

Mark 1 (Part 2) - The Authority of Jesus

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In our first pass through chapter one, we got through the first 20 verses, so we're going to pick it up in verse 21. Where Jesus is heading back to Galilee to minister.

And it says, "And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes."

Let me stop you there for just a moment to kind of remind you that the Jewish teachers back in those days. Whether it was the rabbis or the scribes, they would spend a lot of their time just kind of quoting other scribes, other teachers. And they would say, well, as Rabbi Hillel said, and then they'd make a quote.

And sometimes they would even give opposing viewpoints of the different rabbis and teachers over the years who had spoken and into the word of God. And it was basically just kind of the opinions of others, but Jesus didn't do that. He just spoke by the authority of his own words.

And he said, but I say to you, and people—I'm sure they were very taken aback at that sort of authority. And it just kind of surprised them. And we forget sometimes that when we get into debates, and I'm on Facebook, sometimes I wish I wasn't—90 percent of the time I wish I wasn't—but I'm there lurking sometimes in the background reading and sometimes you read comment sections under somebody's post and you have to, you know, you're taking your life in your hands, you know.

It's like, I got to be prayed up before I get in and read this stuff because it's just the cesspool of opinion. And we will get into things with people, and I hate to say it, but I'll do it too. I get into things sometimes, and we forget when we're talking about truth that truth is not a debate process or a methodology—truth is a person. And we forget that Jesus said, I am the truth. (John 14:6)

He didn't just say, I know the truth. That's something you and I can say as it relates to what we understand from the Bible. I can say, I know the truth because I've read the Bible, and I'm starting to understand it, but Jesus is the

only person who came along and said, I am the truth. You want the truth? Come to Me.

And when we're talking to people and we're debating issues of life, I think it's important that we don't just lend ourselves to the general conversation of opinion but rather step forth and allow the words of Jesus to speak for themselves—the authority of Jesus to speak for itself. Because Jesus spoke with authority. He said things that nobody else can say because He has the authority to say them.

I don't have the authority to say it. You don't have the authority to say it like He said it, but He did. And we can read it in the Word, and we can share it with others, and we can bring the conversation out of the realm of opinion—which is where you can just get lost, can't you?

And just everybody's opinion... reply to that a little. Well, I think that... and then somebody hits reply, and they say, well, my thought is... and pretty soon, you're just swimming. Don't you feel that way? You're swimming in this cesspool of personal opinion, and nobody really says anything with any kind of authority. It's just what people think.

Who cares what people think, you know? I mean, in the final analysis, we've got to get to a place where we begin to recognize truth for what it is. And I don't think there's anything wrong with saying, well, you know, Jesus taught us that, and then share what He said and the authority by which He spoke.

And if somebody's got a problem with Jesus, they can take it up with Him. And it's not you. It's not you just going, well, I think that... because that's what everybody's doing. Christians, you and I have a lifeline to authority that the world doesn't even begin to understand. We have a lifeline connected to the one who said, I am the truth. And we better be able to share it.

I think it's important for you and I to not only share what Jesus said but be able to know where He said it and to pinpoint the address for people. And if you guys, some of you folks will say, well, I just don't really know my Bible good enough. Okay, I get that.

Do you know how easy it is to look up a reference on the internet these days? Good grief. There is no reason for anybody in the world—if you know just a few of the words from the verse, put into Google, Google knows! They know everything! So put it in, and it pops up, and then you go, in Mark chapter 9... and you sound like you know it. It's like, hey, I got this one dialed.

But it is important for you and me to establish that element of authority in our conversation—not our authority, His authority, right? Because He is the truth—the one and only. Yeah, don't let the swirling of opinion rule the day.

Now, beginning in verse 23, Jesus is going to begin to show His authority—His spoken authority. Now He's going to go on to show it. It says, *"And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit."*

And if you know the Old Testament or hang out in the Old Testament, you know that the word unclean is a borrowing from an Old Testament concept of being ceremonially unclean.

Our Leviticus study on Wednesday night is talking a lot about this, so we're very familiar with that word. But as it relates to this particular verse, unclean is simply more of a euphemism for a demonic spirit. So can you imagine being in church—because they're in the synagogue—and all of a sudden, there's this guy among them with a demonic spirit who comes forth in the thing?

And here's what's interesting: When Mark describes this man who is possessed by a demonic spirit, this is interesting, he uses language in the Greek that is very similar to the language the apostle Paul uses when he describes a believer who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Very similar language.

