

# The CITYGATES C H U R C H

## Mark 1:29-39 Directed By God, Not Men

**Summary:** How do you know if the popular thing is the right thing?

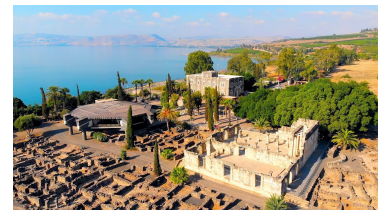
This morning we're going to talk about two super important things that affect our lives – public opinion and prayer. We'll ask the question: when do you go along with the excitement and enthusiasm of people around you, and when do you hear everything they're saying and go in the opposite direction? We'll ask: how do you know the right thing to do?

We'll also look at the subject of prayer – because we'll find Jesus praying and consider how what He does might affect what we do. It's going to be some good stuff and I'm excited to see how God uses it in our lives.

So, let's jump in where we left off last week – it's Saturday and Jesus was speaking in the synagogue, which is kind of like the Jewish church. People were amazed by His teaching at the synagogue and He had even cast a demon out of some guy. There's a lot of buzz and excitement going on but the service is over and it's time to go. So,

**Mark 1:29** Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. **31** So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.

Remember, for Peter it was a pretty short walk home. He lived about fifty yards from the synagogue and you can visit the ruins of both locations today. You can imagine the buzz as they walked down the street. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Jesus, maybe a few others with them, asking Jesus questions, or giving each other looks as they remembered the exorcism like 'did you see guy' or recalling the sermon like 'did you hear what He said?' These guys are completely caught up in what they've just been through as they roll through the door to Peter's house and realize, oh man, Peter, your mom's sick – their attention snaps from the excitement of the morning to the problems of the present.



But here's what I love – this is real life. Some of you know exactly what it's like. You've been at church, or away on a retreat, you've been out at home group and your head and your heart are filled with amazing things, you're even humming that one worship song. And then you walk in the door of the house, or you show up at work, or you check your phone and you realize, you've got problems.

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What do you do? How do you respond? How do you keep the 'real world' and real life from stealing your spiritual joy?

Well, what did Peter do? Notice, they told Jesus about the problem (30). They **told Him about her at once**. So, church, can I encourage you to do the same thing? **Bring your problems to Jesus** – talk to Him about all the things that sap your joy, the things that aren't working out, the things and people that are broken and hurt, the people and policies that directly oppose you.

### **Bring your problems to Jesus.**

You get to invite Jesus into your life, into your home, into your family, into your work. You get to ask Him for guidance, ask Him for healing, ask Him for reconciliation, ask Him for deliverance, Ask Him for strength. Ask Him for whatever you need, but bring Him into the situation. Let Him make a difference. Sometimes He'll get you out of your situation, other times He'll see you through it, but whatever He chooses to do, inviting Him in makes a difference.

Also, let's recognize that someone told Jesus about this lady, she didn't come for herself. We call this intercession: it's you talking to God *about* someone's situation or need. When you read the gospels, you find it happens a LOT. So, bring your problems to Jesus, but **bring other people's problems to Him too**.

### **Bring other people's problems to Jesus.**

In fact, I think it would be interesting to look at the healings described in the gospels and categorize them: how many occurred because the sick person came to Jesus personally, and how many occurred because someone else brought them to Jesus or came to Jesus on their behalf? And then how many, like the man at the pool of Bethesda, were healed without even looking or asking for it because Jesus came directly to them?

Christian, I hope to help you see that it's good to talk to people about Jesus, but it's also good *to talk to Jesus about them*. Now, I know many of you are already doing that, I just want you to see *it makes a difference*. You can change someone's life by talking to Jesus about them and talking to them about Jesus. Prayer is a powerful thing just understand the answers don't always come immediately or take the form you hope. But trust the King. Invite Him in and pray, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

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And now, notice the woman's **healing leads to service**. As soon as she recovered, she's looking for something to do in response.

Church, *gratitude is a better fuel than obligation*. That's another way of saying something we repeat often – that we should receive and then reflect – in other words, whatever we do

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to show love for God and others is the result of what we have already received from Him. Ideally, *our gratitude compels us to serve*.

