

Amazing Healings

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Preacher: Rod McArdle

[0:00] Woody Allen, the New York actor and movie producer, once commented, If only God would give me some clear sign, like making a large deposit in my name in a Swiss bank account.

Recently in the United Kingdom, psychologists asked more than 2,500 people in their age between 16 and 24 to nominate who they most admired.

They could choose political leaders, they could choose artists, religious leaders, etc. The top 20, not surprising, were all celebrities. There was David Beckham, the soccer star, there was actor Brad Pitt and the pop star Justin Timberlake.

Jesus was on the list, he scored a handful of votes. In fact, it was the same number as the US President George W. Bush. When Jesus calmed that terrifying, extraordinary storm on the Sea of Galilee by his powerful word, the disciples were filled with great awe and they said to one another, Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Who indeed is this man? This morning we're looking at Mark chapter 1 verses 29 to 45 and it'll be helpful as we go through it if you've got that passage open on page 813.

[1:41] And this morning is the third message on this first chapter of Mark's Gospel and it's part of our series on the early chapters of Mark. And I wonder if this morning if I was to distribute a piece of paper to each of you and get you to write down, especially those who have been here over the last couple of weeks, get you to respond to this question, What has the Gospel writer Mark been focused on so far?

For us to do that, I wonder how you would respond. Perhaps you'd say, well, John the Baptist or Jesus' baptism and his temptation.

Perhaps the calling of the disciples, the demonised man in the synagogue from last week. Or from today's reading, Simon Peter's mother-in-law. The healing of lots of sick and demonised people.

Or perhaps the healing of the leper. And of course, at one level, if they were the answers, all of those answers are correct. But under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as Mark writes, what is his principal purpose in recording all of these accounts?

Mark doesn't hide his purpose behind a rock. If you look at verse 1, it's very clear. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[3:03] You see, Mark's Gospel is simply about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So one way to think about the book is from verse 2 on through to the end of the book, the Gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And so as we go through these accounts of just amazing healings today, let me encourage each of you to keep that perspective. And this last part of chapter 1 from verse 29 on is useful to think of in four segments, four sections, but they're related to each other.

Verses 29 to 31, the healing of the leper. And then there's a summary of Jesus' ministry down to verse 39. And then the extraordinary story of the healing of the leper, 40 to 42.

And then this unusual instruction to keep quiet in the last couple of verses. You recall, if you had been here last Sunday, that Jesus is in Capernaum and he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

And he teaches there and we read in verse 22, the Jews were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.

[4 : 21] And while he's in the synagogue, he exorcises from a man an unclean spirit. The unclean spirit had cried out, what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. And the people in the synagogue, of course, not surprisingly, they were stunned. They were stunned at his teaching with authority and even being able to command demons.

And so as we come to our passage this morning, it's still the Sabbath. And Jesus and the four disciples, there was Simon Peter and his brother Andrew and James and his brother John, they leave the synagogue and they go back to Simon Peter's house.

It's considered probably quite close to the synagogue. And they go back there to have their main Sabbath meal. You would typically have that immediately after synagogue at the sixth hour, which was noon.

And Mark records for us in verse 30, Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever and they told Jesus about her at once. There was no Sabbath meal that was waiting for the troops.

[5 : 31] There was no roast in the oven. There wasn't even a packaged meal that had been put in the microwave. What there was was a sick cook. Well, I wonder what Mark's purpose is in giving us that incident.

Perhaps he wants us to think a little about mother-in-laws. I wonder. A guy brings his dog into a vet and he says, could you please cut my dog's tail off?

The vet looks at the dog, examines the tail and he says, there's nothing wrong with it. Why would you want this done? And the man replies, well, my mother-in-law's coming to visit and I don't want anything in the house to make her think that she's welcome.

And the story's also told of two men that were in a hotel and one says to his mate, my mother-in-law's an angel. And the other looks at him and says, hmm, you're lucky mine's still alive.

Well, it's easy, isn't it, to look up jokes on the internet. But a friend of mine, his mother-in-law asked him, if you don't like me, then why do you take me on holidays with you?