What's interesting about that is that you and I don't usually use the word possessed to describe ourselves. We don't go around telling people, I'm possessed by God, but fundamentally, that's the case. We are a host. We are indwelt by a spirit. In our case, it's the Spirit of the living God. Whereas an individual who is demonically possessed is a host who is invested with an unclean or demonic spirit, and it's a similar sort of a situation from that standpoint.

Now, when you start looking at the result of that inhabitation, that's where the differences begin to really shine, because obviously, you know that when it comes to demonic possession, the goal of the demonic spirit is to bring darkness, slavery, and ultimate destruction to a person's life.

But for you and I, who are indwelt by the Spirit of the living God, it is the opposite. He comes to bring life and peace and everlasting life at that. And truth and freedom. That's the wonderful thing about being invested with God's Spirit. He brings freedom. Demonic spirits bring slavery. God's Spirit brings freedom.

Jesus is the only one who said, I will set you free, and when I set you free, dude you're going to be free. You're going to be completely free. (John 8:36) And that's what He does in our lives. He brings peace that the world is searching for

and can't find. And we have it because the Prince of Peace dwells in our lives through faith.

So the differences are incredible. But the fundamental idea behind being indwelt is very similar. And it is interesting that Mark uses similar language here that would also describe a believer.

When it comes to demonic stuff, this is where I'm always sensitive whenever we get to passages related to demonic activity because I know there are people who worry about these kinds of things, and I always want to settle their hearts. There's usually a couple of questions that come up rather quickly when we start talking about the topic of possession.

One of those is, how does a person get possessed by a demon? Here's the interesting thing: Do you realize that in the Bible, there is no specific passage that brings necessarily any real insight on that question? It's a burning question, but it's one that the Bible doesn't necessarily answer. It simply says there were people who were possessed by demons.

Now, it's not like we're totally in the dark on the topic, of course. I really believe demonic possession is a counterfeit of the work that God desires to do in every believer—to bring about the freedom and eternal life that He offers us through His indwelling Spirit.

But you know, we've learned a lot from missionaries over the years. We've been sending missionaries out for a long time, and many of these people go to countries where demonic possession is just right out there in the open. We have learned that where cultures have given themselves to pagan idolatry and dark occultic practices, there are often more instances of demonic activity and specifically demonic possession. That Ouija board that you thought was harmless is anything but.

But here's the next question that often troubles people quite a bit: Is it possible for me as a Christian to be possessed by a demonic presence? And I can tell you, in that particular case, the answer is a resounding no. It is not possible. For one thing, you're already invested with God's Spirit as a believer.

And believe me, there isn't room for two or more. The fact of the matter is there is not one single example in all of God's Word of a believer being invested with a demonic presence—not one example.

And secondly, the writers of the New Testament letters never even give a hint of the idea that demonic possession is possible for a believer. Spiritual warfare? Oh, you bet. Spiritual battles against darkness? Absolutely. Demonic possession for a believer? It's not even mentioned. It's not even warned against.

And you'll notice as you read through the New Testament that none of the New Testament authors suggest anything related to getting rid of a demon that might be behind your problems.

In other words, they never suggest an exorcism. You don't ever see that in the New Testament. You don't see Paul or Peter or somebody saying, yeah, well, if somebody's got this issue going on in the church, then, you know, you better get out the holy water or something. They just don't do that.

The word that is given to believers when we struggle with areas of sinful behavior and that sort of thing is always one: and that's repent. That's what we're told to do as believers because you can't blame it on demonic possession.

Having said that, I know there are plenty of authors and flashy guys and gals on TV these days who are telling you the opposite of what I am saying to you today. Many of them are saying that you can be demonically invested even as a believer. I just want you to know that those individuals say what they say without the authority or backing of scripture. It's just not there.

There's actually scriptural evidence to show that what they're saying is not true. Let me show you a passage on the screen here from 1 John 5:18. It says:

1 John 5:18 (ESV)

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning (And by the way, that's a reference to believers having been set free from the dominion of sin or the tyranny of sin. He goes on to say) *but he who was born of God* (and that's a reference to Jesus) *protects him* (and look at this last sentence), *and the evil one does not touch him.*

That's a wonderful proof text to show you and me that when it comes to believers, it's a hands-off approach related to the work of the enemy in our lives.

Now again, I want to just remind you as it relates to spiritual battles and spiritual difficulties—oh yeah. I mean, the enemy is a very real and very malevolent enemy whom we have to be prepared for. This is mentioned many times in the Word.

Peter talks about it in 1 Peter 5:

1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...

Be sober-minded (he says); be watchful. (Why?) Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (He says,) Resist him, firm in your faith...

So is the reality of satanic activity or attack in your life a real one? Absolutely. According to the scripture. And then look at Paul's comments in Ephesians 6:12. He says:

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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Again, there are plenty of scriptures to tell us that demonic activity and battles are a part of life. But I want to just encourage you, as a believer, as someone who has received Christ as your Savior—possession is not in the cards for you.

Here's this guy. Talk about interrupting a church service! It says, "*And he cried out, (verse 24) 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.'*"

And by the way, this was very common. Mark's going to talk about it here in just a few verses—how the demons would often do this. They would speak through the host to try to expose Him, and they would say, I know who you are, and they'd start freaking out, whenever Jesus would be around.

They'd say things like, have you come to cast us into the abyss? and then they'd get all whacked out and so forth. But Jesus always commanded them to be silent—not to tell who He was.

This causes a question sometimes to rise up in people's minds: Why? Why did Jesus do that? Why did He tell the demons to be quiet?

Well, you have to understand something about Israel. For almost the last 100 years at this particular time in their history, they had been under Roman

occupation, meaning the Romans had ruled the roost, if you will. They were conquered, and they were dominated militarily and politically. They really didn't have any kind of sovereign existence in their own country.

The Jews chafed under that heavy-handed Roman leadership and wanted very much to be free of it. Well, for the last 30 years, there had been a lot of talk in Israel about the coming Messiah, and people were at a fever pitch of anticipation.

And now, here's Jesus, who comes out onto the scene, and He starts doing miracles. The word is getting around the miracle: Could this be the Messiah? Well, Jesus knows there are a lot of hot-headed individuals—they called them zealots—who wanted so desperately to be free from Roman rule that Jesus knew they could potentially take Him by force and demand Him to be crowned king of Israel, which, of course, would have brought the wrath of Rome down upon the Jews very quickly and decisively.

Beyond that, there was a timetable that God had for letting the people know who He was. So, Jesus avoided any of these blatant declarations by Satan to try to expose who He was before the time. Besides, Jesus didn't need a satanic spokesman for His ministry.

That's why it says in verse 25, if you look in your Bible: "...*(that) Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him."* ²⁶ *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.*"

Now, what's cool is you see the authority of Jesus—He's like, you, out! What you don't know is that Jesus was not the only person going around at this time doing exorcisms. It was actually a fairly popular sort of thing. Doesn't mean they were successful at it necessarily, but they were doing it.

I say they, because there were lots of different people who—since demonic possession was a problem—were going around trying to set others free. I'm sure for various motives. But what they would do, these other exorcists, is employ all kinds of fancy language and methodology, kind of like today when people use holy water and stuff like that.

They would do all that—a lot of ceremonies and long-worded things to oust the demonic presence. And Jesus comes along, and He says, hey, be quiet. Get out of him. And the demon responded.

That was so different from what these people had witnessed from any kind of exorcism going on. And they were just kind of like, okay, that's cool. This guy has authority. He doesn't cite other people or use wild, wacky, elaborate

ceremonial things. He doesn't even have to light a candle. This guy just says, out with you, and they leave. Immediately, people understood: Wow!

And what does that tell you about God's authority over the demonic realm? It tells you who has the authority, doesn't it? The One we serve.

Look at verse 27: *“And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’”²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.’”*

It got people talking.

Verse 29: *“And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew (they were brothers), with James and John.³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her.³¹ And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”*

This is a beautiful and, I think, fairly simple miracle—if miracles can be classified as simple. But it's amazing for a couple of reasons. First of all, it's amazing for what it shows, but it's also amazing for the example it gives us.

Have you had a bad fever? I mean, I remember as a kid getting fevers. As a kid, you'd get over your fever, and man, I'd be out playing an hour after my fever broke. But I've noticed as I get older, that's just not the case anymore.

For one thing, I don't go out and play anymore, but still—when you've had a fever, even if your fever breaks and goes away, it takes about three days just to feel half-normal again, right? That's the weird thing about getting older. Those of you who are young—God bless you—this is all coming down the pike for you.