It's important to return to this truth regularly. Whatever form of ministry your service to God and others takes and wherever it occurs, it's important that we regularly assess our motives by asking: *why am I serving?*

Because, *ministry is still work*. This lady had a house full of grown men, feeding them and hosting them would require effort, but her attitude toward that work would make all the difference. You know it's possible to do things for others and grit your way through it with an attitude of obligation. You tell yourself, "This needs to happen, so get over it and do it." Or maybe, "You signed up, so keep your word." Or, maybe on those days you're even less proud of, you gripe your way through it with resentment and a sour attitude or apathy.

*That is not the life and ministry that Jesus wants you to have!* Yes, it's very noble to honor your obligations, to follow through on things you volunteered for, signed up for, inherited, or that just come with your position, but Jesus' intent – *for everything you do* - is that you would be able to do it with *joy*, as a response to what you have received; that you abide in Him and produce spiritual fruit as you function with spiritual gifts.

And, I want to be clear: I'm talking about all of life as ministry, not just whatever you happen to do at, or in connection to, the church or some other group. This woman was sick, Jesus healed her, and with her God-given health, she immediately began to serve. The word in Greek is *diakon*, from which we get our word deacon, and she did it *in her home*. The point is: you can serve, or minister to, God and others - in your home, at work, and of course at church. But wherever it takes place, it should feel like joy, fueled by response to what Christ has done for you and a deep desire to see others experience Him too.

If that's not true for you – if you're fried, if you're burned out, that's a warning sign. You might need to take some time out and find healing again so that you can serve with joy and enthusiasm. That's OK. At times, it happens to us all. If you're dried up and withered, invite Jesus in, He promises to fill you with living water (John 4, 7).

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Now, everything we've spoken about so far focused on what's happening inside Peter's house. But outside, in the community, people are responding to what they heard and saw at the synagogue that morning. So,

**32 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed.**

They came after sunset, because the religious rules they lived by wouldn't allow work on the Sabbath and that includes the work of carrying your sick friend or family member to Peter's house.

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If you were with us last week, you remember that according to the Jewish reckoning a day starts with sundown the night before – so the Sabbath goes from Friday evening, through Friday night, all day Saturday, and then ends at sundown on Saturday night.

Now, we know Jesus came to Capernaum after celebrating Passover in Jerusalem, and that means this probably took place sometime in the spring, probably in April, and by using the Internet instead of two pieces of string, we can look up what time sunset is in Capernaum during April and learn that it's about 7PM, and it's going to be a busy night.

33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door. 34 Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

Jesus didn't need demons announcing His identity and Kingdom, He came to do it Himself.

And, as we said, He performed miracles to authenticate His claims – miracles including healing people physically and delivering them spiritually. As one translator put it, (MSG) "He cured their sick bodies and tormented spirits." With characteristic efficiency and brevity Mark shows us that Jesus is King over both the spiritual and physical world.

But, you can imagine the kind of stir this is going to create. You can imagine how people are going to react. People love free stuff and when it's genuinely useful, life-changing free stuff, that's big news. The question is: are people getting excited about who Jesus is, what Jesus says, or are they growing excited about what He can do? I think you know the answer. For many people what Jesus can do is more interesting than what He has to say. People are happy to get stuff from Him, but not so eager to follow Him and receive Him as King.

Keep that in mind as we see what happens next.

35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight (which would have been around 0615 assuming these events occurred in April around Capernaum), He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

If you're taking notes, you might want to write this down: **Jesus valued action and reflection**

Church, I need you to see that after a busy day of ministry, Jesus found time to get alone and pray. He knew He needed this time. He needed the right balance between action and solitude, between activity and stillness, between public service and private devotion. *He needed to be with the Father so that He could be with people.* Church, would you please take note of that: *Jesus, needed to be with the Father so that He could be with people.*

So, let me go back to what I said earlier. If things in your life and ministry feel like a burden, like a bother, if there's little left of joy, this might be exactly what you need too.

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Personally, I find it amazing that Jesus prayed. Look at everything He can do, look at all the wise things He has to say, and *still* He needs focused time with the Father. He still takes time to pray.

According to the gospels, prayer was a regular part of Jesus' life, especially at big moments. And it wasn't always because things were falling apart. I mean, look at the day He's just had – things are going well. People are excited, and still, we find Him out here praying.

Actually, I suspect that's why He's here. He knows things are going well. He knows people are responding with excitement. And He wants to make sure He stays on course with the Father's will.

