

"For this Purpose I Have Come Forth"

Are any of your entrepreneurs out there? Have any of you started a business before? If you have, then you know it's important for your business to succeed to have a business plan and to stick to it. True, some successful companies may not have had an actual formal written document at first, but I'm sure if you talk to their founders, they had a plan; they had some sort of idea of what they were trying to accomplish, and how they were going to go about doing it.

Jesus had a plan and purpose in his ministry. No, Jesus was certainly not starting a business. He wasn't an entrepreneur looking to how best sell his ideas. But Jesus did have a plan and a purpose. Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, had come into the world to execute his father's plan of redemption. From before the foundation of the world, God had planned to save his chosen people from their sins and make them citizens in the eternal kingdom of God. And so when Jesus was born into this world, he came to execute his father's plan. This plan ultimately would lead him to the cross. And yet before that, he would first announce the coming of the kingdom and call people to respond. And it is in this kingdom ministry, which came to a climax at the cross, where Jesus is revealed for who he truly is - not just a good moral teacher; not just a miracle worker; not a political revolutionary; but the eternal Son of God who is king of this eternal kingdom which he came to announce.

And so if we are to be Christ's disciples, we must understand what Jesus came to do and how he planned to do it. As we study this, we'll learn more about the kingdom which he came to announce, and we'll learn more about who Jesus is, as king of this kingdom. And as we learn about this kingdom and its king, we'll see how this challenges how we live our lives as his disciples. You see, his purpose, must be our purpose. His plan, must be our plan. Jesus' purpose in his earthly ministry was to announce the kingdom of God and call people to respond. That continues to be his purpose today. As his church and his people, we must set his purpose before us and ask what that means for how we live our lives as Christians.

And so as we study this passage today, we get a great glimpse of his purpose. Verse 38 even records Jesus talking explicitly about his purpose for coming when he says, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth." This chapter introduces what Jesus' purpose in ministry was, by illustrating what Jesus was typically doing in his ministry. This chapter also shows a danger and threat to Jesus ministry, and by looking at that we'll also get a better idea of his purpose in ministry.

And so as we study this passage, ask yourself if you know what Jesus came to do and teach about. Does his purpose during his earthly ministry affect how you understand who Jesus is? Does his purpose affect how you live your life?

So let's begin to look at his purpose as shown in this passage. Look with me first at verses 14-15. We've looked at these verses before. Here Jesus begins his ministry with a summary of what he came to do - to announce the coming of the kingdom and call people to respond. This is a summary of his purpose which he makes at the start of his ministry. And as the rest of this chapter unfolds, we see a summary of what Jesus' ministry will look like. We see him doing three sets of things: One, we see him preaching and teaching. Two, we see him calling disciples. Three, we see him doing exorcisms and healings. These three things are

programmatic for Jesus' ministry. Mark reveals here in chapter 1 a snapshot of what Jesus earthly ministry would look like. As we continue to study Mark, we'll see in his account that these are things that he continues to highlight about Jesus' ministry. Jesus ministry would be one where he preaches and teaches, where he calls disciples, and where he performs mighty signs of exorcisms and healings.

Look with me at this chapter. This is exactly what we see here. After verses 14-16 where Jesus announces the coming of the kingdom, Jesus goes and calls his first disciples in verses 16-20. Then in verses 21-28, we see Jesus on the Sabbath teaching with authority in the synagogue, where he demonstrates his authority through the exorcism of an unclean spirit. Then in verses 29-34, at the evening of that same day, we see him healing numerous people and casting out more demons. Then the next morning, we see in verses 35-39, Jesus says that he and his disciples must move on to the next towns to keep preaching the gospel. Verse 39 then records Jesus as preaching throughout the synagogues in Galilee and casting out more demons. Then in verses 40-45, Jesus heals a leper, someone who was ceremonially unclean because of his disease. What Jesus does here in this opening chapter of Mark is what we'll continue to see him doing throughout Mark. He will preach and teach. He will call disciples. He will exorcise and heal. Mark is showing us what Jesus will be doing in his ministry.