We can imagine Peter's mother-in-law was probably an elderly woman since we know he himself was married. I would guess he was maybe in his 40s, early 40s or something like that. So, maybe this woman was in her 70s.

It says, though, that Jesus healed her, took her fever away, and she got up immediately. Not only did He heal her of the fever, but she instantly had her strength back and she just begins to wait on them. She begins to serve, which is very cool.

I mean, that shows an incredible and full healing, but it is also a kind of cool example too. That strength that I'm sure was gone for this woman has now been restored. And what does she do with that which God gives her back? She gets up and starts serving the Lord right away.

I like that example because I've noticed in our lives, when we come to Christ, He gives us things. He often gives us back things that we had lost because of sin or because of just stupidity or whatever. Jesus restores that which is lost. Have you ever noticed that?

In my case, it was my marriage. God restored my marriage. He gave me my marriage back, better than before. I think when God gives us something back, it behooves us to take that thing—whatever it is—and start to serve God with it.

Just like this woman. Her strength had to have been gone with the fever—elderly woman—God gives it back. Jesus restores her, and she gets up and starts serving. And I'm sure joyfully. Right away. I'm going to take what God has given me back, and I'm going to serve Him with it, with all my heart.

What has He given you back? What has the Lord restored in your life? Take that thing—whatever it is—and serve the Lord with all of your heart. Begin immediately. Get up and serve God. Give it to Him. Bless Him and bless others with what you have received. I think that's such a neat example.

Have you noticed that this woman isn't even mentioned by name. When you see her in heaven, she's going to have to tell you who she is. That was me. I was Peter's mother-in-law. Had a fever. The Lord healed me.

I want to just walk up to that lady someday and go, you're a cool example of what it means to receive something back from the Lord and begin to serve Him with it right away.

Verse 32: "That evening at sundown, they brought Him all who were sick or oppressed by demons."

That tells you right there—this has been an incredibly busy day. Because now it's sundown. At the beginning of the day, people are rushing to Jesus all throughout the day. He goes into Peter's house, supposedly to kind of get away from the crowd for a second. There's more work to be done there. You've got a sick mother-in-law.

And then the whole town comes to Peter's house. They hang out at the door. So what does Jesus do? Does He say, I'm sorry. It's been a really busy day. Everybody needs a break, so we're good. You guys go home.

That's probably what I would say. I hate to say that, but sometimes I feel a little entitled after a busy day. We have a busy day of ministry. Sundays, as you can well imagine, are my busiest day of the week. I take Mondays off, and I've got to be honest with you—this sinner sometimes looks at Monday like that's my day, and you better not trample on it. You know what I mean?

It's like, we're going to sit around in our jammies. I'm going to sleep till noon, and we're going to shut the shades. If somebody comes to the door, we're not going to answer. I'm turning off my phone. Because I kind of feel like I'm entitled since I had a busy day.

And I'm humbled by how Jesus responds to the crowds. Now it's night. He's got to be exhausted. The people of the town come to Peter's door. Hey, is the Master there?

And Jesus comes out, and He just has compassion on these people. Oh, come on. Arms out, healing people, casting out more demons, battling, loving, caring. I'm just so blessed by His compassion. Aren't you? Because guys, this is the compassion of God.

Sometimes when you listen to our prayers, it sounds like we need to talk God into being compassionate. Have you ever noticed that? It's like we have to prevail upon Him to care because we're not really sure He cares. So, our prayer sounds like, God, don't You see what's going on? Don't You care about me? This is a painful, challenging situation. I need Your help. I know You're busy...

We do all kinds of dumb things, don't we? I've had people actually say that to me: I know God's really busy. Yeah... well, it takes a lot to be God, but it's like—He's got time for you. And His heart is moved by people. It says they were sick with diseases and demonic issues.

But it tells us here that He, once again, wouldn't permit any of the demons to speak because they knew Him. That's interesting. Demons knew Him. Demons know Jesus.

What does that do for your theology? Demons know Him. They know who He is. There's no question. Jesus doesn't walk into a room and the demons aren't going, Who's that? They're like, oh... the Holy One of God!

It's even accurate to say that, to some degree, demons even believe that He is who He says He is.

Let me show you a passage from James 2:19. I'm quoting this out of the NIV because I kind of like the way it sounds:

James 2:19 (NIV1984)

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

Isn't that great? I just love that verse. James is one of those straight-talkers. He doesn't mess around. He says, you say you believe in God. Wonderful. Demons believe in God, in the sense that they know who He is, and they shudder at the sound of His name.