My friends, I think we all know the danger we're in when life is falling apart. But do we realize there's also a profound danger when things are going well? There's a danger of getting off course, of chasing shiny things, of following the opinions of people. In fact, I'd argue that's the greatest danger to spiritual health in the West today – there's been too much success, too much prosperity, and we all, including the church, have been drawn off course.

So, here we find Jesus, out praying after a "successful" day of Sabbath ministry. And what happens next?

[36 And Simon and those \*who were\* with Him searched for Him. 37 When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."](#)

Luke (4:42) tells us the "multitudes" were out looking for Him. And they [tried to keep Him from going away from them](#). The people of Capernaum imagined all the great things Jesus could do for them. You know, 'now that You've healed me from the fever, could you do something about this pain in my lower back?' Or, 'my cousin in Cana has been walking with a limp ever since that accident with his ox, let me send for him and you can help him too!' And you know there was a guy wanting to talk to Jesus off to the side because he thinks his hair is starting to thin out and maybe Jesus could do a little something to thicken it up and darken it up like when he was in his twenties...

This will be Jesus' perpetual problem. He wants to help people. He wants to relieve pain and suffering. But *that's not the main reason He's come*. He'll spend the next three years on the move because people have all kinds of ideas of what He could do for them that are not always in line with His ultimate goal. They get stuck in the here and now and He's trying to point them toward eternity.

And so, what does He do? Read with me:

[38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."](#)

I made a note of that in my Bible. It's Jesus' purpose statement.

Picture the scene: people are enthusiastic. Jesus is rocking the polls. He's got massive voter confidence in Capernaum. He's going viral. He's got subs and likes and followers. And He says, "Pack up boys, it's time to go!"

But, here's the thing that doesn't come through as clearly in English – He says, 'let's head out for the sticks.' Let's move on to some Podunk town. The word He used meant a village that was so small it had no walls. He's not moving on to the next big city.

**39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.**

Jesus didn't stop what He had been doing in Capernaum – He was still preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God and working miracles, but He kept moving around, spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God because, as He said, **this is why I came**.

All of which should warn us to beware the "Great opportunity" that comes your way. It could lead you astray. It could have tremendous cost. Church, I think this point needs special emphasis for those of us living here in this city surrounded by the kinds of opportunities that come your way. Are you sure it's the right thing to do? I've seen people achieve great things but make sacrifices along the way that cost them dearly.

I know everyone is excited. I know it all seems to make sense. I know it could really open some doors or be a great opportunity. But have you spent time in a solitary place to seek God and pray? Is this really the right way to go? And, if it is, is this really the right time for it? Don't assume that the big opportunity is always the right opportunity – Jesus left the excitement of Capernaum and went into the countryside. It was exactly the opposite of what everyone wanted, and yet it was exactly what He knew He needed to do.

And, by the way, it also says something really, really important to us: *God values people in podunk towns, people without positions or titles*. He values people who have never heard of the place you work. He values people who have no clue who your boss is or how important your next project is.

*Jesus sees things differently* and one way to gain that same kind of perspective and clarity is to follow His pattern and spend time in prayer.

So, what can we learn from His pattern? Well, notice Jesus made time to pray early in the day. Which, according to the language here, would be sometime between 3-6AM. We know He was up before the sun and sunrise occurs around 6:15AM in April in Capernaum. So, it was definitely an early morning, after a busy day.



Leland Wang was a Chinese evangelist whose personal motto was – “No Bible, no breakfast.” In other words, I’m not going to eat until I’ve spent time with God.

I share that because it’s got a nice ring to it, it’s memorable.

But here’s thing – I know a lot of you have crazy schedules, you might not be able to make this work. I know some of you have found ways to spend time daily with God during your commute on the Metro bus crawling up 395, or in the parking lot before going into your building, or at your desk before the day starts, or after all the kids are changed and fed and settled. If that’s what it has to be, OK. God knows and He can reach you there.

The principal I’m begging you for though is this: *Let God have the first and last word each day.* Regardless of when, where, or how you do whatever you call your devotions, *let God be the first voice into your life*, don’t let your phone or your email set your agenda and tone for the day. And when you lay down to go to sleep each night, don’t let the events of the day or what you’ve got coming up tomorrow be what’s rolling through your head as you go to sleep.