What I'd like you to note about all these things is that they all are serving a common purpose. These are all serving Jesus purpose' in proclaiming the coming of the kingdom and calling people to respond. They are all an outworking of what he summarized in verse 14-15. This obviously makes sense when you think about his preaching and teaching - he was preaching and teaching about the kingdom. It make sense when you think about his calling disciples - he was calling people to be disciples of this kingdom, calling them to live in light of the kingdom. But what about his exorcisms and healings? Are they too serving the common purpose of revealing the kingdom? I believe that they are, as they are an illustration of the kingdom. They are a manifestation of God's eternal kingdom breaking forth into the present. This is a crucial aspect of this passage, how these exorcisms and healings relate to Jesus' purpose, and so later in our sermon I will try to make this point more clear - that even Jesus' exorcisms and healings were to serve his purpose in announcing the coming of the kingdom.

But before I give that further explanation, I'd like to show you how this passage raises this question. I'd like to show how this passage begins to raise this question over how we are to understand these exorcisms and these healings with regard to Jesus purpose in ministry. You see this passage shows a threat and a danger to Jesus' purpose. There is something that threatens to hinder what Jesus is trying to do - and it's related, in part, to these exorcisms and healings. You see, in our passage, it appears at first glance that Jesus is trying to suppress identification about himself. You probably noticed that when we read the passage. In verse 25, Jesus commands the unclean spirit to not speak, after the demon began to announce who Jesus really was - the Holy One of God. In verse 34, Mark summarizes a number of exorcisms by again saying that Jesus would not let them speak, "because they knew him." Later in Mark we see the same thing - demons recognizing Jesus for who he really is - some explicitly call him the Son of God - Mark 3:11 is one example of that; in these other examples, Jesus again strictly orders the demons to not make him known. In verse 44 we see something similar, where Jesus commands the leper that he just healed to not say anything about his healing to anyone, and instead to go to the priest to be declared ceremonial clean. Again, similar incidents happen throughout Mark, where Jesus heals someone, and he orders the person to not tell anyone.

Why is this? Does Jesus not want people to know about who he is? Some liberal theologians have tried to argue that these verses are a part of a messianic secret, that Mark claims Jesus had hid his identity as the Messiah until after the resurrection. But that is an overstated claim. We know especially from the gospel of John that there was various ways in which Jesus made known his identity before the resurrection. There are definitely ways in Mark and the other synoptic gospels in which Jesus is identified. However, what we see in Mark and this so-called Messianic secret is Mark showing how Jesus will reveal the mystery of the kingdom and of his identity according to his own terms and according to his own plan. This apparent suppression of others trying to identify Jesus only heightens the intensity of this action-packed narrative of the gospel of Mark. Right from Mark 1:1, Mark tells us, the reader, who Jesus is. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Then shortly thereafter in 1:11, we hear God declare that same thing, that this Jesus is none other than the Son of God. From that point on, Mark begins to show how Jesus was revealed and manifested as the Son of God. As the humans in Mark's gospel grapple with the question "who is this Jesus?", we'll be reminded along the way, that Jesus is just who Mark declared in the first verse of his gospel - he is the Son of God, the Messiah, the King of the Kingdom which he came to announce. We'll hear from the demons along the way, that they know he is the Son of God. We'll see God the father announce again in Mark 9 at the transfiguration that Jesus is his beloved Son. Jesus himself will confess it plainly before the council of chief priests, elders, and scribes in Mark 14. And yet it is not until the climactic moment of Jesus' death on the cross where we hear a human utter these words; it is not until Mark 15:39 where we hear the centurion declare as Jesus uttered his last breath, "truly this man was the Son of God!" Mark captures in his gospel account a beautiful snapshot of how humans during Jesus ministry were gradually beginning to understand who Jesus really is. As we continue to study Mark, this question of who Jesus is will be at the forefront of Mark's gospel.

And so realize that Jesus is not trying to hide his identity. Mark does not record Jesus trying to uphold some messianic secret. Jesus' commanding demons and people to not talk about certain things is not about a secret kept hidden but about a mystery being revealed. It is about Jesus revealing the mystery of the kingdom and of himself, according to his own plan, according to his own timeline, according to his own purpose, according to his own goals. And so we see Jesus in his ministry, first and foremost concerned to announce the kingdom, to describe the kingdom, to make sure everyone understands the sort of kingdom that he is bringing. And then as Jesus begins to clarify the true nature of the kingdom, he then gradually makes more and more clear who he is. It seems Jesus is not only concerned for people to understand what kind of king he is, but that people also understand what kind of kingdom he is the king of.

