

GOOD AND BAD ISOLATION

Mark 1:35-45

What do you think of when you think of the word “isolation”? That’s what an art teacher of mine asked me when I was a freshman in high school. She wrote the word “isolation” on the white board and said draw what you picture in your mind when you think of that word. And well, for me it sparked a good thought. What I drew was a snow-covered hunting cabin in the woods – kind of like that Terry Redlin painting I have in my office. I still have it somewhere – someday I’m sure that original print will be worth big bucks someday (just kidding)! Someone else in that class, if I remember right, drew a view of the beach. You know how people like to take pictures of their feet at the beach? Well, it’d be better without their toes ruining the view (just kidding, again, kind of) but that’s what they drew. Some people’s personalities instantly went to good thoughts of isolation. But for some people it sparked some bad thoughts of isolation. Grim expressions of loneliness or lostness were the thrust of their images like someone standing in the middle of the desert. We’ve been talking a lot lately about isolation – social distancing and proximities – and well, today, I think that’s a key thought in our passage. We see some good and bad forms of isolation.

Mark 1:35-45 says,

“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.” He said to them, “Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.” And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons.

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.” Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. 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 freely and to 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.”

The first matter of isolation that we see is in verse 35 and is with Jesus in a secluded place. We see some...

I. ISOLATION THAT CAN BE GOOD FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (V. 35)

The Son stays close to the Father by making sure He has time alone in prayer. And that’s just not that easy, is it?. You guys remember last week’s passage – how busy Jesus was? He preached in the synagogue, and stayed up late healing and casting out demons, basically ministered to whole city. Mark said, “the whole city had gathered at the door” the night before. He didn’t get eight hours of sleep that night! But here He is, disciplined enough to make it a priority to maintain His proximity to the Father by getting away and finding alone time with God. His communion with the Father was clearly a priority.

Look at the words used there:

- **Early morning** – probably between 4-6 o’clock, when most people aren’t awake.
- **Still dark** – the sun hasn’t even come up yet. Remember, as soon as there were three stars in the sky and the Sabbath was officially over, Jesus worked late under the stars, has slept

under the stars, and now He is up while the stars are still out. Just reading this passage can wear a person out. But this is the side of servanthood Mark wants us to see. There are times like this that aren't always easy. It requires sacrifice.

- **Left and went away** – He got up and left where He was. He didn't just wake up and pray beside His bed. He literally left and went away.
- **Secluded Place** – He went to a place of isolation, did some social distancing where no one else would be, that would guarantee for Him some uninterrupted fellowship with God.

Now, we know Jesus Christ is both **fully man and fully God**. What we are seeing here though, is Jesus the man, and as a man, the perfect example for us. You see, He lived His life in such a way that we would take notes from Him. And the note we need to be writing down today is that **if the Son of Man made sure to maintain a close relationship to God through prayer, how much more do we?! There is no way for me to overstate this. If Jesus Christ, who was God, lived His life as a man who was fully dependent upon the Father for power and strength and guidance, how much more do we?**

A. Christ's example shows us it is necessary for us to have an intercessory prayer life.

When I use the word *intercessory* prayer life, I'm differentiating that from a more constant prayer life. Throughout our day, we should always be praying, talking to God, sending up short little prayers and requests and thanksgiving – that's **praying without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:16-18) – conversation prayer**. But we should also have moments where we make sure we get some significant time alone to bring the different things going on in our life before Him and ask for wisdom, guidance, strength and to pray on behalf of others we are inclined too.

How many of you know maintaining a prayer life like that isn't easy? Being a parent of young children right now, I know for me or my wife, that may mean waking up before the kids do or putting the kids to bed a little earlier at night. It may mean I watch the kids for a bit so my wife can get away and pray. What's important is that you find time. One pitfall though we have to watch out for in desiring to make that time is that we don't start conjuring up a rigid, legalistic schedule where we get frustrated when our prayer time doesn't happen or it gets interrupted. Jesus was often interrupted as well. Servant just get interrupted and that's reality. But they at least attempt to make the time for prayer and remain flexible to praying at different places and different times.

But to convince you of your need to pray like this, let me give you **two products of prayer** that we see in Jesus's ministry.

1. Prayer is where we receive power to do God's will.

Even for Jesus this was the case because He said so. With everything He did, He said He did it in dependence of the Father.

- John 5:19 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”
- John 14:10 – “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.”

There are several verses like those two we could look at to prove the point that Christ depended on the Father for everything. He ultimately got His power from the Father. And He stresses the idea

because this is something He wants us to learn and to operate the same way.ⁱ If we are going to minister to other people like Jesus and meet the demands of the ministries He calls us too, we must learn to rely on Him through prayer. Jesus said Himself that we are like branches to Him who is the Vine and, “Apart from Him, we can do [what?] nothing.” Power to live the Christian life and to bear fruit that will last for eternity is not from our own power but from an obedient and abiding relationship with God. It’s a moment by moment, serving in His strength and in dependence on Him. You know, prayer is necessary for us to fulfill our vision of deep roots and bearing fruit. **If we want to bear fruit, we have to remain rooted in prayer.**

I’ll tell you what: Sometimes I come into my office to work and I am just dog tired and the last thing I want to do is study at the moment. But I couldn’t tell you how many times where I’ve hit my knees in prayer and came out of prayer ready and strengthened to do God’s will all over again. The meme I have for us this morning is funny, but it is a reality. Prayer is powerful. The idea is that when you go into the prayer room you’re like a kitten but coming out, a lion.

Moving on, the second produce of prayer is this:

2. Prayer is where we receive guidance to know God’s will for us.

Now, I don’t say this as though I’ve ever heard the audible voice of God giving me directions like Siri does. “Turn right in 100 feet.” It’s not like that. What I mean is that if you are prayed-up and seeking Him, He’ll speak to You through His Word and various circumstances and You’ll know it.. Because Jesus was prayed-up on this particular morning, He knew what the Father wanted Him to do and it protected Him, honestly.

The disciples came up to Jesus this morning and they (Peter) tried to give Jesus guidance. They said Master, “Everyone is looking for You.” I like what many of the translations did – they added an exclamation mark – “Everyone is looking for You!” – in other words, “Why are you doing here?! Why are you not capitalizing on this? Come back!” But because Jesus was prayed-up, He didn’t listen to the disciples’ guidance, or let the popularity get to Him and misdirect Him. He knew the Father’s direction for him.

❖ **Abiding prayer lives like this is how we stay on God’s mission for us.**

But again, a prayer life like this isn’t something that comes easy. Our prayer life is the first thing to go when we get busy. The busier we get, the less we tend to pray. But let me suggest this: **the busier we get, the more we need to pray.** That’s another awesome principle to take home from Jesus’s example.

B. The less time we have for prayer, the more we need to make time for it.

That means something will have to be sacrificed on the altar of prayer.

As a result of praying, Jesus knew what the Father would have Him do. Move on to different areas in Galilee and preach. He came to preach – ‘That is what I came for’ He says. Out of all the things Jesus was doing, He saw preaching as the number one priority. Which in my mind, sparked the question: If that’s what He came for, **why doesn’t Mark emphasize the message more than the miracles? Why does Mark emphasize what Jesus did more than what He said?** Three reasons:

1. The message is being authenticated by the miracles.

It proves He is who He says He is and His message has authority. Why does Jesus often tell people not to tell anyone what He did for them like the leper today? Because He just had enough of that kind of publicity. I don’t think that He is trying to hide His true identity

from the Jews like a certain theology called “The Messianic Secret” proports. Rather, He is trying to get them to see His true identity and doesn’t want them to only get caught up in the sensational elements like miracles. According to Matthew, He really doesn’t begin to conceal His message to the Jewish leaders through parables *until they have rejected His identity* by claiming that what He was doing was from evil sources (Beelzebul/Satan) – which was the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit – unbelief in Christ. Until then, there was enough miracle publicity evidence going around that this man didn’t need to go around telling everyone.

Jesus really wanted him to go to the Temple in Jerusalem and according to the Law, present himself to the priests for examination and have him declared free of leprosy. We don’t know if he presented himself to the priests or not, but according to what we read here, it seems that he didn’t – instead, he stayed in Galilee and declared himself to be clean instead of letting the priests declare that for him and letting the priests determine the source of his cure in Jesus. So he did the exact opposite of what Jesus told him to do and His disobedience actually hindered the authentication of the message at the Temple to the priests.

2. The message would be strongly emphasized in other Gospels.

Mark didn’t need to emphasize the details of the message because God knew the other gospels like Matthew, Luke and John would dive deeper into that and be recorded still. Remember, each gospel writer writes with a purpose. It’s not random collections of memories of Jesus.

3. The message is in the miracles as well.

Every miracle Jesus did taught a spiritual lesson. His miracles were visible portrayals of the work of the Spirit.ⁱⁱ There is deep and unforgettable teaching in them.

