

For One Night Only

Mark 1:29-38 March 12, 2025

What's the longest shift you ever worked? Whatever it was, I'll be Ludwig Van Isterdael has you beat. In 2023, the Flemish bartender served customers for 120 hours *straight through*, with little breaks here and there, and set a world record for longest shift tending bar.¹

Mark is showing us a day-in-the-life of Jesus and His disciples. It's a sabbath Saturday. Tonight we'll see Jesus on a marathon tending and serving shift, as He spends the evening in Capernaum healing many sick and suffering people, before take a quick prayer break, then heading out the next morning to preach the Good News in other towns.

The people who saw these events did not truly understand who Jesus was and what the point of His wonders were. They focused entirely on the *miracles*, while failing to consider His *message*.

Mark 1:29 - ²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they went into Simon and Andrew's house with James and John.

The Jewish sabbath started sundown Friday and ended at sundown Saturday. This is still Saturday before sundown, and so the legal and traditional rules about not working and the exact way you must conduct yourself would still be in effect.

Jesus became a local celebrity overnight. His fame was spreading everywhere. When your friend meets a celebrity, usually one of the first questions you ask them is, "What are they like in *real* life?" Mark wants us to see that Jesus is the same in the synagogue and in the fisherman's home. Full of grace and truth and power. He was never putting on an act, never inflating Himself or posturing.

The Gospels show Jesus in *many* different situations. And they always reveal that our Lord is always the same no matter where He goes. We see Him in synagogues and in the temple, in gardens and in deserts, on hilltops and in ships at sea, in humble homes and Roman Praetoriums. He is always the same, always consistent. Always good, always true, always righteous.

But the Gospels *also* reveal that Jesus has *authority* and *jurisdiction* in every one of those places. Not just the sea and the mountains, but also the temples, the palaces, and *your* home and heart.

Mark 1:30 - ³⁰Simon's mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

Fevers are not usually a big deal to us - though if you've ever had a really high fever, things get scary real quick. But Peter's mother-in-law was in trouble.

¹ <https://www.brusselstimes.com/515627/flemish-bartender-breaks-world-record-for-longest-shift>

The Gospel writers use phrases like, “[she was] laying prostrate, burning with fever.”² That she had been sick for some time.³ In his book, Dr. Luke used a technical, medical phrase of the time, saying “she was holden with a great fever.”⁴

Not only was she in medical trouble, there could’ve been some societal trouble as well. At the time, fevers were often associated with God’s judgment for disobedience,⁵ or with demonic activity. In fact, some rabbis taught that you could catch a fever from pagan dancing in the moonlight.⁶

The disciples do something *great* here: They told Jesus about Peter’s mother-in-law right away. Their swiftness is contrasted with how the *rest* of the townspeople delay until the sabbath is over to bring *their* suffering friends and family to the Lord. But Peter and the others did not hesitate, did not delay, did not think Jesus shouldn’t be bothered. They told Him about her at once. They believed Jesus cared and that He had power and that He wasn’t *only* concerned with battling supernatural entities, but also in bringing hope and help to regular people in regular life.

A biographical note here: Peter was married. Here we see his mother-in-law. Paul also references Peter’s wife and indicates that she traveled with him from place to place in his work as an apostle.⁷ Church history records that Peter’s wife was martyred while he was forced to watch and that as she faced death he called out with comfort and encouragement for her to “Remember the Lord.”⁸

Mark 1:31 - ³¹ So he went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she began to serve them.

There are several sabbath traditions being broken here. I say *traditions* because it’s important that we understand that Jesus *never* broke God’s Law. He was often *accused* of breaking the Law by the Pharisees, but Jesus absolutely fulfilled the Law.⁹ What He *didn’t* do is abide by the man-made traditions that the leaders of Israel had *added on* to the Law. He refuted the human *interpretation* of God’s Law. And He tried to show the people just how badly they were interpreting it.