And so think about the dangers that Jesus may have been trying to avoid. Think about having demons testify about him. When he commands the demons to silence in this passage - think about what dangers he may be trying to avoid. First, of course, why would Jesus want a demon to testify about who he is? That's not the sort of PR that you would want (c.f. Malbon) if you were the Son of God! Second, it's possible Jesus was trying to keep the demons from giving a premature identification of him as the Son of God and Messiah. If the people around him didn't first understand what sort of kingdom he was the Messiah of, this could lead to other problems. Remember that most Jews at that time were expecting a geo-political kingdom and a Messiah who as king would lead the people in this restoring of an earthly kingdom. If the wrong people learned too quickly that Jesus was the Messiah, without fully understanding what kind of kingdom he was bringing, they might try to crown him king. That would not be meeting the purpose of Jesus' ministry. But regardless why Jesus silenced the demons, it is clear that Jesus would reveal himself in his own ways and according to his own plan.

Think as well of the danger in having those Jesus healed testify to who he is. Now he didn't tell everyone not to testify to him, for example in Mark 5, he tells a demon-possessed man who he heals to go home and tell his friends what the Lord had done for him. But, nonetheless, Mark records many places, such as in verse 44 of our passage, where Jesus tells the healed person to not tell anyone about the healing. You might ask, what is the danger in these people telling others? They are not demons; why should *their* testimony be a concern? But are we sinful creatures really any more capable, *in ourselves*, to testify to Jesus? In John 2(24-25) it says that many believed in Jesus because of the signs he was doing, but it says that Jesus "would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."

And we see this danger of man's testimony right here in our passage in Mark. When the people Jesus healed told others about the miracles of Jesus, the danger was that people might identify him only with the miracles. They might identify him just as a healer and miracle-worker, instead of seeing the greater significance of what these healings and exorcisms represent. In fact, we see that already happening in our passage. Look at verse 32 and 33. This says that at the evening, the whole city started bringing people to him to be healed. Jesus does one exorcism earlier in the day publically, and all of a sudden the whole city is at his door step looking to be healed. The same thing happens with this leper whom Jesus healed. Jesus tells him not to tell anyone, but verse 45 records that he started telling everyone anyways. The result was that Jesus could no longer freely enter a city, but had to stay outside in the deserted places, because so many people were going to him to be healed.

Do you see what happened when some people got the wrong idea about Jesus and his mission? When people started to identify Jesus just with his miracles, he became overwhelmed with people looking to be healed, and so he couldn't enter a city openly. But do you see how this hindered his purpose which he stated in verse 38? In verse 38, Jesus said that he had to go into the next towns to preach the gospel. He said that in light of all the people who looking for him to be healed. He said he had to move on because his ultimate task was to be preaching, not healing. And so Jesus would not let his kingdom ministry be hindered by those wanted to identify Jesus as only a healer and miracle-worker. No, instead Jesus would reveal himself in his own ways and according to his own plan.

And so then, why did Jesus even do these exorcisms and healings? If in verse 38 he leaves Capernaum because he is being bogged down just healing people, and if he does that saying that his purpose for which he came was to preach, then why did he keep doing these miracles of healings and exorcisms? Well, that is because Jesus' purpose in ministry was to announce the coming of the kingdom, and his exorcisms and his miraculous healings were part of that announcement. These healings and exorcisms served to illustrate the kingdom and testify to its coming. Rightly understood, these miracles profoundly testified to who Jesus really was. Wrongly understood, they threatened to derail Jesus ministry and leave us with a wrong identification of Jesus.