- **Calming the storm** – demonstrated He is Lord of creation, but also shows His ability to grant supernatural peace in the storms of our lives.
- **Feeding thousands** – demonstrated He is the Bread of Life we need and He is able to provide for us according to His inexhaustible resources. You never have to worry about whether or not God has enough to provide for your needs.
- **Raising the dead** – demonstrated His ability to bring the dead to life in resurrection but also He can impart spiritual life to those dead in sins. To make them born again.
- **Cured blindness** – demonstrates His power to illuminate darkened hearts and give us spiritual insight – to open up our eyes to see the light of truth.
- **Cured leprosy** – demonstrates His ability to bring healing and not only physical healing, but the healing we need most of all because of our sin – spiritual healing. Jesus’s curing leprosy may be the greatest representation of spiritual healing in all the Bible because it is the greatest visual symbol of sin.

By the way the word **leprosy** is used in Leviticus, it is apparent that it can be used to refer to several different types of skin diseases possibly from psoriasis or eczema, or even to something such as house mold. Articles of clothing or leather that had leprosy would be burned (Lev. 13:57). But from the description of this leper – Luke describes as “full of leprosy” (Lk. 5:12) – he probably has what we call Hansen’s Disease today. It is a horrible disease, a progressively disfiguring disease that messes with the blood stream, causing body parts like fingers and toes and noses to wear down to nothing but stubs. It can cause the skin to have boils and rashes on it, and the face to become creased and leathery, just really a frightening disease.

Rabbis thought of it as **incurable and untouchable**. To cure it, the priests taught that it was as difficult as raising the dead!ⁱⁱⁱ Even though it doesn't come with a lot of physical pain because it actually has an anesthetic or numbing effect of the body, it does cause a ton of emotional pain, mental pain, and social pain. For the longest time, it was thought to be way more contagious than it really is and because they thought it was extremely contagious it became known as the “**separating sickness**” where people could end up in lifelong quarantine for having it. Some rabbis used to brag that they wouldn't eat an egg sold on the same street as a leper or threw rocks at lepers. And because God had previously used leprosy to judge people in the OT, they thought of it as a form of God's wrath for sin so imagine how different it was when Jesus drew near this man and touches him and cures him.

Nevertheless, this disease was a disease of **isolation and loneliness**. To prevent it from spreading, according to the Law, those who had it had to dress in such a way that they looked disheveled and unkempt (their clothes tattered) and they had to cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” as they went about the streets. If they were upwind of someone, they had to stay **100 cubits upwind** (a cubit is about 18”); from your elbow to the tip of your longest finger). If they were downwind, they had to stay **4 cubits downwind** from someone.^{iv} You want know how much 4 cubits is? 18 inches x 4 is = **6 feet**. Sound familiar? But there's more. It was **illegal to even greet a leper** at that time. And to top it off, if they wanted to go to synagogue on Sunday, **they had to sit behind a screen**. They had to have some sort of screen between them and the rest of the congregation – we know all about screens today, don't we?

It sounds more like coronavirus than leprosy. What's old is new! All of this proximity/isolation stuff really isn't that fun is it? You can feel the isolation and loneliness. The isolation can be good when it comes to our prayer life but this isolation is bad. In our current situation, we've been longing for fellowship and for touch and personal contact. But imagine how bad it must have been for lepers to go on for years like this! What a terrible way to live!

In its likeness to sin, leprosy is a vivid representation of sin's isolating effect on our relationship to God.

a. Like leprosy, sin isolates us from God.

God is holy and man isn't. When Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced a separation there between them and God. It isolated them from God.

Leprosy also makes a person insensitive.

b. Like leprosy, sin makes us insensitive.

It is a disease that attacks the nerves and makes you lose feeling in your extremities. A leper can pick up a potato that's dropped in hot coals and not even feel it or I heard this week about one leprous boy who broke open a padlock with his hands like it was nothing. It cut him to the bone but he didn't even notice it.

And because of indirect effects like that, lepers are also then exposed to increased mortality rates.

c. Like leprosy, sin is deadly.

Historian Josephus summarized lepers by saying that they were treated like a living corpse.^v It's about as close as you can get to a zombie description – walking dead. And that's also how the Bible graphically portrays those who just willingly relish in sin. Timothy says the woman who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives (1 Tim. 5:6) and the prodigal so when he was living in his rebellious, worldly way was described as dead (Lk. 15:24). When he returned to his father, the father said, “My son was dead and is alive again.” Rom. 6:23 says, “The wages of sin is death.” James 1:\ says, “When sin is accomplished, [it] brings forth death.” It has a deadly effect on us. From God it isolates, desensitizes us,

and eventually results in death. It's a graphic picture of sin and the sin nature. One more thing though is that it is also fit for fire.^{vi}

d. Like leprosy, sin is fit for fire.

