

The King's Priority

Text: Mark 1:29–39

Big Idea: Jesus knew that his most important job was to tell people the good news about how to be in God's kingdom so he chose to spend less time healing people.

Aim: To teach that the best way to help people is to tell them Jesus' good news, even if they have other great needs.

The Story So Far

Lesson 1:

- John the Baptist announces that the Lord (Jesus), is coming.
- He tells the people that Jesus is greater than he is because Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit, not just water.
- He tells the people to prepare their hearts for the Lord by turning to God. They show this by being baptised.

Lesson 2:

- Jesus allows John to baptise him to show that he identifies with those he came to rescue.
- The Holy Spirit resting on Jesus in the form of a dove confirms that he will baptise with the Spirit.
- God's voice from heaven confirms that Jesus is the Son of God.
- Jesus overcomes the devil's temptation in the desert to prove that he has come to "crush the serpent's head".

Lesson 3:

- Jesus tells the people that God's kingdom is near.
- To get into the kingdom, people need to repent and believe – this is modelled by the fishermen who immediately leave their old lives to follow Jesus.



Leader's Study Notes

Read Mark 1:29–39 noting what people expected Jesus to do and what he chose to do instead.

Use the following notes to help you think about the passage in more detail.

After delivering a man from an evil spirit, news about Jesus begins to spread very quickly. People are amazed, not only because he is able to heal people, but because he teaches with great authority – they have never heard anything like this (Mark 1:21-28).

1:30 — This is Jesus' first physical healing miracle in Mark. Demon possession (1:23), is distinguished from physical illness in Mark's Gospel (cf. 1:34).

1:32 — As a result of this miracle, word quickly spreads around Capernaum and the crowds flock to Jesus to be healed.

1:35 — Mark records three occasions when Jesus drew aside on his own to pray (see also Mark 6:45-46 and 14:32-36). On all three occasions, Jesus faced the choice of continuing as a popular healer or submitting to God's will and going to the cross.

Note the verses before and after Jesus' prayer:

- 1:28 – "News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."
- 1:33 – "The whole town gathered at the door".
- 1:36-37 – "Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

The demand for Jesus' healing was increasing rapidly. He had a unique gift – being able to heal any problem or sickness with a word or a touch. No wonder everyone wanted his help, even if it meant just touching his cloak!

The temptation to continue as a popular healer was very real for Jesus. He goes aside to pray. He does this to seek God's will and 're-focus' his attention on the mission he had been given by his Father.

1:36 — "Went to look for him" literally means, 'went hunting for him vigorously'. The disciples were desperate to find Jesus and seem to be frustrated with him.

1:37 — The disciples can't understand why Jesus would disappear when so many people needed him to heal them – they don't understand why he came into the world.

1:38 — Jesus refuses the request to go to the crowds. He wants to avoid them and go to a 'fresh' place to do what he came to do: teach the gospel (the good news about Jesus and the kingdom of God). This is his main mission and he must not be distracted from it, even if the need for healing is great.

1:39 — Jesus goes on his way doing what he must do (teach), and he does this extensively. "Driving out demons" is the result of preaching the good news – where Jesus is preached, evil is forced out.

And so Jesus continues in the way that his ministry had started in 1:14-15. He continues to preach the gospel and call people to respond in the right way – in repentance and faith.

Reflect

- Write down five current sufferings in the lives of those you love. How is it possible that Jesus could favour preaching the good news over fixing these kinds of problems?
- What help is this passage to us as we work out when to help people with various difficulties?
- Consider the preaching of the gospel and thank God for five benefits it brings. Ask him to make you more faithful in proclaiming it as your first priority.



Review

Review the previous lesson using the following questions:

- Who started following Jesus? [*Fishermen – Simon, Andrew, James and John* (Mark 1:16, 19)]
- Why did they follow Jesus? [*Because he called them* (Mark 1:17, 20)]
- What did Jesus say he would do for them? [*Make them "fishers of men"* (Mark 1:17)]



Introductory Idea - Option 1

As this lesson is about Jesus' priority to keep repeating the gospel wherever he went, it will be good to revise the summary of that good news in the form of the memory verse (Mark 1:15).

