

# Early Lessons for Christ's Disciples

by Raymond Golsworthy

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of listening and learning from God, prayer and fellowship, and being aware of counterfeit truth in spiritual warfare.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 21:5, Deuteronomy 32:2, Psalm 119:18, Isaiah 1:6, Isaiah 52:11, Isaiah 53:6, Mark 1:17, Mark 9:7, Mark 16:15, Luke 6:12, John 1:1, John 6:63, John 14:12, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 5:8, Ephesians 6:11, Philippians 2:12, 1 Timothy 1:11, Titus 2:14, Hebrews 1:3, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 1:1

**Topics:** "Discipleship Lessons", "Spiritual Warfare"

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## Description

Raymond Golsworthy preaches on the lessons from Mark 1:16-45, focusing on the events that followed Christ's call to His first disciples. The sermon highlights seven vital spiritual lessons illustrated through the disciples' experiences with Jesus, emphasizing the importance of listening to His teachings, recognizing the reality of spiritual warfare, understanding the power of prayer and unity, discerning true versus false testimonies, learning the essential secret of spending time in prayer with the Master, embracing the call to reach out to all in need, and reflecting on the profound cleansing accomplished by Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

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## Transcript

Lessons from Mark 1:16-45

"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Mark 1:17

Introduction

The first chapter of Mark is a chapter which carries a very special significance for the earnest Christian. It tells us how Christ called His first disciples (Peter and Andrew; James and John), and gave them the promise that He would make them fishers of men. The details of the call itself are all very instructive, but we shall here be concentrating on the events which immediately followed that call.

We notice that immediately after giving the call, the Lord led His disciples into a sequence of experiences with Himself; experiences which we may rightly regard as basic to the training programme He was initiating. There were seven such experiences, altogether, and each of them illustrates a vital spiritual lesson needing to be learned by all who would be fishers of men, or effective servants of the Lord. Perhaps those lessons were not immediately grasped by those four fishermen, but the seed was sown, and the full significance would dawn upon them in due time.

May the Lord open our eyes (Psalm 119:18), and enable us to take these important lessons to heart, so that we may become more useful to Him in the days in which we live. The Lord is still saying to us "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Matth. 11:29). And that is what we would do.

### 1. Listening and learning (Mark 1:21)

The first thing we notice is that the Lord immediately led His disciples to the nearby synagogue, and began to teach (verse 21). We read that those present "were astonished at His doctrine, for He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (verse 22).

Needless to say, the Lord would have had upon His heart the needs of all who were present, but we are here simply asking ourselves what does this immediate sequence (seashore to synagogue) teach us regarding the training of a disciple? What did the Lord want to impress upon them?

We believe the lesson was this. The Lord first and foremost wants His followers to be listeners, listening carefully to His voice and to His teaching. This, we dare to say, is not only important; it is somewhat revolutionary, and contrary to our own normal thinking. We so easily take on to the idea that God's servants have to be talkers and that the most important thing is to give Him our voices, our vocal chords! The truth of the matter is that He first wants our ears. He has so much to say, and so much to teach; we must be listeners.

We remember that Christ is actually named the Word of God (John 1:1, 1.John 1:1), and a word has to be listened to. On the Mount of Transfiguration God said "this is my beloved Son, hear ye Him" (Mark 9:7).

We recall that, on the same transfiguration occasion, Peter (so typical of Peter!) had done some ill-advised talking (verse 5,6) so the call to hear, at that point would have been something of a corrective, if not a rebuke! (We note that Moses and Elijah had also done some talking on that occasion, but, in their case it was talking of the right kind, they were talking with Jesus (verse 4), and we can never have too much of that!). The clear message from the mountain, however, as far as we are concerned, is that we are to hear him.

Returning now to Mark one, we repeat that the outstanding lesson for the disciples was that they were to become humble and ready listeners paying earnest attention to the Word and teaching of their Master. That, we suggest, was why He took them straight from the lake-side to the synagogue, and began to teach.

And how great was their privilege! We remember how the Lord said, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). And we all have to agree with those officers who testified, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). We are reminded, too, of the word which says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain: My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass" (Deut. 32:2).

And it is always an unspeakable privilege to sit quietly and have the Lord Himself teach us. Even today, we know of many servants of the Lord who, when they first heard the call to service, felt led to set apart some whole weeks or months especially for prayer and bible-study, earnestly desiring a true and solid understanding of what it is that the Lord has said, and is still saying. And they have never regretted it.