Articles of clothing and leather and houses with it had to be burned if the leprosy, after observation by the priest, didn't go away. And the reality is that if our sin isn't dealt with and taken away by the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, we will end up fit for fire in a place called hell or the lake of fire. It's a place we don't like to talk about but Jesus actually talked about it often. He spoke more of hell than of heaven. Jesus described it is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (Lk. 16:19-31). A place of conscious eternal torment (Rev. 20:10). A place that is always on fire and the smoke rises forever. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 describes hell as a place of eternal ruin, where those who do not know God or obey the gospel of Jesus Christ are going to be **separated from the presence of the Lord forever**. It's pretty rough being separated for a little bit in the way we are, and even worse for a leper, but can you imagine being completely isolated from God forever? Right now, even those who don't believe in God, experience a lot of His goodness. But in hell there is nothing good. Some people talk like they're going to go to hell and play pool and throw a party with their friends but there won't be any of that in hell. No love, no fellowship, no light, nothing good.

Spurgeon described hell as, "a place of absence from God, a place where there is never sleep or rest or hope. It is a place where a drop of water is denied, though thirst shall burn the tongue; a place where pleasure never breathed, where light never dawned, where anything like consolation was never heard of; a place where the gospel is denied, where mercy droops her wings and dies; a place of fury and of burning; a place the likes of which imagination has not pictured. May God grant that it may be a place which you shall never see and whose dread you shall never feel. When you die, sinner, flight from hell becomes impossible." [iii]

Without Christ we are in far worse shape than any leper today. If our "leprosy" isn't taken care of before we die, there is no more chance to cure it after. **The good news in this life is that there is a cure for our leprosy of sin.** There is a way to be made completely clean of your sin and to have eternal life in Heaven with God and it's **through faith in Jesus Christ**. Jesus, who is God, came into this world as a man to give Himself for our sins on the cross and to die the death that we deserve. He came to exchange places with us – just like this leper. A man who once isolated and lived in unpopulated areas is now in towns proclaiming the good news, but Jesus on the other hand is forced out of town to unpopulated areas. Even though this man disobeyed Jesus, and Jesus knew he would, it gives us a clear picture of His grace, proving that He is **able** and **willing** to take the place sinner's deserve.

II. THE SON IS THE CURE FOR ISOLATION FROM GOD. (VV. 40-45)

This leper boldly approaches Jesus on his knees and ask Jesus to make him clean and heal him of this awful disease. "If You are willing, You can make me clean." And what does the text say? **Jesus was moved with compassion.** The word compassion suggests that He felt concern for this man in his guts. He was moved internally over him. And Jesus says, "I am willing. Be cleansed." And immediately and completely, the man was healed.

And for anyone who will admit they are a helpless sinner with the helpless condition of sin, and looks to Jesus' death on the cross for their sins, the Bible also says will be healed spiritually. "By His wounds, we are healed" (Is. 53:5) and "He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). And that's the healing we need more than anything – physical healing is temporary but spiritual healing is eternal.

To cap it off, notice how Jesus healed this man. Jesus did not just rebuke this leprosy away verbally but it says, He "stretched out His hand and touched him." If you've even read through

the gospels, you know Jesus didn't have to touch this man to heal him. He healed a Roman centurion's son from several miles away. But He stretched out His hand and touched him to demonstrate **His compassion** and **His willingness** to heal him and that **the isolation was over**. And since he was full of leprosy at this point, this had to be really refreshing because this is probably the first time this man has been touched in years.

This is final point we can take from this is that **we too, should have compassion like Jesus and in light of eternity, reach out to them.**

❖ **Let's be intentional to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus to others.**

Sometimes all it takes for someone to get to the place where they're willing to listen to the truth, is just a little touch of compassion. Many lives have been healed and set free in Christ because one believer decided to demonstrate Christlike compassion to their neighbor and so become "a testimony to them." And that starts by taking the time to pray for them.

ⁱ Ray Stedman, *The Power of His Presence* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 2006), 15.

ⁱⁱ Kent Hughes, *Mark, Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 53.

ⁱⁱⁱ William L. Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 89.

^{iv} Hughes, 55.

^v Josephus, *Ant.* 3.11.3 §294.

^{vi} Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 93.