

A desolate place – The word “desolate” here is the same word that is translated as “wilderness” previously (Mark 1:3, 4, 12, 13). Both translations are correct. It is not the case here that Jesus need to have gone and found a wilderness or desert (which would have been difficult to find since the land around Capernaum would have been cultivated in that day), but rather a place secluded or devoid of people, where He would not be bothered. The same phrase is used a few more times (Mark 1:45; 6:31, 32, 35) and in all of those contexts, the point is that Jesus wants to be away from the crowds that seek Him out. Jesus needed time for prayer and rest. The disciples needed this too. For Jesus the deserted place can be both a place of conflict (as in His temptation with Satan), but also a place of rest (because of His time in prayer with God).

There He prayed – Mark continues to tantalize us with lack of details. He does not give us any of the content of Jesus' prayers, just as he didn't tell us what Jesus preached at the synagogue or even speak to Simon's mother-in-law. The lack of detail here could be part of Mark's narrative technique, or it could simply be that Mark (reflecting Simon Peter's account of the events) himself didn't know what Jesus prayed because Jesus was literally by Himself, with no one to hear His prayers. Though even if someone were there, there's no reason Jesus could not have prayed silently. So our curiosity will have

to linger. You can tell the disciples have their own desire to learn about Jesus' prayers because they specifically ask Him about prayer (Luke 11:1ff.)

Everyone is looking for you – It's great to be popular isn't it? But whereas Simon and the rest probably thought this was exactly the kind of news Jesus was hoping for, His reaction to this probably surprised them. Jesus came for a different purpose and they can't even grasp it at this point, so He merely tells them, "I have to keep moving." This opening is building up what is sometimes called the "Messianic secret" theme in Mark's Gospel. Initially, Jesus only commands the demons to be silent, but now by going out silently in the middle of the night He actively seeks to avoid the crowds of people who would throng around Him and soon He will tell others to remain quiet too.

Next towns – That is the surrounding and adjacent communities. Cities at this time were usually called cities because they were habitations with walls surrounding them. There were also other places of communal living without walls. The word in Greek here is that word, as opposed to "city," which is what Capernaum was. Interestingly, Jesus is deliberately not seeking out large populous areas, but He is moving outward from Capernaum in a purposeful manner.

That I may preach there also – Jesus tells His disciples two things here. His purpose is to preach and to do so in several places. The first thing might surprise them. After all, although He did make a scene in the synagogue for His teaching, it was really with His interaction with the man with the unclean spirit and subsequent healings and exorcisms that His popularity really grew. One would expect Jesus to say that these healings and exorcisms were His true purpose in coming, but Jesus emphasizes His preaching ministry. It's possible that Jesus would not have thought of these as separate activities. Indeed, preaching and healing/exorcising go hand in hand. It is all part of the greater ministry plan described in Isaiah 61 "to preach the Good News (Gospel)." John refers to Jesus as "the Word of God," and He proclaims to us all God needs us to know (Heb. 1:1-2). To this day, the preaching ministry remains the central activity of the church. Yes there are many good works that the church does, but if you would take away the preaching ministry, the rest would come to no avail and have no real power. The other part of Jesus' words here refers to the fact that He is going to conduct an itinerant ministry. He will be on the move, rather than stationed at one particular place. This too fits with Jesus' primary mission. He goes (or comes, depending on your perspective) to *seek* and save the lost. Jesus doesn't wait for people to find Him, He moves with intent and purpose to bring salvation to all people, even as He left His Father to come to this sinful world.

That is why I came out – There is a potential wordplay going on here. What exactly does Jesus mean "why I came out"? Does He merely mean, that's why I got up during the middle of the night to come here? Or that's why I came to Capernaum in the first place (given that Nazareth was His hometown)? Or is this meant on a much grander level to mean that's why I left heaven itself? I could make arguments for all three, and I think Mark likes the ambiguity. It's likely the disciples understood only one of these

options, but that doesn't mean Jesus' words had more meaning behind them. On another level, Jesus' words are interesting because if He means only the reason He got up to pray during the middle of the night was so that He could preach to other villages, that should give us some pause. His ultimate purpose was preaching, but in order to preach, He spends time in prayer. Our own lives should emulate this too, no doubt. In order for us to do anything good, we should first begin in prayer.

Preaching in their synagogues – In Mark 1:21-22 Jesus' activity in the synagogue is called "teaching." Here it is "preaching." While the two are different activities, we are probably meant to understand them with a great deal of overlap and practically the same thing. Prophets would especially be associated with preaching, whereas rabbis were more connected with teaching. Obviously Jesus does both, but the greater emphasis remains on Jesus in line with the prophetic line and fulfilling it. He is the prophet greater than Moses who brings God to His people (cf. Deut. 18:15ff.).

Casting out demons – Mark has differentiated healing and casting out demons as distinct actions by Jesus. We are not led to believe that every time someone was sick, people would cry out that it was a demon who possessed a person. Yet Mark highlights this, even more so than Jesus' healing. The proclamation of the Gospel brings about the end of Satan and his dominion. Jesus' preaching is the mission that brings about the victory over all the spiritual forces that would resist God's work.