My point in all this is that I think people sometimes rest in that same kind of superficial knowledge, like, I know who Jesus is. I even believe He is who He said He was. You know what? Big deal.

I remember, as a teenager, hearing the gospel. I was probably about 15 years old or so. I remember where I was when I heard it, and I remember understanding it. This guy who was sharing the gospel was really good. He was talking about Jesus on the cross and how He suffered for our sin.

I remember it hit me like a ton of bricks. I thought, wow... He did this. He bore the sin. He bore my sin. I knew that He bore my sin, and I even knew I needed Him to be forgiven.

But it took time in my life to really make it personal—to go beyond that superficial thing where, yeah, Jesus... Jesus is... yeah, sure. You believe Jesus is who He said He was? Yeah, sure. But have you made Him Savior and Lord? Well... I don't know.

Because that's the next step, isn't it? The Bible doesn't just say, believe who He said He was, and you're good to go. It says, to those who received Him, He gave the right to become children of God. To those who received. (John 1:12)

That's why when we take communion, it's a picture of salvation. We don't just watch the cup and the bread go past us. We take it and receive it. We take it in. I take the bread, and I eat it. The cup—I drink it. I'm showing that I've received this. It's inside of me now.

Communion is this picture of not just giving some kind of intellectual assent or intellectual nod, like, hey, there's Jesus. He's a cool guy, but saying, yeah, He's my Savior. He's my Savior! I've received Him into my heart. He has forgiven all my sin. He's mine.

And you can have Him too. That's what we're talking about here. That's why James makes that comment: You say you believe in God. Great. Even the demons believe in Him in that sense.

Have you received Him as your Savior? People, we're talking about going past religion to relationship. We're talking about really knowing that you are born again because the Spirit of God is living in your heart and, yeah, you've made Him Lord. Okay, we move on here.

Verse 35: *“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”*³⁶ *And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,*³⁷ *and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.”* (And He said to them, I just really need a day off. Now, see, that's what I would say.)³⁸ *And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”*

And you know what? Here's Jesus—after a long day of ministry that goes on into the night. He finally probably lays down somewhere in the house to get some rest. And it says that before the sun even rose, He got up and went to pray. That tells us something not just about His heart toward people and ministry—it also tells us something about prayer.

I think some of us are waiting for prayer to be convenient. It's not convenient. It's never convenient. It is never convenient to pray. When you get together with other believers and spend time wrestling in prayer, it's not convenient. It's not easy. It's hard work. It's challenging. You may have to give something up in order to do it.

In Jesus' case, He gave up a few hours of precious sleep—which we hold on to like it's gold. We even quote all these things about needing eight or nine hours of sleep every night, and drinking plenty of water, and all this stuff. And we're also whacked out about what it takes to be healthy. We're hanging on to our lives like we don't want to let him go.

And Jesus kind of lived His life with this reckless sort... I don't mean reckless in a bad way, but in a sense of—this is for you. He's giving His life away. And prayer for Him meant sacrifice—sacrificing something precious.

I told you guys, we need to get together for prayer on Thursday mornings, and it's hard when we get to this time of year. We wake up in the morning, and it's dark. I don't like getting up when it's dark. Even if I'm awake, I don't mind waking up when it's dark, but I'll just stay under the covers until I see the light of day. You know what I mean?

But we get up, and it's cold in the house, it's dark, and we're like, we've got to go pray. Sue and I were talking about it. We thought, maybe we shouldn't get up quite so early in the winter. We entertained that idea for a minute. No, no, no. It's never going to be convenient. It's never going to be easy. Let's just do it. Let's do it because it needs to be done. Amen?

Guys, we need to be better prayers, and we need to be careful not to wait for it to be easy. It's never going to be easy. Don't expect it to be.

Verse 39: *“And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.”*⁴⁰ *And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will (in other words, if you're willing), you can make me clean.”*⁴¹ *Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and (touched him or excused me) and touched him and said to him, “I will (which means literally, I am willing); be clean.”*⁴² *And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.”*

This is such an amazing thing on several levels. When you think about what this man said to Jesus—think of it like a prayer since we're talking about prayer.

We get so bound up thinking we've got to say our prayers just the right way. We have to use eloquent speech or whatever. People, the vast majority of people will not pray in public because there is an expectation that they're they think they're just not going to say it right, or they'll sound stupid.