You see the right way to understand these healings and exorcisms is as an extension of Jesus' kingdom ministry. In this way, they complemented his preaching and teaching about the kingdom. That is why he will eventually have his disciples also be healing and exorcising along with preaching and teaching when he sends them out in chapter 3. And so how do Jesus' healings and exorcisms illustrate the kingdom? How do these complement his teaching on the kingdom? Well, think first about exorcisms. When Jesus casts out a demon, he is showing forth that God's kingdom rule has arrived. His kingdom rule has come with authority, authority even over

the demonic forces. It's an intrusion of the end times. For at the end of the ages, at the final coming of the kingdom in its fullness, Satan and his demons will be fully destroyed and vanquished. And so in the exorcisms, we see a foretaste of Satan's destruction. We see a foretaste of the final realization of God's kingdom in destroying Satan. With Jesus, the kingdom has already come in a real sense, and so we see that shown to us by Satan already beginning to be vanquished through these exorcisms.

The same is true with the healings. When Jesus heals someone, he is also showing the coming of the kingdom. It's an intrusion of the end times. For when the kingdom comes in its fullness, the salvation of God's people will be complete, which will include our final healing from all our physical afflictions, when we are given our new glorified bodies. And so when we see Jesus heal someone, we see a foretaste of the final realization of God kingdom. With Jesus, the kingdom has already come in a real sense, and so we see that shown to us by these physical healings of people, foreshadowing the day when they will be permanently healed from all of life's afflictions.

And so these exorcisms and healings are temporary intrusions of the consummated kingdom. I say temporary because that's what they are. The kingdom had not yet come in its fullness when Jesus did these miracles. That's why the people Jesus healed or the people he even raised from the dead, all eventually get sick again and die at some point. Their healing is a temporary foretaste of the consummated kingdom.

And so Jesus' healings and his exorcisms are meant to communicate something about the kingdom. These are signs of the coming kingdom, and they tell us a little bit about how wonderful that kingdom is. Just think about these signs in contrast to the OT kingdom of Israel. In the kingdom of Israel, people could become unclean and separated from God ceremonially, restricted from worshipping God with his people. We saw that with the Leper here in our passage in Mark. And yet what does our passage say about the coming kingdom and uncleanness? When the coming kingdom confronts uncleanness, the person is made clean. That's what happened with this Leper in our passage. That's even why the man with the unclean spirit is liberated from this demonic possession. Jesus' exorcisms and his healings are an illustration of the coming kingdom and its power. The coming kingdom far surpasses the OT kingdom of Israel. With the coming of the kingdom, something greater had arrived. And so when these exorcisms and healings are received and understood in this way, then they are fulfilling Christ's purpose in announcing the kingdom and calling people to respond.

But when these exorcisms and healings are not understood in this way, we have a threat to Jesus' purpose in ministry. If we see these miracles as *just* a ministry of mercy by Jesus, and lose the kingdom focus, we can make Jesus into a mere healer and miracle worker. Do you see the danger? We cannot, we must not, separate Jesus' miracles away from his message of the coming kingdom. These two go together. If you lose the kingdom focus of these miracles, you lose the purpose of what Jesus was seeking to accomplish when he did these miracles. Ultimately, if you lose the kingdom focus, you begin to misunderstand Jesus' ministry and you consequently begin to misunderstand who Jesus really is.

And so, Saints of God, Jesus here in Mark chapter 1 shows what his ministry is going to be about: teaching about the kingdom and ultimately revealing who he is, but on his own terms. And so Jesus is not trying to hide his identity - far from it! Instead we see Jesus according to his own plan and purpose deliberately preaching and teaching, calling disciples, exorcising and healing, all to announce the coming of the kingdom and to call people to respond in faith and repentance.

And as Jesus does this, he is revealing to the world that he is both the Messiah and the Son of God. Though some would misunderstand Jesus and think of him merely as a healer and miracle worker, Jesus' plan would not fail. Throughout Mark we see Jesus faithful to his plan and purpose, which finds its culmination especially at the cross.

And so Saints, realize where you stand in redemptive history. Sometimes we might look at the stories in the gospels, and say, "ahh, if only I could have been there". Yes, that would have been an exciting time. And yet, in so many ways you and I live at a far better point in time. For as we saw in our passage today, so many at that time had no clue about who Jesus really is. And yet we as a church have seen the fullness of Christ's ministry. We now have Mark 1:1 which tells us clearly that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. We know this clearly now, not because Jesus kept it a secret until after his resurrection. No, we know this now because Jesus throughout his earthly ministry set a purpose to reveal himself and the coming kingdom. Jesus' ministry was successful, and so because of that we now possess the mystery that has been revealed. We now know who this Jesus of Nazareth is because Jesus had a purpose and a plan in his ministry to reveal it in the right time and the right way according to his divine wisdom.