The simple truth is that we must first give the Lord our ears, if we ever want him to use our voices. It is most significant that, when a Hebrew slave wanted to serve his master for the whole of his life, (and that,

surely, is the only real dedication!), the master brought him to the door and bored his ear through with an awl that he might "serve him for ever" (Ex. 21: 5,6).

Perhaps we should add another verse to the well-known consecration hymn, and sing from the heart...

Take my ear, Lord, let me hear

What thou teachest, loud and clear:

Show thy truth, Lord, to my heart:

I would learn how great Thou art.

The Lord's best disciples are those of whom He can say, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me".

May the Lord make us listeners to the Master's voice, and may we re-echo the word of Samuel, "speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:10).

## 2. The great warfare (Mark 1:23-28)

The next incident in our chapter has to do with the casting out of an evil spirit, and it is a most dramatic and instructive story! It will be good for us, right now, to get the details clearly in our minds; the demonic outcry (verse 23), the fear of coming destruction (verse 24), the divine rebuke (verse 25), the tearing of the victim (verse 26), the final shriek (verse 26), and the Lord's glorious victory (verse 26). It all constituted a very solemn and important lesson for the wondering disciples.

The miracle was performed right there in the synagogue where the Lord had just been teaching, and perhaps it was, also, a satanic reaction against that teaching!

Be that as it may, the lesson for the disciples was very clear; they were involved in a great spiritual warfare, and they must quickly realise the reality and intensity of that warfare.

The lesson, we might say, was in three parts.

First, the disciples must be made aware of the existence of a great enemy kingdom, one which is ever opposed to Christ, and to His teachings.

Then again, they must know of the craftiness and subtlety of God's enemy. We note that the demon, in this case, actually addressed our Lord as "Jesus of Nazareth", and spoke of Him as "the Holy One of God". All this was very true, and yet Satan, the great liar (John 8:44), was very much behind it! It was all a plausible act, a ploy, and it reminds us of Satan's friendly approach to Eve in Gen.3:1. Yes, those disciples must also be made aware of the deceitfulness of their foe.

We notice that an almost identical situation appears a little later in our chapter (verse 34), and we shall there have more to say about it. Here we simply note the fact that deception is part of the satanic strategy and the disciples must be warned about it. The Bible speaks of "the wiles of the devil" (Eph.6:11), and our enemy is still "the serpent" (Gen.3:1, 2; Cor.11:3, Rev. 12:9), ever seeking to beguile us.

The third part of the lesson has to do with Christ's absolute mastery over the enemy kingdom, also vividly demonstrated in the story. It seems that the very presence of the Lord in the synagogue brought terror to

the demon, and caused him (it) to cry out in fear (verse 23,24). And it could have been that that note of authority, mentioned in verse 2, was also registering on the demon, and was itself contributing to the fear. In any case, when Christ finally gave the word of command, the enemy obeyed, and came out (verse 26). Christ was indeed the Master of the situation. And, thank God, He still is, He is Master of the whole satanic kingdom.

The lesson for us all to learn, however, is that, for the present, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against ... spiritual wickedness (wicked spirits) in high places" (see Eph.6:12). As soon as we name Christ as Lord, we find ourselves involved in that warfare. But, thank God, we are now actually indwelt by the One who holds the mastery over all those foes. And, furthermore, in our day, we can gratefully look back on the great victory of Calvary (Heb.2:14; Col.2:15), and take our stand in that victory.

It is such a wonderful thing when we know in our hearts that "Christ is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36). And what a joy when we can shout that fact out by faith whenever we are confronted by the enemy, or about to enter his (supposed) territory, carrying God's gospel. It is thus that we, like Paul, can follow in the train of Christ's triumph, and celebrate His victory from place to place (see Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15). It is so good to be able to take our personal stand in Christ's accomplished victory.

All these are truths which we need to know, and to claim in our day when Satan's power, and his deceptions, are everywhere. May God graciously reveal His victorious Son to us (Gal. 1:15,16), and may He ever "give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"(1 Cor. 15:57).

### 3. Anon, they tell Him of her (Mark 1:29-31)

From the synagogue, Christ and His disciples proceeded to the house of Peter and Andrew, and there the Lord performed another miracle, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. We read that the Lord "took her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she ministered unto them" (verse 31). The whole story is full of helpful instruction, but we shall again seek to identify one particular lesson for the disciples on that occasion.

To do this, we should note that it was at a certain point that the Lord put forth His hand and performed the miracle. The important phrase that helps us is, "Anon, they tell Him of her" (verse 30). It seems that herein was the key that actually triggered the miracle on this occasion. They brought the need to Him, and then He acted. Although He was the all-knowing and ever-compassionate Lord, He deliberately waited until the disciples (in evident unison), spoke to Him about the need, and then He performed the miracle. We submit that there was the special lesson for the disciples. It was a lesson on prayer, and the essentiality of it. The Lord was showing them that it is when we pray, (and pray in unison) that He is somehow released to do His own great things. And what a great and encouraging lesson that is!

But, behind all that, again, was something still deeper. Let us try to explain. The fact of the matter was that a whole new era was about to dawn, the era of Christ and His church, and, during that era, a still closer fellowship would exist and be in operation. A new corporate man, in fact, was about to be formed, the Ascended Christ being the head, and Christians being the body. Because of this, there would be a still closer interdependence and interaction. We could even say that, during that era, Christ's great saving and church-building activities (Matth.16:18) would be based on the united prayers of His people. Indeed, we could say that those activities would somehow be limited to, and determined by, those prayers, and all this by Christ's own gracious and sovereign ordination.

The Lord Himself plainly taught this principle in John 14:12-14, and we would certainly recommend a prayerful study of that passage in this connection. We are sure it holds an important key to spiritual effectiveness in our day.

Here, however, we are simply suggesting that the healing of Peter's mother-in-law was an initial appearing of that great principle, at least a valuable illustration of it; they told Him of her, and He did the miracle. Glorious cooperation indeed! And a herald of far greater things in the present age of the church!

What a high privilege, then, is ours; we do the telling, He does the touching, and He often uses us, the petitioners, as His ready and available instruments. (Again see John 14:12).

Surely we want to say again, "Lord teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1) and graciously clarify to us this amazing principle of an organic oneness with Thyself while we pray.

As an appendix, we mention that the same principle appears again in chapter two, the story of those four resourceful men who brought their friend to Christ, and lowered him down through the roof. We read that the Lord saw their faith and healed their friend (Mark 2:3-12).

We could mention, too, that the same factor of unison was also very much evident on that occasion. Try to imagine it! In those precarious circumstances, those four men would certainly need to act in fellowship, and also with a considerable degree of understood and accepted leadership: all of it very instructive for us!

#### 4. Unwanted testimony (Mark 1: 32-34)

The next few verses in our chapter likewise present a great lesson for God's people. We cannot tell to what extent those early disciples caught on to it, but the message certainly was there, and, in due time, it would dawn upon them!

The scene is still at the house of Peter and Andrew, and we are told that, at eventide, a great multitude of needy people gathered at the door, including some who were demon-possessed. Again, the Lord put forth His mighty power, healing the sick and casting out demons from those that were possessed. Here, too, there would have been clear evidence of the all-power of the Master, but it is a phrase at the end of verse 34 that now grips our attention. We read that the Lord "cast out many devils, and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew Him" (verse 34).

This, actually, was a clear echo of what had taken place back in verse 24, where we have another demon-possessed man crying out and saying, "what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth, ....I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God" (doubtless a reference to His messiahship). Those words were certainly true words, as such, but there too, we read that the Lord rebuked him, saying "hold thy peace", (literally "Be muzzled", Greek), and come out of him".

The message in both these cases was very clear. Plainly stated, it is this; there is a kind of presentation of truth, even the highest truth, which Christ refuses. He does not want it. He is not interested in the correct words that men may utter, or even demons. He only accepts true words uttered in the true spirit. He knows, only too well, that there is a counterfeit proclamation of truth which is the greatest enemy of the truth, and, sooner or later, He will rebuke it.

It is interesting that Paul and Silas encountered similar falsehoods in Acts 16. We read that "a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination ... followed Paul... and cried,'these men are the servants of

the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation" (verse 16,17). We read that Paul was grieved at this and cast the evil spirit out of her (verse 18).

This again was a case of true words coming from a false spirit. The margin of our Bible actually tells us that this damsel was possessed with a spirit of Python" (verse 16), and yet what true and desirable words were coming from her lips, but all of them a grief to the Holy Spirit.

We believe this is a very big and important subject, and in fact it touches the whole tragedy of a 'letter-perfect', but nevertheless counterfeit, Christianity and it has application to very much that is going on in the world today, all in the name of Christ. We need to take deeply to heart the solemn words of Christ Himself: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?, and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matth. 7:22,23; see also Matth.24:24).

How slow we are to learn that "the letter killeth" (2 Cor.3:6), and it is only the Spirit that gives life. We are simply noting here, however, that, in Mark 1, the Lord was showing His disciples that there is such a thing as a counterfeit "retailing of truth" (or partial truth) which is to be avoided and, in fact vigorously repudiated, for it stems from a positively satanic realm.

