception of a messiah at that time. It was a militaristic, nationalistic perception, and Jesus does not need this perception going out because it will only serve to alarm the authorities and bring people to Jesus who really don't have a personal interest. He does not want any more trouble with the authorities than He already has. Having these demons spouting off will only add to His problems. That is speculation on my part; we don't know. But here is what we *do* know: Jesus had complete authority over illness and demonic possession.

That was quite a day! Finally it comes to an end, and we wonder what is going to happen the day following. Verse 35:

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." (vs. 35-37)

I think Simon and his friends are agitated here, because they have the crowds and they're saying, "Jesus, what are You doing in a secluded place? We need to go work the crowds! We need another demon possession, a couple healings, and we'll be ready to go."

I don't know if you have noticed, but it is election season. If you haven't, let me be the first to welcome you. I mention that because George W. Bush and John Kerry (and a host of other candidates) would love to have going what Jesus has going in our passage. These candidates

want to create a buzz, an excitement, about themselves and their message. That's what they want to create. Well, Jesus has got it here. Simon and friends certainly see the political opportunity. Jesus responds in verse 38. He says, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby."

He is going to leave the scene. He is going to give up the opportunity. Why? Verse 38:

"...so that I may preach there also, for this is what I came to do."

Jesus had a clear purpose, and it didn't involve playing to the crowds. His purpose was about getting the gospel message out. And because He knew His purpose, Jesus could say *no* to this and *yes* to that.

We started this by asking the question: What is our purpose in life? I believe Jesus, the Son of God, with complete authority, models that purpose for us. I would like to say our purpose in life is making God's message known.

I want to take a minute to talk about, *What is that message?* We have to go back to Mark 1:15, where Jesus is saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." The message is this: Jesus has shown up. He has embodied the kingdom of God: the authority, the rule, of God! Now that the kingdom has arrived, that demands a response from the people. That is the second part of verse 15: "Repent and believe in the gospel." The response from the people is to repent, which means to change their mind. Not only that, but it means they change the direction of their life. They begin the process of moving from self rule to God rule. They repent and they believe in the gospel. The gospel is the good news. They trust in Jesus' death for the forgiveness of their sin and the restoration of relationship with God.

Friends, if people would access and embrace this message, it will change not only their quality of life here on earth, but it will change their eternal destiny. And I say that to make the case that this message—this purpose—has priority! It demands a complete allegiance.

Last week when Bryan was talking about Mark 1, he pointed out in verses 16-20, when Jesus said to the four men, "I want you to drop your fishing nets and follow Me"—they did it *immediately*. It shows complete priority, complete allegiance that this message demands. And in verse 38 here, we see Jesus living with that priority. He has got the crowds, though; they're looking for Him. He has an opportunity to work the crowd, but that is not what He is about. He is about making God's message known.

You step back from that and you say, "Andy, it seems like living by purpose can be kind of demanding." Yeah, it can be. "It seems like it can be kind of restrictive. It means there are some things you do and other things you don't." Yeah, I've got to be honest—it does. But I would argue that there are far greater consequences in living without purpose.

During World War II, a group of Allied prisoners in a Nazi camp were ordered to move a huge pile of garbage from one end of the camp to the other. So they spent all day moving the trash from one end to the other. The next day the Nazi guard then ordered the prisoners to move the pile back to its original location. So they spent all day moving the trash to the other end. No reason was given; they were just told to do it. The next day they got up and the guard said, "Your job today is to move that pile of trash to the other end." So began a pattern: day after day, the prisoners hauled the pile of garbage from one end of camp to the other.

The impact of this mindless and meaningless existence began to come to the surface. It was only a few more days before an elderly prisoner began sobbing uncontrollably and had to be led away. Then another man began screaming until he was beaten into submission. A third man, who had endured three years of labor in the camp, suddenly broke away and began running toward an electric fence. He was told to stop or he would be electrocuted. He flung himself into the fence and died in a blinding flash. In the days and weeks that followed, numbers of prisoners went insane or committed suicide. The Nazis didn't care. They were conducting an experiment on what life would become without a sense of purpose. They concluded the result was insanity and suicide.

You and I need a sense of purpose to get along in this life. All of us have a certain routine; we do certain things. Why? Why do we get up each day and do these things? As long as we need a sense of purpose, why don't we take it from our Creator? Wherever we are in life, whatever we are doing, let's make it our purpose to make God's message known.

Now at this point, all the task-oriented people in the congregation have taken notice: *We need to get on task. We need to get a purpose—a vision—and follow it.* That is what we have with Jesus in verse 39:

And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.

