

Evaluating Priorities

“Who’s On First!”

Luke 14:25-35

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

The Cost of Being a Disciple

25 Great crowds were following Jesus. He turned around and said to them,

26 *"If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.*

27 *And you cannot be my disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow me.*

28 *"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills?*

29 *Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh at you!*

30 *They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!'*

31 *"Or what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of ten thousand is strong enough to defeat the twenty thousand soldiers who are marching against him?*

32 *If he is not able, then while the enemy is still far away, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace.*

33 *So no one can become my disciple without giving up everything for me.*

34 *"Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again?*

35 *Flavorless salt is good neither for the soil nor for fertilizer. It is thrown away. Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!"* Luke 14:25-35 (NLT)

☞ **PRAY** for God’s guidance

1. If you were on a TV game show, would you try for the \$50,000 grand prize, even though you might lose the \$25,000 you had won so far? Why?

2. What is Jesus saying about family?

What does He mean by “hate”?

By carrying a cross?

3. What do each of the three parables tell us about how to give our lives to Jesus?

4. What does the salt analogy emphasize about discipleship?

5. In summary, what kingdom values are taught?

Why such tough talk from Jesus?

6. When did you realize that following Jesus was costly? How so?

Wrap-up: Is it worth it? What keeps you going?

Prayer: For one another

LIFE GROUPS

A safe place to build friendships and grow spiritually.

- L** ♦ Learn..... applying Biblical truth for everyday living
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Commentary from the Life Application Bible

Luke 14:25-35

Notes for Verse 27

Jesus' audience was well aware of what it meant to carry one's own cross. When the Romans led a criminal to his execution site, he was forced to carry the cross on which he would die. This showed his submission to Rome and warned observers that they had better submit too. Jesus spoke this teaching to get the crowds to think through their enthusiasm for him. He encouraged those who were superficial either to go deeper or to turn back. Following Christ means total submission to him -- perhaps even to the point of death.

Notes for Verses 28-30

When a builder doesn't count the cost or estimates it inaccurately, his building may be left half completed. Will your Christian life be only half built and then abandoned because you did not count the cost of commitment to Jesus? What are those costs? Christians may face loss of social status or wealth. They may have to give up control over their money, their time, or their career. They may be hated, separated from their family, and even put to death. Following Christ does not mean a trouble-free life. We must carefully count the cost of becoming Christ's disciples so that we will know what we are getting into and won't be tempted later to turn back.

Notes for Verse 34

Salt can lose its flavor. When it gets wet and then dries, nothing is left but a tasteless residue. Many Christians blend into the world and avoid the cost of standing up for Christ. But Jesus says if Christians lose their distinctive saltiness, they become worthless. Just as salt flavors and preserves food, we are to preserve the good in the world, help keep it from spoiling, and bring new flavor to life. This requires careful planning, willing sacrifice, and unswerving commitment to Christ's kingdom. Being "salty" is not easy, but if a Christian fails in this function, he or she fails to represent Christ in the world. How salty are you?

Notes from Barclay's Commentary of the NT

When Jesus said this he was on the road to Jerusalem. He knew that he was on his way to the cross; the crowds who were with him thought that he was on his way to an empire. That is why he spoke to them like this. In the most vivid way possible he told them that the man who followed him was not on the way to worldly power and glory, but must be ready for a loyalty which would sacrifice the dearest things in life and for a suffering which would be like the agony of a man upon a cross.

We must not take his words with cold and unimaginative literalness. Eastern language is always as vivid as the human mind can make it. When Jesus tells us to hate our nearest and dearest, he does not mean that literally. He means that no love in life can compare with the love we must bear to him.

There are two suggestive truths within this passage.

(i) It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp-follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight. Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, "So and so tells me that he was one of your students." The teacher answered devastatingly, "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students." It is one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.

(ii) It is a Christian's first duty to count the cost of following Christ. The tower which the man was going to build was probably a vineyard tower. Vineyards were often equipped with towers from which watch was kept against thieves who might steal the harvest. An unfinished building is always a humiliating thing. In Scotland, we may, for instance, think of that weird structure called "M'caig's Folly" which stands behind Oban.

In every sphere of life a man is called upon to count the cost. In the introduction to the marriage ceremony according to the forms of the Church of Scotland, the minister says, "Marriage is not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but thoughtfully, reverently, and in the fear of God." A man and woman must count the cost.

It is so with the Christian way. But if a man is daunted by the high demands of Christ let him remember that he is not left to fulfil them alone. He who called him to the steep road will walk with him every step of the way and be there at the end to meet him.