What a warning is this! "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

#### 5. The essential secret (Mark 1:35-37)

The next few verses in our chapter are very special, particularly in view of the theme we are now following,-the training of the disciples. And what a glorious picture of Christ Himself we have in these verses.

We read that, "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out into a solitary place, and there prayed". Here, surely, the Lord was actually showing to His disciples the most important lesson of them all; they must be prepared to spend much time with the Master; they must ever keep a close contact with God Himself.

We remember that there were occasions when our Lord spent whole nights praying to His Father (e.g. Luke 6:12), but here, in Mark 1, it was just those choicest early hours immediately before day-break. What a time for communion; blessed quietness.

We feel we should here do our best to get the fuller picture. We recall that the previous day had been a most strenuous one. It had started with the actual calling of the disciples at the lake-side, followed by that most important teaching session in the synagogue. Then came that intense battle with the unclean spirit in the same synagogue, followed by the gracious healing of Peter's mother-in-law. Finally, at sunset-time, there were healings and more deliverances from evil spirits. It is not difficult to imagine how, after such a day, the disciples would have fallen asleep around their Lord in that tiny fisherman's cottage. O, what a day, what battles, what victories, but what a cost!

We do not know how much sleep the disciples got that night, but we can imagine their surprise, (and, no doubt, their alarm), when they woke up in the morning and found the Master was not there. He had gone out while it was still dark, to commune with His Father! No doubt they hastily bestirred themselves, and went out looking for Him, finally finding Him, praying! All they could do was to say to Him, "All men seek for thee" (verse 37). It would seem that, before ever they had left the cottage to seek for Christ, needy people

were already gathering at the door, looking for His help, so perhaps there was some element of rebuke in what the disciples said to Him.

By that time, however, the sun would have been rising over the Sea of Galilee on the eastern horizon, and, praise God, the Greater "Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) was also arising with healing in His wings. In His case, however, He was rising from the depths of an unfathomed and unhurried fellowship with His Father, and rising once more to bless.

Looking back over the story, we can only thank God for this precious lesson on prayer, and particularly on early-morning prayer. Many have found such prayer to be a key to a deepening fellowship with God, and something essential to spiritually effective ministry.

We are reminded of the little poem which says:

I met God in the morning,

when the day was at its best.

And His presence came like sunrise,

with a glory in my breast.

Yes, it was a lesson, indeed, for us all, and it also reminds us that we must expect some sacrifice, and some degree of physical cost, whenever we go to the Lord and say, "Lord, teach us to pray". But what inestimable rewards! It was our Lord's essential secret.

#### 6. The other sheep (Mark 1:38,39)

We continue the thought of the training of the disciples, and, once more, we are confronted with something of a surprise.

The sleepy disciples had gone out and found the Lord praying, and had said to Him (somewhat critically?), "All men seek for Thee" (verse 37). Then comes the surprise. The Lord simply replied "Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth" (verse 38).

This, surely, is remarkable. The whole world was coming to Him; an abundant audience was guaranteed right there where He was! And yet the Lord withdrew; His only word was, "Let us go into the next towns".

Here, surely, is another deep insight into the Lord's inmost heart. While there could have been a variety of lesser reasons why the Lord was so eager to move on at this point, we can only say that, in his great heart, there burned a passion to go; to journey on in His Father's name, and in His Father's business (Luke 2:49), and to reach all who needed to hear His message.

This again would have been a clear lesson for those early disciples. The Lord was being an example to them. Here was something they would have to pray about. Was a similar fire, the same fire, burning in their own hearts? Sooner or later, they would need to be constrained by the same great love. They would need to love the Master and they would also need to love all men everywhere, going to them and giving them His gospel. And very soon the Lord would be saying to them, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). And they would, indeed, go forth and preach everywhere, the Lord also working with them (Mark 16:20). They had been chosen to go (John 15:16) and, in Christ, they

had seen God's perfect example.

We are reminded of the well-known saying: "Every man has more right to hear the Gospel once than any man has to hear it twice". That old adage may need some qualification, and could have its dangers, but it certainly illustrates our present point.

We conclude by saying that the Lord wanted the need of the whole world to be much on the hearts of His disciples. He was ever saying to them, either by word or by deed, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring" (John 10:16). Hence, then, the word in Mark 1:38 about "going forth to the next towns". He was teaching His disciples a tremendous lesson; and He would have us learn it, too.

Lord crucified, give me a heart like Thine;

Help me to love the dying sons of men.