[6 : 37] And he turns around and said, well, I don't have to kiss you goodbye. And she turns back to him again and she says, but if you hate me so much, then why have you got my picture on the shelf above the fireplace?

A friend turned to her and said, that's to keep the kids away from the fire. Now, I really need to stop at that point, don't I? Otherwise, I'll never get a cup of tea or coffee from the kitchen again.

We actually need to be far more biblical than that. Adam and Eve, of course, were the happiest and they were the luckiest couple in the world because neither of them had a mother-in-law. No, no. Yes, I'll stop now.

My mother-in-law, of course, is wonderful. I mean, she lives in the Gold Coast, but she genuinely, genuinely is wonderful. But this passage is actually not especially focused on mother-in-laws.

Look at its focus in verse 31. Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her and she began to serve them.

[7:40] And it's interesting that the word translated there, fever, signifies a high temperature. That's probably not so much interesting in itself. But in the first century, it was a word that was used to describe actually an illness, not the symptoms of an illness.

And the literal rendering is the fever for succor. There's only two other references in the New Testament as to how this word's used. And the suggestion is that this condition has come on supernaturally, either through demons or divine chastisement.

And when we look at the parallel account in Luke 4, it points us in the direction that this sickness, in fact, was demonic in origin. And in a display of just great compassion and gentleness, Jesus takes Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, lifts her up.

And what happens? The fever leaves her. In fact, the tense of the verb is that it just happened. I wonder if you can remember how sick you felt when you've had a temperature in the high 30s, 38, 39, 40 degrees.

If you can remember that, you'll remember that it's just absolutely life-sapping, isn't it? You feel like your whole body is on fire. And I wonder whether, as you remember such a case, whether you would have been ready to get up and wait on a house full of people.

[9:07] Have you ever had a fever just instantaneously go? I mean, the normal pattern is that a high temperature will subside gradually over a period of time.

You see, God does things in odd ways to make it clear that it's God that's doing it and that there's no other explanation.

This man, this Jesus of Nazareth, has command over disease. Mark makes it very clear of the all-sufficiency of Jesus as a healer.

And Peter's mother-in-law, in fact, proves that she's fully recovered because she gets up and she serves this hungry horde. And the word that's used to describe Peter's mother-in-law serving is the same word that's used back in verse 13 when it says that the angels waited on Jesus during his temptation.

Serving, you see, is the way of Jesus and those who attend him.

[10:23] It also introduces an essential characteristic of the kingdom of God. If you've got your Bibles open, look at verse 15. Do you remember what Jesus' announcement was at the beginning of his Galilean ministry?

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news. See, the kingdom of God was being manifest in the Galilean countryside.

But the kingdom of God was also being manifest in the kitchen, in the house of Simon Peter. And the kingdom of God, or elsewhere spoken of as the kingdom of heaven, is a really important teaching in the Gospels.

It's not God's sovereignty as such, because God is always sovereign. It's not God's reign as such, because God is always reigning. So, what is it then?

What is this kingdom of God? It's the action of the sovereign God by which his reign is restored in power to those areas of his creation that are in rebellion and those that are not acknowledging his rule.

[11:40] The kingdom of God. Are you in the kingdom of God? Scripture is very clear on this. Two kingdoms. Kingdom of God. Kingdom of darkness.

Scripture is also very clear that you enter the kingdom of God by one door and only one door. And that's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Kingdom of God has been opened by Christ's death and resurrection.

And the kingdom of God, as we read in the Gospels, is inaugurated by Jesus' preaching, by his proclamation, but also through his powerful miracles, by his casting out of demons, by his healing the sick, by his extraordinary power over the forces of nature.

All of those attest to that announcement in verse 15 of chapter 1. And as you read through the Gospels, you will have noted that Jesus heals in quite a variety of ways.

A variety of ways that always speak powerfully about a message that he's communicating. And so here Jesus reaches down, he takes the sick woman's hand, and she's immediately healed.

[12:53] It is truly an amazing healing. And the way that Jesus does that expresses his genuine love, his tenderness, his desire to meet this woman's needs.