This still happens today in our own legal system. We see a judge or a circuit court make a ruling about what must be done and how the law should be followed, and then the *higher* court or judge takes up the case and says, “No, no, you’ve *misinterpreted* that law and your ruling is reversed.”

Jesus didn’t break *God’s* law concerning the sabbath. But the people around Him at the time often couldn’t tell the difference between God’s commands and man’s traditions. In this scene there are several traditions being violated.

² Charles Erdman *The Gospel Of Mark*

³ Robert Utley, Robert James *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark and I & II Peter*

⁴ Archibald Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament*

⁵ Leviticus 26:16, Deuteronomy 28:22

⁶ David Garland *Mark*

⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:5

⁸ Clement Of Alexandria *Stromata Book VII, Chapter 11*

⁹ Matthew 5:17

First of all, they would say Jesus should not be touching a sick person. Second, the fact that He touched a female who was *not* a relative would be offensive to Pharisee types.¹⁰ But then, after being healed, Peter's mother-in-law gets up and *prepares the sabbath meal!* It seems that she had been unable to prep the food Friday afternoon. Isn't that a big no-no? Well, remember - as Jesus points out in Matthew 12 - the priests work in the temple on the sabbath and are deemed innocent, because they are serving God. And Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath. Like David and his men who were hungry and received the showbread, Jesus and His disciples receive a meal from a grateful and sanctified servant in the form of Peter's mother-in-law.

We are saved to serve. It's not the *only* reason, but it *is* a reason. Of course, there is an *endless* list of ways that we *could* serve the Lord whether it's now or later, near or far. So which things does He *want* us to do? Well, that's what walking with God is about. As you walk with Him you discover where He wants you to go, what He wants you to do, how He wants you to be His hands and feet.

But using this example, an important way we serve the Lord is by identifying the needs in front of us. God brings us into relationship with certain people, into a specific time and place, so we can help one another and love one another and bear one another's burdens. So each Christian should be sensitive to needs right in front of them. God has positioned you where you are for a reason.

Mark 1:32 - ³²When evening came, after the sun had set, they brought to him all those who were sick and demon-possessed.

Maybe they thought Jesus wouldn't help them before the sabbath ended.¹¹ Maybe they were afraid for their *own* standing in the eyes of the religious rulers.¹² Either way, this huge pool of suffering people had to suffer a little longer even though Jesus was ready to give tender mercy.

Mark 1:33-34 - ³³The whole town was assembled at the door, ³⁴and he healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

This is a long night seeing a large number of people. The whole town came out. When it says in verse 34 that He healed "many," it doesn't mean there were some He *couldn't* heal - the term means *all* those brought to Him were healed.¹³

These people *knew* where Jesus could be found, they *knew* what He was able to work miracles, and yet there is *no* discussion at all about them *listening* to Him or *believing* in Him as disciples.

They wanted physical help. It's great that they brought sick loved ones, but there are *no* questions about eternal life, about what they must do to be saved, about how they might follow Him.

¹⁰ Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

¹¹ Clifton Allen *Broadman Bible Commentary: Matthew-Mark*

¹² Frank Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter Wessel, and Walter Liefeld *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

¹³ William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

And it's not speculation on our part. Jesus would later call out Capernaum by name as one of the most unresponsive towns He had been in when it came to faith and belief.

Matthew 11:23 - ²³“And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today.

Matthew also explains that Jesus' miracles in Capernaum directly proved He was the One Isaiah prophesied about. And it wasn't that the people *couldn't* believe, it's that their hearts were hard. In fact, it was in Capernaum that a centurion has faith that astonished Jesus and caused Him to remark that He hadn't found that kind of faith in *anyone* in the whole nation of Israel.¹⁴

Mark 1:35 - ³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.

This is the third time we find Jesus out in the wilderness. At His baptism, at His confrontation with the Devil, now here in prayer. It speaks to us of His fearlessness and His sufficiency and His authority everywhere. In context, we see He didn't want or need the praise of men. He wasn't looking for the biggest crowd. He was nourished by intimacy and communion with His Father.

