

THE HEART OF THE HEALER

Mark 1:29-39

September 10, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

We look this morning at the first of many healing miracles recorded in the book of Mark. We know from that Jesus' first miracle came sometime earlier in Cana of Galilee at the wedding feast where the Lord turned the water into wine (John 2:1-11). In the text that precedes ours this morning, Jesus performed His first recorded miracle in Capernaum, the exorcism of the unclean spirit. The relevance of these miracles is most apparent in Mark. It is estimated that *forty seven percent of the stories in the first ten chapters* of Mark contain an account of a miracle either directly or indirectly. This should come as no surprise to us given the focus of Mark on the actions of Christ.

Jesus performed these miracles for a number of reasons. First, they served to authenticate that what He preached and taught was the truth, not simply any truth but truth that came directly from the Father and was affirmed by the Father. These miracles served to validate His preaching even though He was preaching and teaching new things that were difficult to understand and that went against the sinful expectations of the people.

Another purpose for these miracles was to demonstrate Jesus' authority and power. These miracles can be divided into four classes – miracles of healing, exorcisms, the raising of the dead, and miracles related to nature. His miracles of healing demonstrate His power over physical infirmities and life itself. His miracles of exorcism show His power over Satan and the supernatural realm. His miracles of raising the dead make evident His power over death. And His miracles over nature gave a visible representation of His authority over the natural realm.

The miracles also served to validate that Jesus was the Holy One *sent* from God, as we noticed in the demon's testimony in the preceding narrative. The miracles then served as a "sign" that the kingdom of God was at hand in the person of Jesus and it is in regard to His kingdom work that we see the heart of the healer revealed. Something that is easy to overlook, but yet essential to understanding the meaning and purpose of these miracles is the fact that they visibly demonstrate Jesus' compassion and God's pity on his suffering people [Charles Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 83]. In this sense, the miracles point ahead to the resurrection at the end of the age when all diseases are cured and when everyone is made whole when the curse is removed [Kim Riddlebarger, "Jesus Healed Many," 3], when the kingdom of God is consummated.

But regardless of the specific instance and purpose of these miracles, there is something common to all of them that serves as perhaps the most significant reason for them – *they came as signs of God's blessing to those who believed, and signs of curse to those who refused to believe*. Keep that idea in mind as we work our way through these chapters. And also notice the great compassion that Jesus had for these people. We see that demonstrated in our text this morning, where we see Jesus' compassion demonstrated both in public and in private.

I. His Devotion to His People (1:29-34)

As we noted earlier, this narrative gives the account of the first of many miracles of healing that our Lord performed while on this earth, the healing of Simon's, or Peter's, mother-in-law. We do not know much about this woman. We know from this account that she was married to Peter. In 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul seems to suggest that she accompanied Peter in some of his

travels. This suggests that Peter was not a widower when he began his ministry. There are three things we notice about this particular miracle.

1. The setting for this miracle (vv. 29-30)

Mark writes, **“And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.”** This would prove to be a busy Sabbath for our Lord. In the hours immediately previous to this event, we see Jesus teaching in the synagogue and exorcising the unclean spirit from a man who was totally controlled by the spirit. The people were amazed by His teaching and with His authority, and word quickly began to spread about this man named Jesus.

“Immediately” after this, Mark writes, Jesus along with His four disciples leave the synagogue and go to the house of Peter and Andrew, which was also occupied by his wife, his mother-in-law, and probably others. It was customary on the Sabbath to gather together with family for a fellowship meal after worship in the synagogue. In this regard they would make good Baptists! This was no doubt the occasion that brought these men to Peter’s house.

However, upon arriving, there was no fellowship meal. Peter’s mother-in-law, who probably was the one to prepare this meal, laid in bed with a fever, what Luke the doctor called, “a high fever” (Luke 4:38). We cannot be sure what illness it was that struck her because **“fever”** was a general term for an illness. They did not have the medical knowledge we do today to know that fever is the body’s defense mechanism against illness. So in their terms, she was sick with “the fever” and this fever was severe enough that she could not carry out even the simplest of tasks like preparing a meal – no offense, ladies. Mark tells us that **“immediately”** upon learning the situation, **“they,”** evidently meaning Peter, Andrew, James, and John, **“spoke to Jesus about her,”** revealing the purpose that the meal had not been prepared. We know that their concern in coming to Jesus was not so much the missing meal, but a concern for her illness. Luke said, “they asked Him to help her” (Luke 4:38). They had seen Jesus’ miracles to this point and turned to Jesus in this moment with a plea for help. How would Jesus respond?

2. The working of this miracle (v. 31)

Jesus does not concern himself with the fact that this was the Sabbath. He had already exorcised a demon in the synagogue and He now approaches Peter’s mother-in-law with wonder-working power. This does not suggest that Jesus was not at all concerned about the Sabbath as instituted by the Father. It simply shows that He understood that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath and, as he would demonstrate, “He is the Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28-29). However, legalistic religious leaders would later unjustifiably use His miracle working on the Sabbath against Him.