That's Christ's instinctive way. To touch our hearts. To touch our sinful, rebellious souls by his grace. The love of the Lord for the pinnacle of his creation, that is us, men and women, men and women of all ages, of all different economic and social standings in life, of all races, the love of the Lord is truly wonderful.

Well, the Sabbath ends, and we read in verse 32, that at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door, and he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons.

And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. These miracles signified the mission of Jesus. A mission of Jesus which is redemptive at heart.

That is, providing salvation for sinners like me, and sinners like you. In fact, all of humanity dead in its sins. And the miracles also signified the hand of God at work in human history, advancing his kingdom.

[14:25] When Jesus cast out demons, it was a direct attack on the kingdom of Satan. And it was a pushing back, if you think of it in geographical terms, of his territory.

Jesus' mission was to proclaim the kingdom of God. And Jesus saw this as intimately wrapped up in his miracle working in Luke's Gospel.

Jesus says in chapter 11, If it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then what? Then the kingdom of God has come to you.

Well, back in Mark chapter 1, Mark tells us in verse 35, that it was in the morning, while it was still very dark, that Jesus got up and he went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

Jesus goes to this solitary place. He goes to a deserted place to pray to his Father. Friends, Jesus was not just some magician doing wonders, independent of God.

[15:26] Jesus' authority, his strength, his power, all of that came from God alone. And I find that a convicting reminder in my own life, I wonder if you do, of the need for myself to be absolutely dependent every day on the Lord.

It's probably about this basic, isn't it? If it was good enough for Jesus, how much more does that apply in each of our cases? I wonder if verse 36 caught your attention.

We read, Simon and his companions hunted, hunted for Jesus. This is like an urgent manhunt, and it's an excellent translation of what's there in the original Greek.

You see, Simon interrupts Jesus at prayer. Busy Simon. We see busy Simon right through the Gospels, don't we? I mean, there's a lot that the disciples have to learn about Jesus and the Kingdom of God, and we see that unfold as they then travel with Jesus over the course of the next three years.

You can imagine, though, of course, the excitement that must have been in Capernaum. Think about it in our world today. When we were living in Brisbane, as I was thinking about this passage, I can remember seeing this great sign across the road.

[16:44] So maybe that was the case that what the disciples wanted to see in Capernaum, a great sign hung across the road, something like, come to the tent of miracles. Or if you move it right into the 21st century, maybe you go to a web page with very large font lettering, something like, come to Capernaum, the miracle healing center of Palestine.

I mean, the disciples clearly wanted to build on this surging, rising popularity and success of Jesus. I mean, maybe they could even establish a healing theme park there.

Well, how did Jesus respond? Verse 38. Let us go on to the neighboring towns so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.

Jesus is not going to be distracted from his divine mission. He isn't going to be the local Capernaum guru or their captured healer.

It's interesting that in the modern church today, there are segments of it that I believe want a magic Jesus, someone who will simply provide health and wealth to them.

[18:00] But God is not someone to be used. He's the Lord. He's to be loved. He's to be worshipped regardless of our circumstances in life.

In Jesus' earthly life, as he went around Palestine and as we read in Capernaum, Jesus did heal many people. And Jesus still heals today.

But if you think about physical healings, at best, they're very temporal, aren't they? And they are very temporal against a perspective of eternity.

It is right to say that Jesus' mission was a healing mission. It was a deliverance mission. Jesus came healing the souls of men and women like you and me in salvation.

He came delivering men and women like you and me from the slavery, the entrapment of the devil. Jesus does have a healing heart.

[19:11] Perhaps this morning I'm speaking to someone and you know in your heart that Jesus Christ is not your Saviour and Lord. Then my challenge to you this morning is to reflect on how sick are you?

How spiritually sick are you? What actually is your state before Almighty God? Of course, for many of us here this morning you've known Christ as your Saviour and Lord for many years.

And then my encouragement, my challenge is then to do what Jesus tells us to do and that's to be proclaimers of his good news. Well, