

Three middle-aged men--Joe, Fred and Tom--were discussing the possibility of sudden death. "What would you do if you knew you only had 4 weeks of life remaining?" Joe asked. "First of all," Fred said, "I would quit my job and for those 4 weeks I would do nothing but fish." "Not me," Tom said somberly. "For those 4 weeks, I would spend as much time as possible with my children and let them know how much I love them." Joe thought for a few moments and then said, "I'll tell you what I would do. For those 4 weeks, I would travel throughout the United States with my wife and my mother-in-law in a tiny compact car, and stay in a cheap motel every night." Fred and Tom were puzzled by his answer. "Why would you do that?" they asked. **"Because," Joe smiled sarcastically, "it would be the longest 4 weeks of my life."** Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law. We hope this was something Simon was enthusiastic about. It probably was. We don't hear mother-in-law jokes like we used to. That's a step forward. **After all, many have mothers-in-law that they cherish.**

Mark tells us that Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. When they told Jesus about her, he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. Poor lady. No opportunity to recuperate. No opportunity for a little pampering by her family.

I know what some of you women are thinking. Typical male behavior. This poor lady has been sick. Jesus healed her affliction, so immediately it was back to work looking after the household.

It's like a **"Wizard of Id"** comic strip that appeared in the papers sometime back. In the first frame, a peasant is shown approaching the wizard in his workshop. The peasant asks, "Are you familiar with curses?" The wizard replies, "What's the problem?" "A witch turned my wife into a frog," responds the peasant. The wizard asks, "What do you want me to do?" The peasant answers, **"Teach it how to cook."** **WILL MALE CHAUVINISM EVER COMPLETELY DIE?**

Of course, Jesus had the same problem as Simon's mother-in-law. He didn't have any down time either. When people find you can heal their diseases they start lining up outside your door.

Jesus' ministry was a success from the beginning. "To be a success," says TV's Dr. Robert Schuller, "find a need and fill it; find a hurt and heal it." Jesus was certainly doing that. Nearly every family is touched by one sickness or another, and so people were bringing their loved ones to Jesus in droves. After all, there were no hospitals, no twenty-four hour medical clinics. **If you knew that Jesus could help them, wouldn't you bring them to Jesus?**

Mark tells us, "The whole town gathered at the door . . ." Like Simon's mother-in-law, there was no down time for Jesus. **BUT, HERE'S WHAT'S IMPORTANT--JESUS STILL TOOK TIME TO PRAY.** We read, "The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases . . ." And then Mark tells us, ***"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."***

JESUS PRAYED!! In his book, *Ordering Your Private World*, Gordon MacDonald says prayer was such a priority to Christ that there are **more than 20 words in the New Testament to describe his prayer life.**

Jesus took time to recharge his spiritual batteries. That is important for us to see. You think you're too busy to pray. Imagine if there were sick and dying people lined up outside your door each morning waiting for you to open up for business. Imagine that when you went to bed each evening there was still a line. **DO YOU think you could afford to skip over your prayer time?** Why that even sounds like a good excuse for sleeping in on the Sabbath. Surely if you were helping all those people, God would understand if you skipped worship or Bible study. **Yet Jesus took time to pray and he took time to study and he took time for worship.**

J. Hudson Taylor once put it like this: ***"Do not have your concert first and tune your instruments afterward. Begin the day with God."*** That's exactly what Jesus did. He tuned his instrument first.

Stephen Covey used the metaphor of an axe. "Take time to sharpen your axe," says Covey in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*--before you begin cutting. That's practical advice. If we spend time with God before we begin the activity of our day, we will be better prepared for what might come our way.

Felicity Cunningham, wife of former Minnesota Viking quarterback Randall Cunningham had this to say about her husband: "He doesn't even stand up first. He rolls out of bed and he goes on his knees and he prays. He makes that decision every day, to humble himself in prayer."

