

With Christ, the Agenda of God Is Here

Mark 1:35-39

Halifax: 25 November 2018, 10:30 AM

Introduction

How glad we ought to be that Jesus came among us as our Mediator.

- He is the only one who can connect man to God after our separation from God by sin.
- In our sermon series from Mark's gospel, we have been looking at what He brings to us from God as our Mediator—at what we can have only through Him.

So far we have seen that by coming among us from heaven as man,

- He brought *the authority of God* among us—
 - that authority that speaks into our lives so that we hear the voice of God—so that we tremble when we hear the warnings, rejoice in the promises, obey the commandments—we receive it as the word of God and not the word of man.
 - And also, in Christ, we have the authority that frees us from bondage to Satan...
 - We are cut off from God's authority until we meet Jesus the Mediator.
- Last week, we saw how He also brings *the compassion of God* among us.
 - God is full of compassion toward all of His creatures... but our sin separated us from Him and His compassion...
 - It brought sickness and death and famines and all sorts of affliction.
 - But Jesus the Mediator connects us to compassion as He comes among us healing all our diseases, and so promising that through Him, we will be completely delivered from all our infirmities...
 - Not in this life, for He told us that we must suffer now for our own good, but in glory, we will be freed from them all and until then, we have His sympathy and are invited to cast all of our cares upon Him because He cares for us.
- And now, this week, we come to the third thing that Jesus brought among us when He came as our Mediator.
 - He brought *the agenda of God* among us.
 - As fallen sinners, we were following our own agenda...
 - You might think of an orchestra where none of the instrumentalists are following the conductor but each doing his own thing.
 - Or an army where some of the men decide to blow up the bridge so the enemy can't cross, while others among them are making preparations to cross the bridge so they can better attack the enemy.
 - Being contrary to God's agenda is much worse even than that...
 - God is God and His agenda is the only agenda that stands in the end.
 - Those who are at cross purposes with God will be destroyed and frustrated in their purposes—they are trying to rule their own life, but they find that in the end, only He will reign.
 - As Mediator, Jesus comes as a man in beautiful harmony with God, and He comes to set in motion God's agenda among us so that we can also be in harmony with Him and our heavenly Father.

Or text today is Mark 1:35-39 but I will begin with v. 32 for context.

- Please give careful attention as I read it to you, for it is the Word of God.

Mark 1:32-39: At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. 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. Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. 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.” 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.” ³⁹ And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons.

May the Lord add His blessing to His holy and infallible Word.

I. First, I want you to see from our text how Jesus, as a man, comes among us with a beautiful relationship to the Father as His God.

- He brings this beautiful relationship into this world where no such relationship existed.
- A. Understand that this is not something He brings merely for us to admire...
 1. He is our mediator who brings this beautiful relationship into the world and then calls us to join Him in it.
 - As the Son of God in human flesh, He establishes a kingdom in which His subjects are all brought into this beautiful relationship with the Father.
 - He makes a relationship with God like His accessible to us.
 2. We are told, for example, in 1 Cor 5:19 that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.
 - He went to the cross to atone for our sin, of course, so that we who trust in Him are no longer condemned,
 - but it is all to bring us to share with Him in a right relationship with God—to be reconciled to our creator from whom we have been separated by sin... Christ is our connection and there is no other.
- Well then, how is this beautiful relationship of Christ with the Father revealed to us in our text?
- B. See how our Lord arises early to pray after His busy day in the synagogue and a busy evening healing the sick and casting out demons in Capernaum.
 1. The word translated *prayer* here speaks of the soul’s outgoing to God—not just of intercession—of making requests...
 - a. In other words, there was in Him a desire to commune with His heavenly Father... to praise Him, to express His delight and joy in Him, to express His hope in God’s promises...
 - Oh that we would have more of that kind of relationship—where we speak to God of our delight in Him and our admiration of Him!
 - We are too much strangers to this—ours is all intercession—or complaining—looking to get God to work for us instead of delighting in Him and in what He is doing.