THE INSIPID SALT (Lk 14:34-35)

Just sometimes Jesus speaks with a threat in his voice. When a person is always carping and criticizing and complaining, his irritable anger ceases to have any significance or any effect. But when someone whose accent is the accent of love suddenly speaks with a threat we are bound to listen. What Jesus is saying is this--when a thing loses its essential quality and fails to perform its essential duty, it is fit for nothing but to be thrown away.

Jesus uses salt as a symbol of the Christian life. What, then, are its essential qualities? In Palestine it had three characteristic uses.

(i) Salt was used as a preservative. It is the earliest of all preservatives. The Greeks used to say that salt could put a new soul into dead things. Without salt a thing putrefied and went bad; with it its freshness was preserved. That means that true Christianity must act as a preservative against the corruption of the world. The individual Christian must be the conscience of his fellows; and the church the conscience of the nation. The Christian must be such that in his presence no doubtful language will be used, no questionable stories told, no dishonorable action suggested. He must be like a cleansing antiseptic in the circle in which he moves. The church must fearlessly speak against all evils and support all good causes. She must never hold her peace through fear or favor of men.

(ii) Salt was used as a flavoring. Food, without salt, can be revoltingly insipid. The Christian, then, must be the man who brings flavor into life. The Christianity which acts like a shadow of gloom and a wet blanket is no true Christianity. The Christian is the man who, by his courage, his hope, his cheerfulness and his kindness brings a new flavor into life.

(iii) Salt was used on the land. It was used to make it easier for all good things to grow. The Christian must be such that he makes it easier for people to be good and harder to be bad. We all know people in whose company there are certain things we would not and could not do; and equally we all know people in whose company we might well stoop to things which by ourselves we would not do. There are fine souls in whose company it is easier to be brave and cheerful and good. The Christian must carry with him a breath of heaven in which the fine things flourish and the evil things shrivel up.

That is the function of the Christian; if he fails in his function there is no good reason why he should exist at all; and we have already seen that in the economy of God uselessness invites disaster. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

Evaluating Priorities

“Integrity and Submitting to Authority”

Mark 12:13-17

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

Taxes for Caesar

13 The leaders sent some Pharisees and supporters of Herod to try to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested.

14 "Teacher," these men said, "we know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You sincerely teach the ways of God. Now tell us--is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?"

15 Should we pay them, or should we not?" Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Whom are you trying to fool with your trick questions? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you."

16 When they handed it to him, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" "Caesar's," they replied.

17 "Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God." This reply completely amazed them. Mark 12:13-17 (NLT)

[Look up and read Matthew 22:15-22]

The Pharisees did not like Jesus because he exposed their hypocrisy. The Herodians also saw Jesus as a threat. Supporters of the dynasty of Herod the Great, they had lost political control when, as a result of reported unrest, Rome deposed Archelaus (Herod's son with authority over Judea), and replaced him with a Roman governor. The Herodians feared that Jesus would cause still more instability in Judea, and that Rome might react by never allowing the Roman leaders to step down and be replaced by a descendant of Herod.

Anyone who avoided paying taxes faced harsh penalties. The Jews hated to pay taxes to Rome because the money supported their oppressors and symbolized their subjection. Much of the tax money also went to maintain the pagan temples and luxurious life-styles of Rome's upper class. The Pharisees and Herodians hoped to trap Jesus with this tax question. Either a yes or a no could lead him into trouble. A yes would mean he supported Rome, which would turn the people against him. A no would bring accusations of treason and rebellion against Rome and could lead to civil penalties.

The Pharisees and Herodians thought they had the perfect question to trap Jesus. But Jesus answered wisely, once again exposing their self-interest and wrong motives. Jesus said that the coin bearing the emperor's image should be given to the emperor. But our lives, which bear God's image, belong to God.

☞ Pray for God's guidance as you study

1. Which taxes (for what usage) do you hate paying the most? Why?
2. What would you call the Pharisees' and Herodians' approach to Jesus? [Look up Mark 3:6]
 - a. sneaky
 - b. respectful
 - c. flattering
 - d. hypocritical

How would you describe Jesus' response to their question?