The children sit in a circle on the floor, with enough room to run around the outside. As the children chant the memory verse, one child taps the head of each child for each word of the memory verse. The child whose head is the last to be tapped has to jump up and chase the 'tapper'. **For older children**, you could designate a different word in the memory verse to be the 'trigger' word each time. [Use the bridge questions below to make a link with the lesson.]



Introductory Idea - Option 2

For older children – Choose two children to compete against each other by completing the following activity, one at a time.

On one side of the room have a bucket; a shallow mixing bowl; two identical plastic cups; and one jug. On the opposite end of the room have a plate with about a dozen tokens.

Measure exactly four full cups of water into the jug and place one empty cup in the mixing

bowl (the bowl is simply there to collect spilt water). Place the other empty cup beside the bowl (the cups will be swapped continuously during the activity).

The object of the exercise is for the children to transfer all four cups of water into the empty bucket. Points will be awarded for every full cup transferred. Points will also be awarded for every token transferred from the other side of the room to the bucket. Only one token can be collected at a time.

A leader will begin by slowly pouring water from the jug into a cup standing in the mixing bowl. Once the leader starts pouring they should not stop until the jug is empty. They can vary the speed of the pouring, but it should generally be a steady trickle. Start with the spout close to the cup to avoid spilling too much water into the bowl (a steady hand will be helpful!).

While a cup is being filled the first child is free to collect tokens. When one cup is full, they will need to exchange it for the second cup midstream and transfer the water in the first cup into the bucket. They repeat this until the jug is empty.

Carefully measure off the number of full cups of water in the bucket – anything less than full to the brim does not count. Also count the number of tokens collected. Repeat the exercise with the next child. At the end allocate 100 points per full cup and 1 point per token. Keep this point allocation a secret until the end!

The token collection is meant to be a distraction. Talk about how they might have used a different strategy if they knew the value of each activity at the start. In today's true story from the Bible Jesus had to change his strategy and focus on one activity. [Use the bridge questions below to make a link with the lesson.]



Introductory Idea - Option 3

You could introduce the session by asking the children to draw some background scenery onto several large blank sketch frames – perhaps crowds listening; sick people waiting to be healed; and a quiet place for Jesus to pray. This artwork can then form the backdrops as you sketch and tell the story using a very thick marking pen to show Jesus in each scene. You might have someone in your church who could do this for you as you tell the story. [Use the bridge questions below to make a link with the lesson.]

Bridge Questions

In today's true story from the Bible, we're going to see what happened when Jesus went around telling the people the good news about God's kingdom. The children must listen carefully to discover:

- How many people came to Jesus? [*The whole town* (Mark 1:33)]
- What were they coming to Jesus for? [*To be healed* (Mark 1:32)]

- What did Jesus choose to do instead? [*Tell everyone the good news* (Mark 1:38)]



Teaching Plan

This passage contains two snapshots (1:29-31 and 1:32-34), which show Jesus' increasing popularity. Then comes the critical point where Jesus goes to pray (1:35-39). He must make a decision about whether he will continue a popular healing ministry or pursue a preaching ministry instead.

It will be good to get the children caught up in the excitement of the growing crowds so that they understand how the disciples must have felt about Jesus' apparent change of strategy.

You could do this visually by replicating the Sketch and Tell pictures in the Media section of this webpage. This does not require any particular artistic talent. In fact, most people will be able to dramatically improve on the deliberately simple sketches provided!

Prepare the right number of blank story frames on a wall or board so that at the end the full sequence can be seen all together (you may have chosen to do this by using Option 3 of the Introductory Ideas).

Children love to see pictures forming before their eyes. It's a highly effective story-telling method and is not dependent on the quality of the final sketches! Two leaders could work together; one draws while the other tells the story.

Sketches 1 & 2 provide the background to today's story – just one of these might be enough.

Sketches 3 & 4 show the two snapshots which depict Jesus' growing reputation as a healer.

Sketch 5 is the turning point. Which way would Jesus go? Healing or something else? This is the point at which to stop and discuss with the group what they think will happen next. Encourage them to see the disciples' viewpoint – crowds are good, popularity is good, healing is good, 'success' feels good.

Sketch 6 is the shock. Draw attention to Simon's words, "Everyone is looking for you!" The crowds are waiting. It's urgent. Jesus must come now and start healing. But Jesus wants to leave the crowds and go somewhere different where they're not begging for healing so that he can preach and be heard.

Sketch 7 is Jesus doing what he has decided is most important.

The difficulty for children is understanding why preaching is more important than healing and why this decision is so surprising. Consider some of the following questions as you think about how you will teach this shock. [Not all of these questions can be answered by children under seven years old, but they may help you decide what your class needs to understand.](#)

- Help the children to understand the urgency of the crowd's need for healing.
 - What sort of illnesses and injuries might people in the crowd have had? How would these make their lives harder?
 - Why had they come to Jesus?
 - Were they right to come to Jesus?
- Help the children to understand how the disciples probably felt in 1:36-37. This will help them feel the disciples' shock.
 - How did the disciples feel as they searched for Jesus?
 - Why were they in a rush?
 - What did they expect Jesus to do?
- Help the children to think through why preaching was more important to Jesus than healing.
 - What did Jesus decide to do?
 - Jesus is always loving – so why would he leave people who needed help?
 - What did Jesus want to preach/explain to people?
 - Why is that more important than healing people? How do you think Jesus made that decision?

Can you help the children to see that knowing and loving Jesus is even more wonderful than being healed of a serious illness? This is a hard, but life-giving truth and is the best preparation we can provide for the difficulties the children will undoubtedly face later in life.

For younger children – some of the discussion questions and explanation can be done in between sketches. You will not be able to hold their attention for very long in between each sketch so choose carefully what you want to say and ask.

For older children – the sketch idea outlined above can still work. Consider asking small sub-groups of two or three children to draw some of the sketches for you. Perhaps they can do this by studying the particular verses to see what needs to be drawn.

The heart of today's story is 1:35-39. This is where the drama, the shock and the key teaching can all be found. This passage could be studied by your group with a few careful questions to guide them.

Consider doing this in two halves – 1:35-37 and then 1:38-39. Pause between the two halves to ponder how the disciples felt and why they were in a hurry.

For the second half consider speaking from the perspective of the disciples and get your group to argue from Jesus' point of view. Can the children feel the shock and can they understand why Jesus made this difficult decision?



Game Idea - Option 1

Print Game Idea 1 (two pages) from the Media section of this webpage onto paper. Fold both pages in half and paste the halves together to produce two two-sided puzzles. Cut

out each puzzle and place the pieces into two separate envelopes – one for each team.

Divide the group into two teams and have them sit on one side of the room. Place an envelope opposite each team on the other side of the room. Tell the children that they are to send one child at a time from each team to fetch one puzzle piece.

When each child returns to the group, the group must first complete the task written on the back of that puzzle piece before sending the next child to collect the next piece. They can only start assembling the puzzle once they have all the pieces and the first team finished wins. **For younger children, have a leader in each group reading out the task.**

This game will be very frustrating for the team that has been given all the 'distractions' (other jobs). Remind the children that many people, including the disciples, thought that Jesus should be doing all kinds of healing jobs instead of his job of telling people the good news.



Game Idea - Option 2

For older children – draft a list of tasks similar to the ones on the first page of Game Idea 1 in the Media section of this webpage. Write these on separate pieces of paper and place them in a bowl in one corner of the room. A leader stands in the opposite corner of the room with the children all standing in a circle around them.

A ball is thrown between the leader and the children, in a clockwise direction. After each child has caught and thrown the ball back to the leader they must run to fetch a task, perform it and return to the circle to their same position ready to catch the ball again.

Tips:

- It is best to use small pieces of paper with the children's names on them to keep their positions in the circle fixed – simply place these in a circle before starting the game.
- The children can put the task slips back into the bowl so that they don't run out.

Remind the children that the people wanted Jesus to perform many different tasks, but he knew that his most important task was to tell people the good news. Help the children to see that when people are distracted by other tasks, as important as they might be, they risk 'dropping the ball' with the main task.



Discuss and Apply

Having thought through the reflection questions in your preparation, discuss and apply the lesson to the children's lives.

The crucial goal for this time is to explore how telling people the good news could help

more than meeting their other great needs. This is simple to say, but hard to believe and live out. Are you convinced? What is your approach to those who are hurting?

Do the children know how good the good news is? All difficulties are possible to endure if we know Jesus' care; if we trust his control of our lives; if we have the love of a local church; and if we know that we can look forward to complete relief and healing in heaven.

For younger children – we want to make sure we simply tell them the truth. They trust us and will want to repeat back to us what we explain to them. Perhaps they can tell you why it is so wonderful having Jesus as their king?

It might be helpful to use an illustration. Perhaps explore with the children when they last hurt themselves or were very sad. Discuss how being with someone who loved them made the experience a little better. Hurting and being alone is far worse than hurting while being cared for. Children can remember and understand how being loved and cared for makes difficulties possible.

For older children – Jesus' teaching here is light years away from the normal experience of children, especially those in developed countries where many problems and daily frustrations are easily fixed while the reality of death and eternity is kept hidden.

For the children to discuss this properly, you will need to help them engage with the reality of these issues.

- We want to be careful how we talk about suffering, knowing some will be particularly sensitive and some will already have known great hurt.
 - Do they understand the seriousness of pain, hurt and suffering?
 - Can they see why the crowds and the disciples would be so desperate for Jesus to help?
 - How would they feel in that situation?
 - Why did Jesus think that preaching is more important?
- In the children's own lives, how could a conviction of the good news help during times of hurt?
 - What would that help look like? The children will probably not be able to answer these questions so you need to give them situations that they can relate to.
 - In the lives of those around them, how could their understanding of the good news help?
 - How might they respond differently as a result?
 - Would the way they care for others be different?



Prayer Idea

Can the children think of things that distract them from hearing about Jesus or telling others about him? What could they pray about this?

Do they know someone who is suffering? What would be the best thing to pray for them?



Activity A

For younger children choose either this activity or Activity B.

From the Media section of this webpage print Activity A onto paper for each child.

The children colour the picture. Help the children to fold the picture as marked and paste the two Jesus figures back-to-back.

You can now fold the figure of Jesus either way to show the important decision that he made to turn away from healing to preach the good news to others.



Activity B

For younger children, choose either this activity or Activity B.

From the Media section of this webpage print Activity B-1 onto card (one copy for every child) and Activity B-2 onto paper (one copy for every two children).

You will also require two 15cm lengths of shirring elastic per child.

Before the lesson cut the 'miracle picture' blocks out and group them together in sets of four with a paper clip for each child. Also, make the four holes on the main page as marked by the Xs.

The children colour the pictures. Help them to assemble the picture as follows:

- Thread the two lengths of shirring elastic through the top and bottom holes of Activity B-1 to create two vertical lines across the main picture. Secure these on the back with sticky tape (this could also be done before the lesson to save time).
- Place the four picture blocks facedown and under the shirring elastic. Group them together so that they fit inside the dashed border. Use sticky tape to secure each picture to the elastic.
- Flip the four small pictures over so that they are visible.

Remind the children how all the people were coming to Jesus to be healed. The four pictures are examples of some of the people Jesus healed. Now push these pictures outwards from the middle to reveal what Jesus actually came to do. Healing the people was good, and Jesus loved to help people, but the more urgent job was to tell them the good news.



Worksheets

For older children choose either Worksheet C or Worksheet D from the Media section of this webpage. Print whichever is appropriate onto paper for each child and use it to reinforce the lesson or as a discussion starter.



Memory Verse

Use one of the memory verse ideas in the Series Introduction to help the children memorise the following verse:

Mark 1:15 – *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* [NIV]

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