Jesus is on task. He is on purpose. That is what we need to be. Verse 40:

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

Now this has got to be frustrating for Jesus. He's on task, right? He's on purpose. We have just read in verse 38 that He came to preach. He has a bunch of synagogues that He needs to visit and the time is short. And here comes one of these people who has a need. How does Jesus respond? Verse 41:

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

Moved with compassion, Jesus' heart was stirred. This was a visceral reaction on the part of Jesus Christ. He is almost angry at the effects of sin, and there is a great desire to help the person out. So, in a social faux pas, He reaches out and touches the leper—one of the untouchables—and he is cleansed.

It should make us step back and think about the answer to our question: What is our purpose in life? I would like to amend our answer a little bit, based on what we're seeing with Jesus. I want to say: Born out of a compassion for people, our purpose is to make God's message known. It isn't the task of just getting the message out; it's a concern for people.

In his book *Down Deep from Heaven*, Max Lucado tells the story of the second daughter of Queen Victoria, Princess Alice. Her son, at age four was infected with a horrible affliction known as black diphtheria. Doctors quarantined the boy and told the mother to stay away because he was going to die. She couldn't do it. One day she overheard her son whisper to the nurse, "Why won't my mother kiss me anymore?" His words melted her heart. She ran to her son and smothered him with kisses. Within a few days both were dead.

Friends, that is the picture of the compassion of Jesus. So moved by the hurt, so moved by the pain, He involved Himself to the point of death. It is a model for me and it is a model for you. Yes, we are people on task. We are about getting God's message out. But it is born out of a deep compassion for people.

So if we go back to our text, we see Jesus silencing another would-be witness in verse 43:

And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere. (vs. 43-45)

Again we ask: Why did Jesus attempt to silence a would-be witness? I would speculate that it has to do with the perception of a messiah—militaristic, nationalistic, and the consequences that followed from that.

So as we step back and reflect on Jesus, we get quite a picture: very much on task, living by purpose, yet consumed by His compassion for people. And we ask, "Which is it?" Is Jesus this task-oriented guy, or is He this person seemingly controlled by His compassion for the hurting? Both. Jesus is setting up a model for us, and we need to live with paradox, this seemingly contradictory idea. We think of a task-oriented person and a person consumed with compassion as opposites and *Boy, there's going to be conflict there*. But God calls us to live out that paradox and follow Him. But how do we do it? I think the answer comes in Mark 1:35:

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.

This is not an isolated incident in Jesus' life. Luke 5:16 says Jesus often slipped away into the wilderness to pray. Why was Jesus always going to the Father? I think part of the reason is the magnitude and complexity of balancing compassion and purpose. If it drove God's Son to the Father, it ought to drive us to the Father. When do we move on or pull back when people are seeking us out? When do we stop to touch a hurting person? Those questions are only answered as we maintain a vital union, a dynamic relationship with God, to get our direction.

Sometimes we say no, and sometimes we say yes; sometimes we stop, sometimes we go on. It needs to be true in our life that we're meeting with God regularly to make those decisions. But I have to tell you, there are times we don't do it. If prayer is so important, why do we have trouble fitting it into our schedules? There are many reasons, but our passage reminds us of two common culprits that draw us away from prayer.

One of the reasons I think we miss spending time with God is because of our pride and our vanity. When people say they need to meet with us, they want our counsel, they need to talk with us...well, it's nice to be wanted, isn't it? It's nice for people to be seeking our advice and our counsel. But please note in our text that Jesus is saying no to a crowd. He is saying no to the adulation of people—in order that He might be alone with His Heavenly Father. And if you and I are going to complete our commitment to God to get away, to be with Him, there are times we are going to have to say no to the affirmation of people.

A second thing I think that keeps us from praying is that sometimes we're lazy and passive, and we let other people set our schedule. Someone says, "I need to meet with you," "*Well, okay, all right.*" "You need to be here." "*Okay, I'll go.*" We don't live by our priorities. Please notice here in verses 36 and 37 that Simon and friends are very willing to tell Jesus where He should be instead of being with the Father. Friends, we need to take control of our schedule and make our priorities. Let's not be passive. Let's not be lazy. The first priority is time with God. Don't let others set your schedule for you.

As we step back and think about this passage, it is quite a call. But I'd like us to think about it as a church body, because we are taking on a big vision here in Lincoln. We are building a new youth complex right now. And this spring we will break ground on a new 3,500-seat auditorium. That is going to cost a lot of money, and many of you say, "Why? Things are going pretty good. Why?" The answer is found in this passage: because we have a mandate to make God's message known. We care deeply about people and we think the thing they need most is to know God.

Last week at the 11:00 o'clock service we had to turn people away—people who made the effort to come, to hear God's message. We had to say, "Sorry, no room." I don't think Mark 1:29-45 lets us continue that way. We have got to move. We have got to sacrifice. We are planting a church up in north Lincoln. We're helping to plant another church downtown. We are going to lose good people. You might say, "Why? We like what we've got." It's because of this mandate: to make God's message known. We need to get strategic to have churches in those different places, that more people might hear the gospel.

To bring you down to a little bit smaller scale for our church body, we are a church of small groups. Right now we have a waiting list of people who want to be in a small group. Some of you who are in small groups we have asked, or we will ask you, to birth another group. In other words, if you are a group of six or eight couples, we may ask if you will split three couples here and three couples there. You think, *I don't like that. That's hard; that's painful. I've got my community; I don't want to break that up. Why do I have to go through that?* Well, I think the answer is right here: the purpose Jesus modeled for us—to make God's message known. People living in community is critical in the process of getting to know God. We have a list of people saying, "I want to get into a group." It is this concern, this compassion, for people to say, "What can we do to get them in?" Friends, there is a cost to living by purpose. I think Jesus modeled that for us, and we need to follow Him.

As we bring this down to a more personal level, I want to ask you: Can you articulate a purpose for *your* life? We see Jesus very clear on His purpose that allowed Him to say no to some things and yes to others. If I asked you to delineate a purpose for your life, could you do it? I think a purpose statement will simplify your life. It will put some sense into the routine of your life. It will answer the question: Why do I do what I do?

How has God wired you? How has God put you together? What is your niche in making God's message known? If you can articulate that, I invite you and encourage you to make some time this week to articulate a purpose for your life, that you might know what you are doing.

Second, in verse 41, we see Jesus moved with compassion. I'm more of a task-oriented guy, and that is a challenge to me. Some of you are more compassionate, but I don't think anybody has the compassion that Jesus has for people. If we are going to live out His mandate of caring for people and having compassion for people, it has got to be something

supernatural. It is not going to happen in our own strength. This week as you are praying, would you ask God to give you His compassion for people? Would you ask God to help you see people the way He sees them? Would you ask God to give you His heart for people?

I think it was my second year I was with Campus Crusade for Christ, and I was a little frustrated. My director said to me, “Andy, if it weren’t for people, ministry would be great.” We all sometimes get frustrated. People can be a frustration. Let us ask God for His perspective, that we might have His compassion on them.

Finally, if there is anything that stops me in this passage, it is always Mark 1:35. Here is the Son of God, with complete authority, able to speak so that demons are cast out and fevers are healed, making it a priority to get away with His Heavenly Father. If He did that, what does that say about me and what does that say about you getting away to be with our Heavenly Father?

I’m always looking for encouragement in this area, so this spring I reread the book *The Genesee Diary* by Henry Nouwen. It is Nouwen’s journal from his seven-month stay in a Trappist monastery. During his seven months Nouwen saw his passion and commitment to prayer grow. In his own words, Nouwen said he created space for God. Near the end of his time in the monastery, Nouwen began to grow concerned because he was going back to the real world and would be faced with tasks and demands. He wondered what would happen to his passion and commitment to prayer. He wondered if his space for God was going to get squeezed out. So he approached his spiritual director with his concerns. His spiritual director responded this way: “Decide on the front end how much time you want to spend in prayer, pick a reasonable amount of time, then put it in your schedule. Then make a commitment to maintain your prayer schedule. Make it your most important task. As you are faithful, you will come to terms with your basic powerlessness to solve your or other people’s problems. As you live through this experience you will find that your many projects, plans and obligations become less urgent and lose their power over you.”

Over the past few months, as I’ve tried to put this into practice, I’ve got to tell you it has been unsettling and disquieting coming to terms with my powerlessness. Like you, God has given me a part in His kingdom work. But really, God working on the inside of a person is far more important than my working from the outside of a person and seeing life change in those to whom I minister. It has been unsettling and disquieting, but it has also been freeing—because there is really not that much in my life that is that urgent or that important. I’d like to think it’s true, but mostly ministry is about *God’s* working.

Now I've got to tell you, as much as I've grown, and as refreshing as it has been, there are days I just miss it. I get caught up in a task, and I'm just doing, doing, doing. And the end of the day comes and I have spent no time with God. Maybe your tendency is like mine when that happens—to beat myself up. *Man, how could I do that?*

About three or four weeks ago, I had an “aha” experience with my five-year-old. I said, “Chris, I need you to go ahead and get dressed.” Meanwhile, I went to attend to our three-year-old. When I came back a few minutes later, he had his pajamas off, his underwear on, his shorts on, and he was reading a book. He had gotten distracted in the task. I said, “Chris, Daddy needs you to get dressed.” “*Oh, sorry Daddy.*” “That’s okay, son. Put the book down and get dressed.”