- a. evasive
- b. compromising
- c. smart
- d. balanced

3. What is implied in Jesus saying, "Give Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"?
[Look up Romans 13:6,7]

- a. both God and the government should be given their due
- b. government has rightful authority, but final authority must be to God
- c. paying taxes is a spiritual as well as a political obligation
- d. don't do any more for the government than you have to do

4. Which of the following do you think Jesus would encourage or condone?

- a. cheating on income taxes
- b. minimizing taxes with "loopholes"
- c. refusing to pay taxes because of an unjust war or program
- d. protesting a government policy
- e. disobeying what you believe is an unchristian law
- f. disrespecting government officials

5. What do you have the most trouble with in giving "Caesar" what is his?

- a. submitting to authority -- I don't like to be told what to do
- b. paying so much money in taxes
- c. supporting a government I don't agree with

[Read Romans 13:1-6]

6. Why does Paul say we should submit to governing authorities?

7. What principles do you find for helping you deal with authority?

Wrap-up: Are you giving God all that is rightfully his? Give your life to God -- you bear his image.

Prayer: For one another

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Commentary from the Life Application Bible

Notes for Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees, a religious group, opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine. The Herodians, a political party, supported Herod Antipas and the policies instituted by Rome. Normally these two groups were bitter enemies, but here they united against Jesus. Thinking they had a foolproof plan to corner him, together their representatives asked Jesus about paying Roman taxes. If Jesus agreed that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees would say he was opposed to God, the only King they recognized. If Jesus said the taxes should not be paid, the Herodians would hand him over to Herod on the charge of rebellion. In this case the Pharisees were not motivated by love for God's laws, and the Herodians were not motivated by love for Roman justice. Jesus' answer exposed their evil motives and embarrassed them both.

Notes for Verse 17

The Jews were required to pay taxes to support the Roman government. They hated this taxation because the money went directly into Caesar's treasury, where some of it went to support the pagan temples and decadent life-style of the Roman aristocracy. Caesar's image on the coins was a constant reminder of Israel's subjection to Rome.

Notes for Verse 19

The denarius was the usual day's wage for a laborer.

Notes for Verse 21

Jesus avoided this trap by showing that we have dual citizenship (1Peter 2:17). Our citizenship in the nation requires that we pay money for the services and benefits we receive. Our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires that we pledge to God our primary obedience and commitment.

Romans 13:1-6

Notes for Verse 1

Are there times when we should not submit to the government? We should never allow government to force us to disobey God. Jesus and his apostles never disobeyed the government for personal reasons; when they disobeyed, it was in order to follow their higher loyalty to God. Their disobedience was not cheap: they were threatened, beaten, thrown into jail, tortured, and executed for their convictions. Like them, if we are compelled to disobey, we must be ready to accept the consequences.

13:1ff Christians understand Romans 13 in different ways. All Christians agree that we are to live at peace with the state as long as the state allows us to live by our religious convictions. For hundreds of years, however, there have been at least three interpretations of how we are to do this.

(1) Some Christians believe that the state is so corrupt that Christians should have as little to do with it as possible. Although they should be good citizens as long as they can do so without compromising their beliefs, they should not work for the government, vote in elections, or serve in the military.

(2) Others believe that God has given the state authority in certain areas and the church authority in others. Christians can be loyal to both and can work for either. They should not, however, confuse the two. In this view, church and state are concerned with two totally different spheres -- the spiritual and the physical -- and thus complement each other but do not work together.

(3) Still others believe that Christians have a responsibility to make the state better. They can do this politically, by electing Christian or other high-principled leaders. They can also do this morally, by serving as an influence for good in society. In this view, church and state ideally work together for the good of all.

None of these views advocate rebelling against or refusing to obey the government's laws or regulations unless those laws clearly require you to violate the moral standards revealed by God. Wherever we find ourselves, we must be responsible citizens, as well as responsible Christians.
Notes for Verses 3,4

When civil rulers are unjust, upright people are afraid. In these verses, Paul is talking about officials who are doing their duty. When these officials are just, people who are doing right have nothing to fear.

Evaluating Priorities

“Taking Personal Responsibility”

Romans 12:1-8

☞ **What would you like to praise God for today?**

A Living Sacrifice to God

¹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice--the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

³ As God's messenger, I give each of you this warning: Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you.

⁴ Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function,

⁵ so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.

⁶ God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you.

⁷ If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching.

⁸ If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

⁹ Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good.

¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

¹¹ Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically.

¹² Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful.

Romans 12:1-12 (NLT)

☞ **Pray for God's guidance as you study**

1. What was the symbolism represented by sacrificing an animal in the Old Testament?
2. How would you explain what Paul means by to offer yourself as “a living sacrifice”? (see 1 Samuel 15:22, Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24)
3. What does verse 1 add to your understanding of true worship (see also 6:13; 8:13)?