- b. But surely He is also there in prayer (as every man ought to be) to call on God for divine assistance.
 - Remember, Jesus did not tap into His divine power—He lived as a man, dependant on the Spirit of God.
 - As J. A. Alexander says, “prayer was for Him a mysterious, but real and efficient means, not only of conversing with the Father and the Spirit, but of securing their co-operation.”
 - Part of our brokenness that Jesus came to restore is this dependency on God for wisdom, for strength, for godliness, for His work in the world.
 - As J. C. Ryle says, “His very perfection was a perfection kept up through the exercise of prayer.”
 - It is meant that human beings depend upon their Creator by active prayer. It is because of the fall that we don’t.
 - Might we not even suppose that He prayed because He was tempted by the crowds and by the superficial popularity that can be so intoxicating?
 - Not that His heart went after such things, for He never sinned, but His sinlessness as a man required Him to pray that He would not enter into temptation.
 - He had a right repulsion toward the cross—no one should want to be separated from the Father like that—and to attract the crowds without ever going the cross was always available to Him if He had wanted it.
 - So He prays, as all people should, for strength to stand against temptation.
2. But notice how eager He was for this time of communing in prayer with God.
- a. Our text tells us that He arose in the morning—a word that refers to the third watch of the night from 3:00 am to 6:00 am.
 - And it says that it was “a long while before daylight,” literally “at night very much.”
 - After a very busy evening, this is how He spent the next morning.
 - Communing with the Father was a priority for Him.
 - b. And it was not just upon this instance... it was a pattern of His life to withdraw (especially after crowds sought Him) to be alone with the Father.
 - He did it after the feeding of the five thousand.
 - Luke tells us that He prayed at His baptism and that He was praying at the Mount of Transfiguration.
 - He did it in Gethsemane on the night His betrayer was coming to find Him.
- C. Now I ask you, is possible to have a praying Master and prayerless servants?
- 1. J. C. Ryle says: “A praying master, like Jesus, can have no prayerless servants. Many who are baptised rise up in the morning without prayer, and without prayer lie down at night—many never speak to God. Are they Christians? It is impossible to say so... And then there are Christians who pray but little. Seeking little, they cannot be surprised if they possess little. It will always be found that when prayers are few, grace, strength, peace, and hope are small.”

2. My goal in quoting this is not to load you up with guilt for your lack of prayer.
 - It is to free you up by getting you to ask forgiveness from God and pray.
 - Of course you are guilty and discouraged and far from God if you do not pray, but you can change that, God helping you.
 - Feeling guilty for not praying will do you no good if you go on as you are—but if you will start to pray, it will do you much good indeed!
 - If our Lord Jesus found it necessary to pray, how much more do you need to pray.
3. The goal of Jesus is to bring us into a relationship with the Father like His.
 - He saves us, not so we can continue in sin, but so we can come to God and commune with Him... like Jesus does.
 - He wants us to be restored to a right relationship which is a praying relationship like His.

TRANS> That is His agenda—to reconcile sinners to God—to restore them to Him.

II. In our text, we meet with conflicting agendas between Jesus and His disciples.

- A. Look at what happens. Look at the narrative and see that tension that arises because of conflicting agendas.
 1. Jesus has gone out early to pray, and as the morning wears on, His disciples start to wake up and get going.
 - Remember that Simon or Peter and Andrew had this house, and it appears that James and John were with them, and Peter’s family was there too.
 - And soon they realise that Jesus is not there.
 - And then someone is at the door—someone with a sick relative who needs to be healed, and another with a demon that needs to be cast out...
 - But Jesus is not there.
 2. So, as verse 36 says, they search for Him.
 - The word *search* is a strong word that refers to the pursuit of an enemy in war—it implies a strenuous and determined search.
 - You can see by their manner that they are a little irritated with Him by their words in verse 37: **“Everyone is looking for You.”**
 - James Edwards observes that the word “looking” or “seeking” is used ten times in Mark, and always with negative connotations.
 - “It connotes,” he says, “an attempt to determine and control rather than to submit and follow.”
 - That is the very opposite of what Jesus is calling men to do—He calls them to come to submit to God as God, not to try to control God to serve their purposes—so often the way with sinners.
 3. But Jesus surprises His officious disciples.
 - Instead of responding to their appeals with an “Oh, indeed, I must go at once to see them,”
 - He says, verse 38: **“Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also because for this purpose I have come forth.”**
 - So they are leaving Capernaum to go to these surrounding towns—

- The word *town* used here is a compound that means *village-cities*, something between a city and a village—places with a population in the 6,000 to 12,000 range—places like Truro, Windsor, Bridgewater.
- This is not what the disciples had in mind when they said, “Everyone is looking for you!”

B. Yes, compare the disciples’ agenda with Jesus’ agenda.

1. The disciples want Jesus to be popular.

- In their minds, things were going wonderfully well at Capernaum because the crowds were coming to Jesus.
- Jesus had told them that they would be fishers of men—and now the people were coming to Jesus—hordes of them.
- Surely this is a good thing... so the disciples supposed...

2. But here in Mark we see that Jesus’ agenda is different.

- We just saw in verse 38 that His plans were to go to all the village cities and preach—that that was the reason He came forth...
 - not just the reason He came forth from Capernaum, but from heaven.
 - Luke makes this plain in the parallel account when he says, in Luke 4:43: **“I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.”**
- And what was the reason for His preaching?
 - Well, Mark has told us that also—back in verse 14 and 15:
 - **Mark 1:14-15: Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”**
 - Jesus’ agenda was to preach the gospel so that people would repent and believe the good news that in Him, they could be reconciled to God.
 - His agenda was to bring them under the dominion of God—to restore them to Him as their God, as their Lord and Master.
 - He does not want a mere following—a bunch of people talking about how great He is and how He can give them all that they want.
 - I tell you, He has no use for that!
 - He did not come to draw a crowd like that.
 - He came for the much more important purpose of reconciling estranged sinners to God.
 - He was not looking for crowds of followers, but for repentance.
 - He wants others to have the relationship that He, as a man, has with God.

3. This contrast between the disciples’ agenda and Jesus’ agenda is huge!

- The disciples don’t really get it until after Jesus goes to the cross.
 - While Jesus prepares to go to the cross, they are full of talk about who will be the greatest in His kingdom.
 - He will later have to rebuke them for not savouring the things of God when they tell Him that He must not go to the cross.

- They want the multitudes to follow Him... not to follow Him as true disciples who come to God through Him—but as those who are simply attracted to Him.
 - When He is crucified, they suppose that everything has gone wrong.
 - But after the resurrection, they finally come to understand that the agenda that God has is reconciliation.
 - Jesus does not want to be a side show or our vending machine.
 - He wants to bring us to the Father—to bring us to repentance and reconciliation with God.
 - That is His agenda and that is the Father’s agenda.
- C. Sadly, the church has continued to struggle with understanding the agenda of God.
- So often, our agenda has not been His agenda—we have not savoured the things that are of God but of man.
1. Like Jesus’ disciples, we have the “as long as we draw the crowds to Jesus, it’s all good” mentality.
 - That is our agenda... draw the crowds to Jesus.
 2. Those with this agenda do ridiculous things.
 - a. In certain times of history, they conquer a land and force them all to be baptised and to pay tithes and go to church.
 - There were, no doubt, people converted in this way—but not because it was a proper method.
 - b. In our times, we are even more ridiculous—we go about marketing Jesus.
 - We look to see what people want and then we package Jesus and present Him to make Him attractive to them.
 - We replace worship with entertainment.
 - We replace preaching of the Word with motivational talk and storytelling.
 - We replace communion with God with community.
 - Our gospel is often that “Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” instead of “Repent and believe the gospel.”
 - Some today even tell people, “Come to Christ and be happy and full, be rich and prosperous...”
 - There are others who never preach about sin or judgment because that might discourage people or turn them off.
 - I tell you, it is a different gospel.
 3. We need a paradigm shift—to savour what He savours.
 - The crowds love Him for all sorts of reasons, but He wants God’s rule to be re-established in this sinful world.
 - He wants reconciliation between man and God.
 - What a wonderful agenda that is!
 - We should be so glad for it.
 - It was so important to Him that it took Him all the way to the cross.

- Think of it—ruined sinners cut off from God, now restored to be His faithful servants forever—to have Him as our God and to be His people... to be those who yearn to do His will and to walk in His paths.
 - To find our proper place under the rule of our God.
- How glad we should be that Jesus our Mediator brought this agenda to us from heaven...
 - It is God’s agenda to restore us to Himself.
 - That is why He sent Christ—let us make it our agenda to be restored and to help others to be restored to God.
 - Then our agenda will be the same as God’s agenda.

TRANS> But there is something else in our text that we must not miss...