Saints, the mystery of Christ has been revealed to us. And so I would like to ask you: How do you identify Jesus? Who is Jesus to you? Is your understanding of Jesus the one that is revealed in Scripture? This passage should challenge our identification of Jesus. Do you see him as a miracle worker, or as the Son of God who brings God's kingdom rule to you? Are you looking for him to rule your heart and life, or are you looking for him to heal you of your earthly troubles? We must know the Jesus that is revealed to us in Scripture; not who we want Jesus to be, but the true Jesus that calls us to respond in faith and repentance to his life-changing kingdom message.

And so Jesus' purpose in ministry demands that we evaluate the purpose in our life and ministry. Jesus' purpose must be our purpose. Jesus was concerned ultimately with the coming kingdom. If we understand rightly Jesus' purpose we won't approach him just looking to be healed of all our earthly troubles. Instead, we'll see that Jesus was concerned about the kingdom, and so we'll look for his kingdom rule to be manifested in our lives. We'll look for how we can serve him. We'll look for how we can respond in faith and repentance as he has called us to do. In other words, we'll seek first the kingdom of God.

And yet the beauty, of course, is that as we seek first the kingdom of God, we realize that ultimately all these other things will be added unto us as well; if not in this life, then certainly in the life to come. For as Jesus' miracles show, the final realization of the kingdom will mean that our enemy the devil will be fully vanquished, and our every physical disease and sickness will be done away with. These are but simple benefits of being sons and daughters of the king. But we are told to seek first the kingdom, and all these benefits will come along with it, according to God's own timing and plan.

And so Jesus' purpose must be our purpose. There are so many specific ways you can apply this. For example, when you pray are you more concerned to go to Jesus looking for miraculous healings, than looking for his lordship in your life to be more fully realized? If Jesus' purpose was to announce the kingdom, then he is first calling you to look for his lordship! This doesn't mean we shouldn't pray for God's help and healing - no we should, and God even tells us to pray for them. But Christ's purpose should set the proper perspective and priority in our prayer.

Another example is our relationship to the civil kingdoms of the world. What kingdom is our focus? Is it an earthly kingdom? Or is it God's heavenly kingdom? Jesus didn't seek to make the kingdom of heaven realized by taking over political institutions. He came to have the kingdom of God rule in our hearts and in his church among all his people. His kingdom is for those who are his own. He is revealing the mystery of his gospel particularly to them. Again, this doesn't mean that we as Christians don't have any obligation to the civil kingdoms in this world - no God even commands us to not to disregard our role to be good citizens in these earthly kingdoms. And yet Christ's purpose does set the proper perspective and priority for us - the kingdom of God is distinct from the human kingdoms in this world. These human earthly kingdoms are temporary and passing away, but God's kingdom is eternal.

Another example is the idea of mercy ministries and social action and justice. Some churches spend all their energies trying to change the world socially, by doing good, and taking care of the poor. Our passage even sets the right perspective on this too. Yes, we must extend mercy and do good, especially to the poor and afflicted. Jesus certainly had compassion on the masses who came to him. But don't confuse works of mercy and compassion with the real ministry of the church. These works of mercy and compassion must not hinder the ultimate work of the church - the preaching of the kingdom. Mercy ministry brings people temporary benefits in this earthly kingdom; ultimately we want to bring people the lasting benefits of a greater kingdom, of a heavenly kingdom.

And so these are but a few examples of how we might apply this passage to our lives. As you consider Christ's purpose in his ministry, may you be reminded of his sure plan to bring all his chosen people into this glorious eternal kingdom. Be assured that if you believe and trust in Jesus, then you are certainly part of his kingdom. This is our hope. So may we fix our eyes on his kingdom. May his purpose be our purpose. And isn't wonderful how our Lord now entrusts to us his church this mystery revealed! We have been entrusted with the task of bringing the identity of this kingdom and this king to the world. And so by God's grace and the work of his Holy Spirit in our lives, may our labors be used to proclaim Christ's kingdom and his kingship, to Novato, and to the ends of the earth. Amen.

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