4. How does the “renewing of your mind” (NIV) happen (v.2)? What all is involved in the process?
- What are the benefits?
5. In what ways might Christians (you) tend to conform to the world?
6. Are you more inclined to “think of yourself more highly than you ought” (v.3) or put yourself down?
- Where do we tend to look when evaluating our self worth?
- What does it mean to you that “our self worth is based on our identity in Christ”?
7. Identify the different gifts listed in this passage. Why does God give us “different gifts” (see Ephesians 4:16)?
8. To use them effectively, why is it important to:
- realize that all gifts and abilities come from God
 - understand that not everyone has the same gifts
 - know who we are and what we do best
 - dedicate our gifts to God’s service and not to our personal success
 - be willing to utilize our gifts wholeheartedly , not holding back anything from God’s service
9. Look at this list of gifts. What kinds of people would have each gift... what characteristics might they have?
- prophets (preachers) - servers - teachers - encouragers - givers
 - leaders - mercy

Wrap up: What holds you back from using your gifts more fully?

Prayer: For one another

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Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

Chapter 12

Notes for Verse 1

When sacrificing an animal according to God's law, a priest would kill the animal, cut it in pieces, and place it on the altar. Sacrifice was important, but even in the Old Testament God made it clear that obedience from the heart was much more important (see 1Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24). God wants us to offer ourselves, not animals, as *living* sacrifices -- daily laying aside our own desires to follow him, putting all our energy and resources at his disposal and trusting him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven.

12:1,2 God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his children. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Because he wants only what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new lives possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

Notes for Verse 2

Christians are called to "not conform any longer to the pattern of this world," with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them. Our refusal to conform to this world's values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs -- it must be firmly planted in our minds -- "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Rom 8:5).

Notes for Verse 3

Healthy self-esteem is important because some of us think too little of ourselves; on the other hand, some of us overestimate ourselves. The key to an honest and accurate evaluation is knowing the basis of our self-worth -- our identity in Christ. Apart from him, we aren't capable of very much by eternal standards; in him, we are valuable and capable of worthy service. Evaluating yourself by the worldly standards of success and achievement can cause you to think too much about your worth in the eyes of others and thus miss your true value in God's eyes.

Notes for Verses 4,5

Paul uses the concept of the human body to teach how Christians should live and work together. Just as the parts of the body function under the direction of the brain, so Christians are to work together under the command and authority of Jesus Christ (see 1Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:1-16).

12:4-8 God gives us gifts so we can build up his church. To use them effectively, we must (1) realize that all gifts and abilities come from God; (2) understand that not everyone has the same gifts; (3) know who we are and what we do best; (4) dedicate our gifts to God's service and not to our personal success; (5) be willing to utilize our gifts wholeheartedly, not holding back anything from God's service.

Notes for Verse 6

God's gifts differ in nature, power, and effectiveness according to his wisdom and graciousness, not according to our faith. The "measure of faith" (Rom 12:3) or the "proportion to his faith" means that God will give spiritual power necessary and appropriate to carry out each responsibility. We cannot, by our own effort or willpower, drum up more faith and thus be more effective teachers or servants. These are God's gifts to his church, and he gives faith and power as he wills. Our role is to be faithful and to seek ways to serve others with what Christ has given us.

12:6 *Prophesying* in Scripture is not always predicting the future. Often it means preaching God's messages (1Corinthians 14:1-3).

12:6-8 Look at this list of gifts and imagine the kinds of people who would have each gift. Prophets are often bold and articulate. Servers (those in ministry) are faithful and loyal. Teachers are clear thinkers. Encouragers know how to motivate others. Givers are generous and trusting. Leaders are good organizers and managers. Those who show mercy are caring people who are happy to give their time to others. It would be difficult for one person to embody all these gifts. An assertive prophet would not usually make a good counselor, and a generous giver might fail as a leader. When you identify your own gifts (and this list is far from complete), ask how you can use them to build up God's family. At the same time, realize that your gifts can't do the work of the church all alone. Be thankful for people whose gifts are completely different from yours. Let your strengths balance their weaknesses, and be grateful that their abilities make up for your deficiencies. Together you can build Christ's church.

Evaluating Priorities

"The Priority of Prayer"

Mark 1:29-39

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

Jesus Heals Many People

29 After Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue, they went over to Simon and Andrew's home, and James and John were with them.

30 Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away.

31 He went to her bedside, and as he took her by the hand and helped her to sit up, the fever suddenly left, and she got up and prepared a meal for them.