III. In our text, Jesus shows us the *method* by which this agenda is to be pursued.

A. The agenda of restoring sinners to God is to be accomplished by preaching.

1. Look again at what Jesus says in Mark 1:38: **“Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also because for this purpose I have come forth.”**
 - By preaching, sinners are to be called to repent and believe the gospel of Christ.
 - It is to be proclaimed that we are sinners headed for judgment and so in desperate need of forgiveness...
 - It is to be proclaimed that the Son of God came in human flesh to save sinners by going to the cross as our priest, offering Himself as the sacrifice to atone for our sins.
 - It is to be proclaimed that God accepted His sacrifice for His people so that through faith in His name alone is remission of sins.
 - It is to be proclaimed that He rose from the dead and calls us to come to Him believing that we may have eternal life.
 - It is to be proclaimed that those who come will receive the Holy Spirit and will be able to walk with God as their God—in obedience to Him.
 - God will be their God and they will be His people...
2. Note that it is preaching and not something else that Jesus says He has been sent to do...
 - It is not ceremonies, but preaching.
 - It is not miracles, but preaching.
 - It is not social justice, but preaching.
 - It is not taking an earthly throne, but preaching.
 - It is not acts of mercy, but preaching the gospel.
3. It is not that none of these other things are to be done...
 - but that the primary need is for sinners to repent and believe the gospel and then to live for God as those who have been reconciled to Him.
 - Yes, there will be ceremonies appointed by God, prayers for healings, efforts at social justice and political reform, many acts of mercy—

- Of course there will because when we follow God, we love and serve Him by serving our neighbour...
- But none of these are substitutes for the gospel—they are fruits of it.
- At the heart of all, it is reconciliation with God that we seek through the preaching of the gospel.
- We don't want recruits in a social or political cause—we want to see the world reconciled to God—then there will be plenty of social and political reform.

B. And notice where Jesus preached the gospel—not exclusively, but primarily...

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

- The synagogue, of course, was the place where the holy convocation that God appointed by Moses was held each week.
 - It was the church, the assembly of God's people.
 - It was here that people came to hear the scripture read and expounded.
 - And it was here that Jesus went to preach.
- Certainly, we find Him preaching outdoors to those who came to Him, but when the crowds started to get to big because they were coming for healing,
 - it was then that He moved on to another town and went to the synagogue where He could preach the gospel to them.
 - Often, He advised them not to publish their healing—to do so would mean that He could no longer preach in that place and needed to move on.
 - He would not be reduced to a mere miracle worker... He was among them to preach the gospel.

2. The apostle Paul followed a similar pattern.

- Whenever he went to a new city, he went to the synagogue and preached there first—that is how he reached the Gentiles, oddly enough—in the Jewish synagogues.
 - And if they believed, they became a Christian synagogue... James refers to the church as the synagogue in his epistle.
 - This is where the people who were interested in the LORD could be found.
- Paul went out of his way to follow this method...
 - For example, when he went to Philippi, there was no official synagogue, so where did he go?
 - He found a little prayer meeting down by the river and he went there and preached to them.
 - And when he was in Athens, where did he go?
 - To the place where religious men and philosophers gathered and where they had images to their gods—and there he preached Christ and the resurrection and called them all to repent.

3. What this says to us is that we need to encourage unbelievers to come to church and hear the word preached.

- That is the primary means that God uses to convert sinners.

- That was the primary method in the early church and in the reformation, and that is primary method today.
 - Mitchell Persaud just told me of a woman that had come to church for eighteen years and just now professed her faith. She is being baptised.
- We have had various people who attended for several months and some for many months before they came to repent and believe the gospel.
 - Make an effort to get the lost to church—if they really want to find out about God—have them come and hear the gospel proclaimed on a regular basis.
 - This method is underrated.
 - When I was in university, those of us who believed would press our friends to come to hear the word preached, at church or in Bible study, and there were many who did, and in this way many were saved.
- It is our Lord's agenda for the gospel to be preached in the assembly.
 - That is what He did and that is what He commands us to do.
 - Did He not say, after His resurrection, go into all the world and preach the gospel?

Conclusion: How glad we should be that Jesus our Mediator established God's agenda of bringing sinners to repent and be reconciled.

- Where would we be without that agenda?