People, prayer is nothing but talking. It just happens to be talking to God. If you don't push out any King James English, that's okay. He'll still understand you without the Elizabethan edge to your wording.

One of the most powerful prayers is just, God, I need You. But people will avoid public prayer like the plague. And again, it's because there's this, it's just expectation. That I've got to say it just so.

Let me show you this man's prayer because there's these 8 points that goes along with his prayer as we kind of dissect it. And I'll show what he's doing here, we can put that on the screen.

1. It was sincere and desperate— “imploring Him”
2. It was reverent— “and kneeling said to Him”
3. It was humble and submissive — “If You will”
4. It was believing— “You CAN”
5. It acknowledged his need— “MAKE me clean”
6. It was specific— “make me CLEAN”
7. It was personal— “make ME clean”
8. It was brief— just five words in the Greek

Notice that the first thing is that his prayer was sincere and desperate. It says he implored Jesus, right? Second of all, it was reverent. He knelt down to speak to Him, and that's an attitude of the heart. Next, it was humble and submissive. He said, if you will or if you are willing. But it also had an edge of faith to it. He said, if you're willing, you can, you can do this. It acknowledged his need to

make him clean. It was very specific—to make him clean. It was personal—make ME clean. And in the Greek, it was just five short words.

And guess what? It got His attention. Five short words. Five. Can you say five short words? I mean, we do it to our dogs all the time. Can we do that to God? He's not waiting for you to learn how to be flowery. He simply wants a relationship with you and for you to talk to Him. And so, I think we need to take a page out of this guy's prayer journal and just kind of keep it simple.

And the other thing I like about this is this guy came right to Jesus. You've heard me say before, and I'm going to keep saying it, we in the United States of America, as Christians, we need to get over our American Idol approach to prayer that elevates one person's prayer above another just because we think they're more spiritual.

And you know what? I get how it happens. I remember as a new Christian, being in my 20s, I actually had an opportunity to go down to, down south to a conference, and there were some men who were speaking at this conference who were really, they were heavy hitters in the church from the standpoint that they had written a lot of books and commanded a lot of crowds. I mean, people came to see them in droves.

And I was able to be in one of these sorts of meetings. And afterward, they made it possible for people to come up and get prayer. And so, I stood in line for a long time just to have these guys lay hands on me and pray for me. And I remember at the time kind of thinking, whoa, this is going to be cool.

And I recall when they prayed for me— a couple of guys prayed for me at the same time. And I remember at the time even having kind of an expectation excitedly that to have such men of such what I consider to be incredible worth laying hands on me and praying for me.

Let me tell you what I've learned as I've gotten older. I've recognized how dangerous my previous attitude was because it is a worldly attitude, not a biblical one. It is, like I said, it's the American Idol approach to seeing people rather than understanding people from the context of the Kingdom of God, which says, you want to be the greatest? Be the least. (Matthew 23:11-12)

We don't usually go clamoring after the least. I've learned that the least of these often have some of the most incredibly powerful prayers.

In fact, you know what? You really want your prayers— somebody to pray for you? Go get a kid. About a four-year-old. They know how to pray, and there's just such this simple childlike faith. And they don't try to be flowery or weird about it, and they're just—they just get right to the thing.

I love how kids pray. I do. I think it's great. Everybody else is trying to impress you. Kids are not trying to impress you. I mean, they'll be praying for you and pick their nose at the same time. Doesn't matter to them! We're just doing this thing, right?

I've got to tell you, I get uncomfortable when people—when I sense that people have come up to me wanting prayer, and they think that there's some kind of special input that I have with God. That makes me uncomfortable.

I get where it comes from kind of, but I also know that it's completely untrue. My prayers have absolutely no more value or carry no more weight than do yours. My access to the throne of grace is no different from yours. You have the exact same access.

The Bible says the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Well, guess what? In Jesus, you are all righteous because you have made Him Lord of your life, and you have put on the robe of righteousness. So your prayers are powerful and effective. Start using them.

I want you to notice here, too, that Jesus was—it says, “⁴¹ Moved with pity...” And again, that reminds us how God sees our hurts and our pains, right? But remember something about leprosy back in Jesus' day. If, as a Jew, I saw someone walk past me who had leprosy, I would think essentially two things.