You know, as I thought about that a little bit more, I realized that as a dad, although my goal for him is completion of the task, I'm pleased. I was encouraged by what I saw. He got his pajamas off and his shorts on before he got distracted by *Curious George*. If he gets back on task, which he usually does, I don't feel any need to discipline. He is a child and he's in process. I just need to remind him, "Son, get back on task." The initial steps of obedience make me think he'll get it one day—hopefully before he goes off to college (and if he doesn't, I'm sending him to live with you).

So, if and when you fail in your prayer commitment, don't beat yourself up. The Spirit of God will remind you and prompt you. Just get back on task. God is patient and I think He is pleased even with our faltering steps of obedience.

I don't think it's reasonable for me to expect a three or four-year old to go from not knowing how to get dressed to being all the way there. I understand there is going to be some faltering in commitment. There is going to be some wavering obedience. And I understand those are steps to a more complete commitment.

As you set your commitment in prayer, I want to encourage you to honor it. But if you miss it, understand that the faltering commitment, the wavering obedience are, I think, steps to getting to a fuller commitment. Don't let that stop you.

What I want to say is, individually and together, let us set a reasonable amount of time that we can spend in prayer. Let us put it into our schedule. Let us make it our most important task. If we do that, I think we'll come to see there is really not that much that is urgent in life, and we will be freed up to find out how really powerless we are. We need to take time to write out our purpose. We need to take time to ask God to give us His compassion, and let us put prayer into our schedule.

If you followed the Olympics at all, you probably heard the sad story of Matt Emmons. Matt Emmons had the gold medal in sight. He was one shot away from claiming victory in the 2004 Olympic 50-meter three position rifle event. All he needed to do on his last shot was hit the target; he didn't even need a bull's-eye to win. Normally, the shot he made would have received a score of 8.1, more than enough for a gold medal. But in what was described as "an extremely rare mistake in elite competition," Emmons fired at the wrong target. Standing in lane two, he fired at the target in lane three. His score for a good shot at the wrong target? Zero. Instead of a medal, Emmons ended up in eighth place.

Matt Emmons reminds us that it doesn't matter how accurate we are if we are aiming at the wrong target. As we set our purpose, we need to make sure that it scores points; we need to make sure it matters in eternity. Jesus has come to earth to model a purpose for us that does score points, that does matter in eternity.

So, one more time I want to ask and answer our question: What is our purpose in life? *Born out of deep compassion for people, our purpose is to make God's message known.*

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September 18/19, 2004

Study Questions

The Good News About Jesus According to Mark

Jesus: Purpose Driven & Compassion Given

Mark 1:29-45

Pastor Andy MacFarlane

Opening Discussion

1. Is it easy for you to state your purpose in life? Why or why not?
2. What are the benefits of living with a clearly defined purpose? What are the limitations of living with a clearly defined purpose?

What are the consequences of living without a clearly defined purpose?

Bible Study

1. In verse 31, why do you think Mark added the detail that Peter's mother-in-law waited on them?

Would you describe your recovery from past fevers as gradual or immediate?

2. In verse 33, why do you think so many people gathered at the door where Jesus was staying?

How do you think you would have reacted to the news of these miraculous healings?

3. In verse 34, why do you think Mark includes the fact that Jesus cast out many demons?

Why do you think Jesus silenced the demons?

What conclusions do you draw from Jesus' interaction with the demons?

4. Why do you think Jesus felt the need to get away to be with His Father?

What do you make of Simon's response to Jesus' withdrawal from the crowd?

In verse 38, why does Jesus move on from the crowd?

How do you respond to people who say that Jesus showed a lack of compassion by not meeting all the needs before moving on?

5. In this passage, how do you see Jesus' purpose directing His life?

How does your purpose direct your life?

6. In light of Jesus living by purpose, are you surprised by His show of compassion in verse

41? Why or why not?

Can a person be task-oriented and compassionate at the same time? If so, how?

7. Are you surprised that the leper couldn't keep silent about Jesus' work in his life?

Why

or why not?

If you had been that leper do you think you could have kept silent about your healing?

Why or why not?

Application

1. Do you have a clearly defined purpose in life? If not, take time this week to write out a purpose statement for your life.

If you do have a clearly defined purpose, are you living by that purpose? If not, what change do you need to make to live according to your purpose?

2. Do you view people with compassion? Ask God to give you His compassion for others.

3. What is a reasonable amount of time that you can devote to prayer each day? Write that

amount of time into your schedule. Make prayer your most important task.