I'll bet you didn't know that about this professional athlete. But it is true of many successful people in many fields. Before they begin their demanding schedules, they get their heads straight and their hearts straight by spending time before the throne of God. And the busier they are, the more urgent it is that **they take time to pray just like JESUS!**

NOTICE ALSO THAT JESUS TOOK TIME FOR PEOPLE. Jesus was no ascetic who shut himself off from others in his desire to commune with God. He was "a man for others," as he has been so aptly described. He may have preferred to stay in the garden, or on the mountaintop, or in the home of a friend, **but there were people who needed him!**

In his memoirs about surviving the World War II concentration camps, Elie Wiesel claims that he and his father motivated each other to survive. Wiesel needed to stay alive to take care of his elderly father. That became his motivation for surviving the concentration camps. He knew that if he died, his father would give up hope and die also. Wiesel wrote, "(The Germans) tried to get the inmates to think only of themselves, to forget relatives and friends, to tend only to their own needs . . . But what happened was just the reverse. Those who retreated to a universe limited to their own bodies had less chance of getting out alive, while to live for a brother, a friend, an ideal, helped you hold out longer." YES... *"People, who need people," says the song of the sixties, "Are the luckiest people in the world."*

We know it's true. When we live only for ourselves, our lives are sterile and unfulfilling. When we give ourselves in service to others, our lives have meaning and purpose. Jesus took time for **PRAYER** and Jesus took time for **PEOPLE... AND ALSO JESUS FOUND TIME TO FULFILL THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH HE HAD COME.**

We might think Jesus was fulfilling his purpose when he healed the sick and cast out demons. Those were important **TASKS...but they were not the primary reason Jesus came.** Listen as Mark concludes this brief narrative: *"Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"*

"Jesus replied, *"Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can PREACH THERE ALSO!! That is why I have come.*" So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues . . ."

Here is why Christ came—TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S CONSTANT PRESENCE IN ALL OF HUMAN LIFE.

There is much confusion in the world today about why Jesus came. Some of our social prophets would tell us that the reason **Christ came was to CHANGE OUR SOCIAL SYSTEMS.** There certainly are systems that need to be changed--**SYSTEMS that OPPRESS THE POOR AND SPREAD INJUSTICE--but that was not why Jesus came.**

There are those who believe Jesus came primarily TO BIND UP THE WOUNDS OF THE SICK AND HURTING. And, yes, that was an important part of Jesus' work. Jesus' heart was always going out to those in distress. **But our lesson is clear.** The primary reason Jesus came was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom. Healing and Helping were important to Jesus, but his primary task was to WITNESS TO THE TRUTH of God. **Now why do I make this point?**

There are always people who are down on the institutional church. If we install a new stained-glass window, they will protest that the money should have gone to help the poor. If a church builds a family life center with basketball courts and social halls, people will say the church is straying from its mission--the money ought to go to help missionaries overseas. **It's not even rare for politicians nowadays to jump on us:** "If the churches would take in the homeless," they huff, "then we wouldn't have to raise taxes." All of the criticisms have a measure of truth. We cannot follow the man from Nazareth and ignore the needs of the poor, the hurting, and the desperate at our doorstep and around the world. **But what is the primary responsibility of the church? It is to provide a witness to God in our community.** Sure, we could sell our church buildings, and spread the proceeds to the poor, but in a short time the funds would be gone and who would be left to proclaim the good news of the love of Jesus Christ?

The politicians are poor examples of that love, the schools are forbidden to even talk about God. Who would tell people that they are loved if the church didn't? **The greatest need the poor have is not a handout.** The greatest need the poor

have is to be reminded of their dignity as human beings because Christ died for them and Christ's Spirit is available to them.

We build our buildings and conduct our programs and utilize the best resources available for our worship services not out of some misguided sense of pride. **These activities are designed to ensure that after you and I are long gone from this world, the church of Christ will still be shining a beacon in this world of darkness. That is our primary purpose.** That is why you and I bring our tithes and offerings into this building each week, to witness to the truth of God in our lives.

I am so glad that Jesus believed in prayer, because I need prayer. I'm so glad that Jesus cared about people, because I'm a person and you are a person, and even though we are imperfect people, it is life-changing to know that the Son of God gave his life for us. But I'm also glad that Jesus held to his primary purpose of preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. For 2,000 years this Gospel has been proclaimed--and because it has been proclaimed--the hungry have been fed--the sick have been ministered to--the world has been made more humane. **SO KEEP ON PRAYING, KEEP ON CARING FOR OTHERS AND YES, KEEP ON TELLING OTHERS ABOUT JESUS...**

WHY? BECAUSE, TODAY, MORE THAN EVER WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF DEEP NEED!! Amen.