Jesus had a lot of discipline and focus. It seems silly to say that, but think about it: There are no alarm clocks, no GPS maps or Yelp reviews for best praying rock in the desert. But He purposed to spend time praying here in the last watch of the night - sometime between 3am and 6am.¹⁵

Our Lord spent a lot of time praying. Mark references Jesus taking time to pray at the beginning, the middle, and the end of His ministry. Mark always shows Him praying at critical moments.

We need to pray. Don't worry about the "best" method of prayer, just start praying. Use the guidance provided in the Word of God and get to it. Begin praying and learn as you go.

Mark 1:36-37 - ³⁶Simon and his companions searched for him, ³⁷and when they found him they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

Notice how these verses are from Peter's perspective - "Simon and his companions searched for Him." Scholars and church history agree that Mark's Gospel was compiled from Peter's testimony.

The disciples tell Jesus, "Everyone is looking for You." And they did more than just look for Him. Luke says they actually tried to *stop* Him from leaving.¹⁶ The question is: For what reason? *Why* did they want Jesus around? It wasn't so they could hear heaven's truth, it was to receive physical

¹⁴ Matthew 8:10

¹⁵ Utley

¹⁶ Luke 4:42

benefits. In fact, linguists explain that this term "looking for" is *usually* used with hostile intent.¹⁷ They were hunting for Him - *hunting*, not *following*. They had *demands* for Him, not *devotion*.

The people of Capernaum had their own ideas, their own priorities, their own designs of what the Lord should do for them. He could just hang out in the area and they would come when they needed something. He would fix the skin disease, the deafness, the physical problem they wanted resolved. Meanwhile, they had no concern for the healing of their *hearts*. They didn't do what Peter's mother-in-law did after *her* healing, which was begin to serve *the Lord* in response.

Mark 1:38 - ³⁸And he said to them, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come."

This is a very important moment. Why did Jesus come? Did He come to fix ruined bodies? He did a lot of that, but He came to preach the Gospel and to give His life as a ransom so that our *souls* could be saved. He came to restore *all* creation under His perfect Kingdom.

The miracles He performed were not the point of His coming. They were meant to *prove* He was telling the truth - that He was, in fact, the Messiah. But the message of salvation was His primary focus. In fact, as one Bible scholar points out, we do not see Jesus going out of His way to find someone to heal, but He regularly goes out of His way to preach the Good News.¹⁸

And the number of miracles He performed weren't that important to Him. Rather, He was looking for *faith*, for *belief*, for *obedience* to His word. He was *not* working so that *everyone* could be physically healed. He worked so that people everywhere could hear the message of salvation, which He would accomplish *not* by healings and exorcisms, but by His death on the cross.

The people of Capernaum thought, "Jesus is a miracle worker." But they were wrong. He is the *Messiah*. And that misunderstanding led to the greatest *failure* of their spiritual lives. But they were content to say to Jesus, "Do for me," and go no further. They did not consider *Who* Jesus is.

For our part, we are reminded that we want Jesus to *work* in our lives - to help us and deliver us and bless us - but we must also realize *Who* He is and what He has *said*. And we must cultivate a desire to *hear* what He has to say *to us*. The Lord wants to work in our lives, absolutely, but God has things He wants to *say* to you and me today and tomorrow and the next day. Eternal truths He wants us to apprehend so that we can spread the *message* of salvation to a lost and dying world.

Jesus invited Peter and Andrew and James and John to go with Him to spread the word. "Let's go on to the neighboring villages." You and I are invited, too. To be a part of the ongoing *preaching* of the Good News. Preaching with power, yes, but the Word of God going out to us and through us. Because the Gospel *is* the power of God for salvation. That's why He came and that's why He sends us.

¹⁷ James Brooks *The New American Commentary: Mark*

¹⁸ Utley