Number one, I would think, you are a walking dead person. It's just a matter of time before you drop in your tracks. But the second thing—and the more cruel thing—that I would probably think about such an individual is, you are under the judgment of God, and you're getting what you deserve.

As painful as that is, that's the way people actually saw lepers. A healthy Jew learned early on that they were to stay clear of lepers. There was always to be a minimum of six feet, if not more, between themselves and someone with leprosy.

The custom among the people was that you would never greet a leper if you saw them in public. You would ignore them. Many times, if they spoke to you, you wouldn't speak back.

In fact, a leper was required—whenever they left the leper colony and came out into the public square—they were required to cry out, unclean! So as to warn people to get out of the way because they were coming through. So you can see here that the response of Jesus is so other than what this person would have expected.

And did you notice that Jesus did the unthinkable? He reached down and touched this guy. That would have blown the leper away. Let me tell you that nobody touched them anymore. For one thing, they couldn't feel it. The nerve endings of their body were, for the most part, dead.

But the fact that Jesus, with such compassion and with such grace, reached down and touched this man—that would have been enough. But He then went on to heal him of his leprosy. I just love this passage because, again, it tells us the heart of God toward people who are hurting. And that is His heart.

And then we're told in verse 43: *“And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once,⁴⁴ and 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, for a proof to them.”*

And by the way, for those of us who are going through Leviticus on Wednesday night, we're going to actually get to a place in Leviticus where the laws regarding lepers are going to be talked about, and we'll get to that here after a while.

But Jesus is basically telling this man, in keeping with the law of Moses, to go and have his physical condition examined by the priest so that he might be declared clean and able to come into the temple precincts and worship with the other people. But more than that, it was also an opportunity to communicate to the priest that a miracle had taken place.

But we find out that's really not what this guy did. It says in verse 45: *“But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town...”*

People would just swarm around Him. It wasn't even safe anymore. We're told that He would stay out in the desolate places, but even then people came out to Him, we're told, from every quarter to seek Him out and that sort of thing.

Here's the thing I want to end with this morning—just a thought for you. People are still seeking out Jesus. I don't know if you're aware of that.

One of the things that I recognize by being on Facebook and places like that is that people are pretty discouraged right now with the condition of our nation—and the world at large, I guess. But it hits us most poignantly and personally here in the United States of America.

There's quite a bit of discouragement about the coming election. People are like, should I vote for hopelessness or incredible hopelessness? That seems like our choice.

People are struggling. They know that we're living in a world that is morally corrupt and becoming darker all the time. It's easy to let that darkness start to cave in on you. But there's something interesting about the darkness that we Christians need to be aware of.

The darkness has this incredible side effect of compelling people toward the light. "*You, (Jesus said,) are the light of the world...*" (Matthew 5:14)

And in this time of darkness, we cannot afford to allow our emotions to become so buried under the negative pessimism of what is being broadcast abroad so much in our culture that we become discouraged.

And we just go, whatever, God. I'm just praying, come, Lord Jesus. I'm not going to talk to anybody. I'm going to say nothing. I'm going to close down my Facebook account, which might not be a bad deal anyway...

But you know what I'm saying? We get into this mindset where we just want to withdraw and say, well, whatever. Let it happen, God, because it's all coming down anyway.

But there are still people who need to hear. And people are still coming to the light. It blows me away, but it's happening. People are drawn to the light of Christ, and they're coming. We can't pull back because this is our day.

What I mean by that is, you are alive right now. I mean I assume you'd agree with that. And that means that on this day, October 2016, this is when God intended for you to be alive. In this level of darkness, in this level of moral depravity, He brought you into the world for just this day. Just this time. Just this level of moral depravity. This is the time we live,

Well, there's no good sitting around complaining about it. Let's do something. Let's be aware that people are coming, and they need to hear about Jesus Christ, and we have the answer. So when you're at work or out in the marketplace, be prepared. Peter said, "*...be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...*" (1 Peter 3:15)

If there was ever a time to be prepared, it's now. Because the darkness is closing in. But when the darkness closes in, the light gets brighter. We can't afford to extinguish that light. So let's let it shine.

Like Jesus said, who takes a lamp and lights it, and then puts a bowl over the top of it? (Matthew 5:15) We can't afford to do that. No. You light a lamp so it gives light to the whole room. So give light where you work, where you go to school, in your family. Let your light shine. It doesn't mean be obnoxious. It just means live for Christ. And understand that people are coming.