O flood any soul with thy great love divine.

And give me love, pure Calvary love,

To bring the lost to thee.

#### 7. The cleansing of the leper (Mark 1:40-45)

In this final section of the chapter, we have the story of the cleansing of the leper. We found it difficult, at first, to pin-point one particular lesson for the disciples, and the thought came that possibly the Lord wanted to show the various factors involved in, shall we say, the saving of a soul. All those factors were certainly there, and we would heartily recommend a study along those lines. But, was there not here some thing far bigger and far deeper?

Standing right back, then, and surveying the event as a whole, the words that came to us were simply, a cleansing, a great cleansing. Our thoughts were then carried forward to that far greater cleansing of sin which, we are told, Christ accomplished through His dying on the cross.

Here we must mention a verse which comes early in the epistle to the Hebrews. We read there that Christ "purged our sins, and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high" (Heb.1:3). The original word for purge in that verse is exactly the same as that translated cleanse in the story of the leper. Some translators have rendered it, "Christ made a cleansing for sin", or "Christ accomplished a cleansing". There, we say, is our link with the story of the leper: Christ accomplished a cleansing at Calvary. And what a cleansing it was!

We must make it clear here, that we are now thinking of sin in its universal aspect, the sum total of all wickedness everywhere. All of it is dealt with and taken away in Christ's redeeming work. As a consequence, a whole new world of holiness and bliss is now available to all, in Christ, through simple faith. That purging was a full and perfect purging, and it led on to a full and perfect provision; something which individuals may now draw upon, and experience, according to their faith (Matth.9:29). That was, indeed, a mighty purging, and that is the purging referred to in Heb. 1:3. And that is what we are here thinking of in relation to the leper.

We now make the suggestion that Christ would have had that far greater cleansing in view when He cleansed the leper. And that was the area of the lesson which He wished His disciples to learn. Something

far greater was about to be "accomplished" and those disciples must now get at least a minute glimpse of it. The cleansing of the leper was itself great, but it prefigured something far, far, greater! It was but a small figure and fore view of that greater purging of sin which Christ was about to accomplish. And there lay the lesson for the disciples.

We feel we should pause here, to think for a moment of the real magnitude of that greater purging which Christ later accomplished at Calvary. It is, of course, far beyond our present comprehension, but just to think quietly upon it is to be blessed.

In the first place, we need to glimpse something of the magnitude of the sin that needed to be purged away. But who could possibly describe that awful horror of defilement that has overtaken mankind since Adam's fall? Who could imagine even the sin of one country, or of one city, or of one street, all of it mounting up from one generation to another? It reminds us of something Isaiah once said about corrupt Israel, but which would be even more applicable to corrupt humanity as a whole. "From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (Isa. 1:6). Leprous humanity, indeed; and there lay the need for the great divine purging. (See Luke 5:12)

The glorious fact is that that whole horror of putrefaction "met on Christ" at Calvary (see Isa. 53:6, margin) and He bore it all away (1 Pet. 2:24)!

Then, in His resurrection, there emerged a whole new creation "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." In that new creation, all is white as the light, and the marvel is that a heart-trust in Christ links up immediately with all the blessedness, and the blessedness then begins to work itself out from within us (see Phil. 2:12,13; Eph. 5:8).

What a purging this is, indeed! From earth's immeasurable sin to heaven's immaculate holiness. And it was accomplished for us all, at Calvary.

Our present point, however, is that all this would have been in the view of Christ when He cleansed the leper. And this, surely, was the ultimate lesson He desired to teach to His disciples on that day. The very sight of that one leper being cleansed would have been a small figure of the far greater cleansing; at least an initial illustration of it, and a seed well sown in the disciples' hearts. The greater truth would surely break upon them in due time (see John 16:12), and they would become the heralds of God's glorious Gospel (1 Tim. 1:11). Perhaps with the memory of that one leper still fresh in their minds, they would go out to the whole world and re-echo that timeless message of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Thank God, then, for this "lesson of the leper". How we should praise God for that Spotless One who "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). How marvellous indeed, that "He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

O, great Purger of sin, continue thy deep, deep, cleansing work within. We praise thee for all that was accomplished at Calvary, and even though, at present: we understand but little of that great accomplishment, we ask Thee to bring us into the inestimable values of it. We would ever be clean as we seek to bear the vessels of the Lord (Isa. 52:11).

We would earnestly pray the prayer of the hymn-writer:

O, Purge me now, without, within;

O, Purge with fire, if that must be.

No matter how, if only sin

Die out in me, die out in me.

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