32 That evening at sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus.

33 And a huge crowd of people from all over Capernaum gathered outside the door to watch.

34 So Jesus healed great numbers of sick people who had many different kinds of diseases, and he ordered many demons to come out of their victims. But because they knew who he was, he refused to allow the demons to speak.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

35 The next morning Jesus awoke long before daybreak and went out alone into the wilderness to pray.

36 Later Simon and the others went out to find him.

37 They said, "Everyone is asking for you."

38 But he replied, "**We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too, because that is why I came.**"

39 So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and expelling demons from many people. Mark 1:29-39 (NLT)

☞ Pray for God's guidance as you study

1. What do you think the crowds were looking for in Jesus?

- a) a quick fix
- b) a miracle-worker
- c) a teacher of truth
- d) a spiritual leader to follow
- e) a better way to live

2. What do you think Jesus was looking for in the people?

- a) appreciation and applause
- b) faith
- c) followers
- d) He gave with no strings attached

3. How do you picture the scene in verses 32-34?

Why does He silence the demons?

4. What might Jesus be praying about (v.35)?

How might this relate to His decision to move on (v.38)?

5. Which of the things Jesus faced cause you the most stress?
 - a) being physically crowded (v.33)
 - b) short nights (v. 35)
 - c) having routines disrupted (v. 37)
 - d) constant demands (v. 37)
 - e) always on the go (v. 39)
6. How does this Scripture speak to your life?
 - a) being alone at times is good
 - b) I need more balance between activity and prayer
 - c) I need more balance between being with others and being alone
 - d) I shouldn't stay constantly busy just to keep from being lonely
7. When you need time alone, where do you go and what do you do?
8. If you were having a private prayer time and the disciples came looking for you, how would you feel?
 - a) angry I couldn't have time alone
 - b) like telling the disciples to leave so I could keep praying
 - c) like inviting the disciples to join me
 - d) gratified that I was so needed
 - e) guilty that I wasn't around when I was needed
 - f) torn between my need to be alone and my desire to help others
9. What is the greatest obstacle in your personal devotional life?
 - a) finding time
 - b) finding somewhere quiet
 - c) being consistent
 - d) staying awake
 - e) keeping my concentration
 - f) knowing what to do
 - g) having the desire

Wrap-up: What goals would you like to set for your "quiet time" (e.g. amount of time, or a Scripture-reading plan)?

Prayer: For one another

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- | | |
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Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

Mark 1:29-39

Notes for Verses 29-31

Each Gospel writer had a slightly different perspective as he wrote; thus the comparable stories in the Gospels often highlight different details. In Matthew, Jesus touched the woman's hand. In Mark, he helped her up. In Luke, he spoke to the fever, and it left her. The accounts do not conflict. Each writer chose to emphasize different details of the story in order to emphasize a certain characteristic of Jesus.

Notes for Verses 32,33

The people came to Jesus in the evening after sunset. This was the Sabbath (Mark 1:21), their day of rest, lasting from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. The Jewish leaders had proclaimed that it was against the law to be healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10; Luke 13:14). The people didn't want to break this law or the Jewish law that prohibited traveling on the Sabbath, so they waited until sunset. After the sun went down, the crowds were free to find Jesus so he could heal them.

Notes for Verse 34

Why didn't Jesus want the demons to reveal who he was? (1) By commanding the demons to remain silent, Jesus proved his authority and power over them. (2) Jesus wanted the people to believe he was the Messiah because of what he said and did, not because of the demons' words. (3) Jesus wanted to reveal his identity as the Messiah according to his timetable, not according to Satan's timetable. Satan wanted the people to follow Jesus around for what they could get out of him, not because he was the Son of God who could truly set them free from sin's guilt and power.

Notes for Verse 35

Jesus took time to pray. Finding time to pray is not easy, but prayer is the vital link between us and God. Like Jesus, we must break away from others to talk with God, even if we have to get up very early in the morning to do it!

Notes for Verse 39

The Romans divided the land of Israel into three separate regions: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Galilee was the northernmost region, an area about 60 miles long and 30 miles wide. Jesus did much of his ministry in this area, an ideal place for him to teach because there were over 250 towns concentrated there, with many synagogues.

Notes from Barclays Bible Commentary

A PRIVATE MIRACLE (Mk 1:29-31)

In the synagogue Jesus had spoken and acted in the most amazing way. The synagogue service ended and Jesus went with his friends to Peter's house. According to Jewish custom the main Sabbath meal came immediately after the synagogue service, at the sixth hour, that is at 12 o'clock midday. (The Jewish day began at 6 a.m. and the hours are counted from then.) Jesus might well have claimed the right to rest after the exciting and exhausting experience of the synagogue service; but once again his power was appealed to and once again he spent himself for others. This miracle tells us something about three people.