Notice the simplicity of Mark’s account. **“And He came to her and raised her up.”** Here we see the gentle compassion of our Lord. She was unable to come to Him, so He goes to her. Luke reported that Jesus stood over her (Luke 4:39), showing His calm but confident bedside manner. As Edmond Hiebert notes, “His response was prompt and gracious, marked by a calm confidence. Approaching her couch and facing her, He grasped her hand and raised up the prostrate sufferer. The physical contact served to establish rapport with the sufferer and made it obvious that the healing was an expression of His own volition” [*The Gospel of Mark*, 53-54].

“And the fever left her.” From Luke’s account, some commentators think the fever was a demon because Luke wrote, “He rebuked the fever” (4:39) and Jesus would only have rebuked an unclean spirit and not an illness. This is certainly possible considering the demonic activity

that erupted with Jesus presence as we have already seen in the synagogue and will see further in a moment. But regardless of what the fever was, it **“left her.”** But it did not leave her in a recovery mode, exhausted and beaten down by fever, but fully recovered as evidenced by her immediate action, **“she waited on them.”** She immediately resumes her duties just as though she had not been sick. She had no lingering affects of the illness. Her healing was full and complete. Geoff Thomas vividly portrays the moment. “‘What’s this?’ she said, ‘the great rabbi is here in the house and I’m lying in bed perfectly well and my daughter hasn’t got the food going? What will he think of us? Poor hosts indeed.’ And soon the smell of charcoal burning, and the sound of pans being filled and put on the fire, and the odour of newly cooked food started to fill the house” [<http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/sermons/mark8.htm>].

3. The effect of this miracle (vv. 32-34)

This miracle, coupled with the earlier events in the synagogue, had an immediate impact on the entire city. **“When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed.”** ³³ **And the whole city had gathered at the door.”** Mark is careful to note the time in which this took place. It was not “immediately,” which marks most of the events in this narrative, but after sundown. The Jewish Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday and these people would have broken the Law had they brought the sick and demon-possessed on the Sabbath. Mark again is careful that we note the legalistic tendencies of the crowd.

Mark also makes a distinction between those **“who were ill”** and **“those who were demon-possessed.”** There were those who were ill but not possessed, and those who were possessed that were not necessarily ill. Those who try to show that demon-possession was not real but some manifestation of mental illness totally miss this distinction. Demonic activity was rampant from the beginning of Jesus ministry until the end of His ministry on this earth. It is interesting that Scripture does not speak much about evil spirits or demonic possession prior to Jesus’ ministry nor is it mentioned much after the Cross and His resurrection. That does not mean that demonic activity does not exist today. We will comment on this further in Mark 5. What we need to see here is that we have every reason to believe that every single one of Satan’s minions took up residence in Capernaum during this time and followed Jesus wherever He went. This was their last shot at survival. You remember the demon’s question in the preceding story, **“Have You come to destroy us?”** (1:24). This was not so much a question as a statement of fact. There was great fear in the demonic realm concerning Jesus, who they testified was **“the Holy One of God!”**

But Jesus’ miracles prompted not only action among the demons, but they also generated excitement among the people. There was great enthusiasm surrounding this man. So they brought **“all”** who had any type of ailment, physical or demonic, to Jesus to be healed as the whole city gathered outside.

“And He healed many.” I can think of no greater demonstration of the compassion of Christ in this instance than these words. This does not mean that all that were brought to Jesus were not healed, either because of inability on Jesus’ part or a lack of time. **“Many”** simply refers to the large number that Jesus healed. Matthew clearly states that He healed **“all”** of the **“many,”** or large number, that were brought to Him (8:16). We have every reason to believe that Jesus turned no one away for any reason. He healed them all, no questions asked. He, unlike us at times, did not stop and consider His probable weariness as the night grew later and later. He

did not get out His calendar and see what was on tomorrow's agenda. He healed them all, turning no one away.

Then we see that He again commands the demons to keep silent concerning Him. Again, His purpose in this was two-fold. First, He did not want the people to have an excuse to associate Him with the testimony of the demons, true as their testimony was. Mark plainly states, **“they knew who He was.”** But Jesus also wanted to keep things a secret until the time that the Cross was nearer, until the time had come. There were political and spiritual reasons for this. Political in that the people were looking for a Messiah that would deliver them from the oppression of Rome, which was the prevalent, though misguided, idea concerning Jesus. Spiritual in that no one, not even the disciples, could understand the person and work of Christ apart from His death, burial, and resurrection. Any testimony of the Messiah at this point was presumptuous at best.

So we see the heart of the healer in the way He responds to the people on that day. He had great compassion for the Jews and was devoted to carrying out the work of the ministry in their midst, even to the point of exhaustion. His day began early and lasted well into the night. Yet, He turned no one away. However, Jesus begins to realize that all was not right with these people.

II. His Focus on His Purpose (1:35-39)

We see Jesus compassion not only in the devotion He had for His own people, but perhaps even more in the devotion He had for His purpose. We see this devotion to purpose reflected in two ways.