I want to encourage you to develop a habit of taking the first and last minutes of the day to connect with God. Let it become as ingrained in you as brushing your teeth. In fact, I actually link the two together. I have a Bible on my nightstand turned to the passage of Mark that I’m preaching next and each night as I brush my teeth, I review that passage. Madeleine has My Utmost for His Highest on her side of the bed and she does the same with it. Actually, it’s her dad’s old copy with all his underlining and notes in it. I slip that fact in to continue to make the case for paper books and paper Bibles as your primary tools, supported by digital when you have to. But the point is: the last thing we put into our mind each night, is something that points us to God, and it’s not on a screen.

Regardless of what your schedule looks like, could I encourage you to develop a personal rhythm that says, **No Bible, no bed.** But not as a form of legalism, let it become a habit, a desire, a pattern. Tell yourself, “I’m the kind of person who spends time with God each night before going to bed” and then figure out what works best for you.

And then in the morning, **no prayer, no phone.** Again, you might not be able to do what you would call your devotions until you’re out the door or at your desk. But could you become the kind of person who checks in with God each morning *before you check your phone*? Because, if we’re honest, you know that sometimes you check your phone and you see something that takes over your thoughts and you either never get to the devotional time you meant to have, or you rush through it or are distracted because of what you saw.

What kind of impact would it have on your life if you let God have the first and last word each day? To spend time in prayer before Peter shows up excited that [“Everyone is looking for you!”](#)

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There's no need to let it feel impossible or overwhelming. The language here indicates that Jesus was praying for a long time, but this isn't what He did every day. Think of prayer the same way you think of other conversations. Sometimes you send someone a quick text or a random picture of yourself just to keep the Snapstreak going. It's a quick check in.

Other times you have a short chat, a quick back and forth by voice, video, or text, to catch up or work out details. And then there are times when you need a long talk to explore, discuss, or work things out. Prayer can happen all the same ways – quick little shout outs to God, short chats to touch base about an issue or review the day and long talks to work through big issues. There's more than one way to stay connected to God.

*It's the connection itself that's important.* The willingness to be directed by God, and not the desires of the crowd or the needs of the day. In fact, it's saying – 'God make me into the kind of man or woman that these people need to see or hear from today. Don't let me go out there without being touched, filled, prepared, instructed, by You.' It's turning to God and saying, 'of all the things that come my way today, in all the opportunities I'll have and decisions I need to make, help Me to follow You and not the crowds.'

So, here's what I hope you'll be thinking about today. **What is your purpose? Why are you here?**

Jesus said He came – [to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God](#). This is what you see Him doing throughout the gospels – sometimes in a house, sometimes on a mountain, in the city, in the country, at the lake, in the synagogue, in the Temple, in markets, even on a boat – we find Jesus always preaching, always communicating the good news of what God has done. [For this purpose](#), He said, [I have come](#).

So, what are you hoping to accomplish in life and how do you know if it's enough or when it's enough? Should you follow the advice, directions, and desires of the crowds – should you go where everyone is looking for you and be led by all the excitement? Or is there another plan?

Have you spent enough time with God to know?

Let's Pray.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

**Mark 1:29-39**

**Directed By God, Not Men**

**Summary:** How do you know when it's time to turn your back on popularity?

- What do you think the crowds wanted from Jesus? Miracles? Quick-fix solutions? A leader to follow? What do you want?
- Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. Where are some ways you have seen His power in the physical realm?
- Jesus cast out unclean spirits. What are some ways that you have seen the power of God in the spiritual realm?
- Jesus is one with God the Father. Does it surprise you that He prayed? Why or why not?
- Review the following passages – what do you learn about turning to God for help in prayer?
  - Genesis 32:9-12
  - 2 Kings 19:14-19
  - Ps 55:22
  - Phil 4:6-7
  - 1 Peter 5:6-7
- What have you learned about spending solitary time with God? When did you first attempt it? What kinds of success and setbacks have you found? What lessons have you learned?
  - Do you have a secluded spot to go to when you really need to connect with God?
- We recommend the Dwell Bible App (one time cost, many translations and voices) or the Blue Letter Bible App (free) for listening to Scripture.
- We recommend starting and/or ending your day with Morning and Evening by Spurgeon or My Utmost For His Highest by Chambers.

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