(i) It tells us something about Jesus. He did not require an audience in order to exert his power; he was just as prepared to heal in the little circle of a cottage as in the great crowd of a synagogue. He was never too tired to help; the need of others took precedence over his own desire for rest. But above all, we see here, as we saw in the synagogue, the uniqueness of the methods of Jesus. There were many exorcists in the time of Jesus, but they worked with elaborate incantations, and formulae, and spells, and magical apparatus. In the synagogue Jesus had spoken one authoritative sentence and the healing was complete.

Here we have the same thing again. Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from what the Talmud called "a burning fever." It was, and still is, very prevalent in that particular part of Galilee. The Talmud actually lays down the methods of dealing with it. A knife wholly made of iron was tied by a braid of hair to a thorn bush. On successive days there was repeated, first, Exo 3:2-3; second, Exo 3:4; and finally Exo 3:5. Then a certain magical formula was pronounced, and thus the cure was supposed to be achieved. Jesus completely disregarded all the paraphernalia of popular magic, and with a gesture and a word of unique authority and power, he healed the woman.

The word that the Greek uses for authority in the previous passage is *exousia* (1849); and *exousia* was defined as unique knowledge together with unique power; that is precisely what Jesus possessed, and that is what he was prepared to exercise in a cottage. Paul Tournier writes, "My patients very often say to me, 'I admire the patience with which you listen to everything I tell you.' It is not patience at all, but interest." A miracle to Jesus was not a means of increasing his prestige; to help was not a laborious and disagreeable duty; he helped instinctively, because he was supremely interested in all who needed his help.

(ii) It tells us something about the disciples. They had not known Jesus long, but already they had begun to take all their troubles to him. Peter's mother-in-law was ill; the simple home was upset; and it was for the disciples the most natural thing in the world to tell Jesus all about it.

Paul Tournier tells how one of life's greatest discoveries came to him. He used to visit an old Christian pastor who never let him go without praying with him. He was struck by the extreme simplicity of the old man's prayers. It seemed just a continuation of an intimate conversation that the old saint was always carrying on with Jesus. Paul Tournier goes on, "When I got back home I talked it over with my wife, and together we asked God to give us also the close fellowship with Jesus the old pastor had. Since then he has been the center of my devotion and my travelling companion. He takes pleasure in what I do (compare Ecc 9:7), and concerns himself with it. He is a friend with whom I can discuss everything that happens in my life. He shares my joy and my pain, my hopes and fears. He is there when a patient speaks to me from his heart, listening to him with me and better than I can. And when the patient is gone I can talk to him about it."

Therein there lies the very essence of the Christian life. As the hymn has it, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." Thus early the disciples had learned what became the habit of a lifetime--to take all their troubles to Jesus and to ask his help for them.

(iii) It tells us something about Peter's wife's mother. No sooner was she healed than she began to attend to their needs. She used her recovered health for renewed service. A great Scottish family has the motto "Saved to Serve." Jesus helps us that we may help others.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CROWDS (Mk 1:32-34)

The things that Jesus had done in Capernaum could not be concealed. The emergence of so great a new power and authority was not something which could be kept secret. So the evening found Peter's house besieged with crowds seeking Jesus' healing touch. They waited until evening because the law forbade the carrying of any burden through a town on the Sabbath day (compare Jer 17:24). That would have been to work and work was forbidden. They had, of course, no clocks or watches in those days; the Sabbath ran from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and the law was that the Sabbath was ended and the day had finished when three stars came out in the sky. So the people of Capernaum waited until the sun had set and the stars were out and then they came, carrying their sick, to Jesus; and he healed them.

Three times we have seen Jesus healing people. First he healed in the synagogue; second, he healed in the house of his friends; and now he healed in the street. Jesus recognized the claim of everyone. It was said of Dr. Johnson that to be in misfortune was to be assured of his friendship and support. Wherever there was trouble Jesus was ready to use his power. He selected neither the place nor the person; he realized the universal claim of human need.

The people flocked to Jesus because they recognized in him a man who could do things. There were plenty who could talk and expound and lecture and preach; but here was one who dealt not only in words but also in actions. It has been said that "if a man can make a better mousetrap than his neighbors, the public will beat a path to his house even if he lives in the middle of a wood." The person people want is the effective person. Jesus could, and can, produce results.