1. Praying (vv. 35-37)

After a long, exhausting night, Mark tells us, **“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”** Mark records only three instances that Jesus departed from the crowds and went into a solitary place to pray. Each instance marks an occasion where He was under intense oppression by the people who totally disregarded who He is. One is here. The second is after the feeding of the five thousand (6:45-46) where He knew that the people wanted Him to exercise His royal prerogative before His time in a militaristic way. The third is in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32) where He knows that the time is at hand for His passion.

Mark does not tell us, but I am of the opinion that Jesus did not sleep very well that night. Jesus was distraught because His people did not understand His purpose or who He really was. The demons did, but they did not. Jesus did not look at their enthusiasm as a validation for His ministry. He did not have the pragmatic approach that we see all too prevalent in churches today that gage spiritual growth simply by heads and excitement. Jesus was distraught in His spirit, unsettled because His people were using Him for their own physical well-being with no concern for their souls. They were focused on the here and now with no concern for eternity. So Jesus departs to a solitary place to commune with His Father, to receive physical and spiritual refreshment.

But the crowds were not the only ones who misunderstood Jesus purpose at this point. Upon finding Jesus gone, **“Simon and his companions searched for Him.”** The verb in the Greek is very strong, denoting an intent and determined search, literally, “they hunted Him down.” And when they found Him, they ask, “What are You doing out here all by yourself?”

Don't You know that everyone is looking for you?" They imply here that Jesus should return with them and satisfy the crowds who were again looking for Him and seeking His popularity. The disciples thought that Jesus was missing a tremendous opportunity to strengthen His reputation. Jesus reply must have stunned them. He says, "**Let us go somewhere else.**" I can just hear Peter on this occasion. "You want us to do what? I've got the entire town on my doorstep and You want us to leave? Are You sure You know what you're doing?" The answer would be, "Yes, Peter, I know what I am doing." How do we know that Jesus clearly understood that He was to move on? Because He had just spoken with the Father. Instead of hanging around and feeding the frenzy, Jesus demands that they move on. He did not allow the circumstances to dictate His actions and impede His mission.

2. Preaching (vv. 38-39)

His real purpose was to proclaim the gospel of repentance and faith. Notice something here. Jesus would not have fit in real well with many church growth methods today. Jesus did not jettison the gospel or try to dress it up and make it more palatable for them. He did not make the gospel easier to believe or cheapen God's grace by watering the message down. There was nothing more that could be done for or said to these people than had been proclaimed and demonstrated by Jesus on this occasion. They had heard and they had seen. So Jesus says, "**Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also.**" "Let's go somewhere else," Jesus said.

Now you might ask, "How is this showing compassion? He is leaving them in their condition?" My friend, that is the point! Jesus did not hang around and try to manipulate or coerce these people into believing. To have done so would have been a spiritual disservice to them. So Jesus shows His heart for these people, and more importantly His heart for the gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16), *by* leaving them to themselves.

We see this same heart in the story of the rich young ruler. We read in Mark 10:21-22, "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'²² But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property." What did Jesus do? Did He water the message down? Did He lower the bar? Did He make the entrance to heaven a bit more reachable for this young man? No! He let him go. There was nothing more to be said. Nothing more could be done. Jesus left him to himself.

Of course, this takes great spiritual discernment. There are instances when Jesus did press the issue, such as with the adulterous woman at the well. The key is that we must be careful that we remember our purpose, which is to share the gospel, and that we also remember who alone can save a person. We must not change our message to appease the lost. We must not manipulate or coerce a person. Remember, if you talk them into it, someone else can probably talk them out of it. No, we must remember our purpose just as Christ remembered His. We must preach as a dying man to dying men, and leave the results to God. Sometimes that means leaving them or letting them go.

Conclusion

1. The response of Peter's mother-in-law in being healed of a physical ailment serves as a picture of the response that those who have truly been healed spiritually will have.

2. The importance of prayer for discernment and refreshment. How was Jesus able to stay focused on His purpose? If Jesus needed to withdraw to a quiet place, we certainly need to. We need these times of quiet, prolonged communion with the Father for spiritual strength and wisdom.

3. “For that is what I came for.” Many missed Jesus purpose for coming to this earth. They were more interested in the promises than the Promisor; more interested in the blessings than the Blessor. They had great enthusiasm for Jesus, but they lacked faith in Him. Many followed Him only until His demands began to crimp their style. Then they fell away.

Does that describe you this morning? Is it possible that you have accepted the *benefits* of the gospel rather than the gospel itself. There are benefits to the gospel, but only for those who have truly received the gospel, the whole gospel, which does make demands of our lives. Dear friend, you will never truly “deny yourself” unless you have received Christ as Lord and Savior. You will never “take up your cross” without understanding the saving merit in His Cross alone. You will not “follow Him” as He requires if you continue to live your life in your way rather than living your life in His way, only following Him so long as it does not interfere with your schedule. If you know why He came, are you committed without reserve to the service of His kingdom?