But there is the beginning of tragedy here. The crowds came, but they came because they wanted something out of Jesus. They did not come because they loved him; they did not come because they had caught a glimpse of some new vision; in the last analysis they wanted to use him. That is what nearly everyone wants to do with God and his Son. For one prayer that goes up to God in days of prosperity ten thousand go up in time of adversity. Many a man who has never prayed when the sun was shining begins to pray when the cold winds come.

Someone has said that many people regard religion as belonging "to the ambulance corps and not to the firing-line of life." Religion to them is a crisis affair. It is only when they have got life into a mess, or when life deals them some knock-out blow that they begin to remember God. We must all go to Jesus for he alone can give us the things we need for life; but if that going and these gifts do not produce in us an answering love and gratitude there is something tragically wrong. God is not someone to be used in the day of misfortune; he is someone to be loved and remembered every day of our lives.

THE QUIET HOUR AND THE CHALLENGE OF ACTION (Mk 1:35-39)

Simply to read the record of the things that happened at Capernaum is to see that Jesus was left with no time alone. Now Jesus knew well that he could not live without God; that if he was going to be forever giving out, he must be at least sometimes taking in; that if he was going to spend himself for others, he must ever and again summon spiritual reinforcements to his aid. He knew that he could not live without prayer. In a little book entitled *The Practice of Prayer*, Dr. A. D. Belden has some great definitions. "Prayer may be defined as the appeal of the soul to God." Not to pray is to be guilty of the incredible folly of ignoring "the possibility of adding God to our resources." "In prayer we give the perfect mind of God an opportunity to feed our mental powers." Jesus knew this; he knew that if he was to meet men he must first meet God. If prayer was necessary for Jesus, how much more must it be necessary for us?

Even there they sought him out. There was no way in which Jesus could shut the door. Once Rose Macaulay, the novelist, said that all she demanded from this life was "a room of her own." That is precisely what Jesus never had. A great doctor has said that the duty of medicine is "sometimes to heal, often to afford relief, and always to bring consolation." That duty was always upon Jesus. It has been said that a doctor's duty is "to help men to live and to die"--and men are always living and dying. It is human nature to try to put up the barriers and to have time and peace to oneself; that is what Jesus never did. Conscious as he was of his own weariness and exhaustion, he was still more conscious of the insistent cry of human need. So when they came for him he rose from his knees to meet the challenge of his task. Prayer will never do our work for us; what it will do is to strengthen us for work which must be done.

Jesus set out on a preaching tour of the synagogues of Galilee. In Mark this tour is dismissed in one verse, but it must have taken weeks and even months to do it. As he went he preached and he healed. There were three pairs of things which Jesus never separated.

(i) He never separated words and actions. He never thought that a work was done when that work was stated; he never believed that his duty was completed when he had exhorted men to God and to goodness. Always the statement and the exhortation were put into action. Fosdick somewhere tells of a student who bought the best possible books and the best possible equipment and got a special study chair with a special bookrest to make study easy, and then sat down in the chair--and went to sleep. The man who deals in words with no actions to follow is very like that.

(ii) He never separated soul and body. There have been types of Christianity which spoke as if the body did not matter. But man is both soul and body. And the task of Christianity is to redeem the whole man and not just part of him. It is indeed blessedly true that a man may be starving, living in a hovel, in distress and pain and yet have sweet times with God; but that is no reason at all for leaving him in such a case. Missions to primitive races do not only take the Bible; they take education and medicine; they take the school and the hospital. It is quite wrong to talk about the social gospel as if it were an extra, or an option, or even a separate part of the Christian message. The Christian message is one and it preaches and works for the good of a man's body as well as the good of his soul.

(iii) Jesus never separated earth and heaven. There are those who are so concerned with heaven that they forget all about earth and so become impractical visionaries. There are those who are so concerned with earth that they forget about heaven and limit good to material good. The dream of Jesus was a time when God's will would be done in earth as it is in heaven, (Matt 6:10) and earth and heaven be one.

Evaluating Priorities

"Setting Limits"

Luke 10:38-42

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

38 As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed them into her home.

39 Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught.

40 But Martha was worrying over the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

41 But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details!

42 There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it--and I won't take it away from her." Luke 10:38-42 (NLT)

☞ Pray for God's guidance as you study

1. Both Mary and Martha loved Jesus. How were Mary's actions a form of "serving" Jesus?
2. If you were Martha, how would you have responded to Jesus' words?
 - a) flown off the handle
 - b) thought to myself, "He doesn't have to live with my sister"
 - c) left the room and pouted
 - d) accepted the correction, sat down with Mary and forgot about supper
3. From this story, how would you describe the different personalities of Mary and Martha?
4. What are their strengths and weaknesses?
5. What was Jesus saying to Martha?
 - a) she should be more like Mary
 - b) she had her priorities messed up
 - c) people are more important than housework
 - d) "sitting at Jesus' feet" is more important than anything else

6. In each of the following, which quality is more true of you?
 - a) task or relational oriented
 - b) work or quality-of-life oriented
 - c) practical or ideal oriented
 - d) uptight or laid-back
 - e) physically or spiritually oriented

7. If Jesus dropped in on you, what might He point out that distracts you from the really important things in life, like spending time with Him?

8. Regarding giving to others, how often do you experience each of the following motivations - seldom, sometimes or frequently?
 - a) to feel in control
 - b) to feel needed
 - c) to receive in return
 - d) to get people to like me
 - e) out of obligation

Wrap-up: In light of your answers to the last question, what course of action do you need to take?

- a) admit my need to change
- b) open my life more to God's love
- c) keep in touch with my motivations
- d) set limits on what I do for others
- e) keep doing what I'm doing

Prayer: For one another

LIFE GROUPS

A safe place to build friendships and grow spiritually.

- | | | | |
|----------|---|-----------------|--|
| L | ♦ | Learn..... | applying Biblical truth for everyday living |
| I | ♦ | Invite..... | welcoming others to our fellowship |
| F | ♦ | Fellowship..... | nurturing Christ centered caring relationships |
| E | ♦ | Evangelism..... | reaching others with the hope of Christ |

Commentary Notes from the Life Application Bible

Notes for Verses 38-42

Mary and Martha both loved Jesus. On this occasion they were both serving him. But Martha thought Mary's style of serving was inferior to hers. She didn't realize that in her desire to serve, she was actually neglecting her guest. Are you so busy doing things *for* Jesus that you're not spending any time *with* him? Don't let your service become self-serving.

Notes for Verses 41,42

Jesus did not blame Martha for being concerned about household chores. He was only asking her to set priorities. It is possible for service to Christ to degenerate into mere busywork that is no longer full of devotion to God.

Martha's Profile

Many older brothers and sisters have an irritating tendency to take charge, a habit developed while growing up. We can easily see this pattern in Martha, the older sister of Mary and Lazarus. She was used to being in control.

The fact that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus are remembered for their hospitality takes on added significance when we note that hospitality was a social requirement in their culture. It was considered shameful to turn anyone away from your door. Apparently Martha's family met this requirement very well.

Martha worried about details. She wished to please, to serve, to do the right thing -- but she often succeeded in making everyone around her uncomfortable. Perhaps as the oldest she feared shame if her home did not measure up to expectations. She tried to do everything she could to make sure that wouldn't happen. As a result, she found it hard to relax and enjoy her guests, and even harder to accept Mary's lack of cooperation in all the preparations. Martha's frustration was so intense that she finally asked Jesus to settle the matter. He gently corrected her attitude and showed her that her priorities, though good, were not the best. The personal attention she gave her guests should be more important than the comforts she tried to provide for them.

Later, following her brother Lazarus's death, Martha could hardly help being herself. When she heard Jesus was finally coming, she rushed out to meet him and expressed her inner conflict of disappointment and hope. Jesus pointed out that her hope was too limited. He was not only Lord beyond death, he was Lord over death -- the resurrection and the life! Moments later, Martha again spoke without thinking, pointing out that four-day-old corpses are well on their way to decomposition. Her awareness of details sometimes kept her from seeing the whole picture, but Jesus was consistently patient with her.

In our last picture of Martha, she is once again serving a meal to Jesus and his disciples. She has not stopped serving. But the Bible records her silence this time. She has begun to learn what her younger sister already knew -- that worship begins with silence and listening.

Strengths and accomplishments:

- Known as a hospitable homemaker
- Believed in Jesus with growing faith
- Had a strong desire to do everything exactly right

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Expected others to agree with her priorities
- Was overly concerned with details
- Tended to feel sorry for herself when her efforts were not recognized
- Limited Jesus' power to this life

Lessons from her life:

- Getting caught up in details can make us forget the main reasons for our actions
- There is a proper time to listen to Jesus and a proper time to work for him

Vital statistics:

- Where: Bethany
- Relatives: Sister: Mary. Brother: Lazarus

Key verse:

"But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' " (Luke 10:40).

Martha's story is told in Luke 10:38-42 and John 11:17-45.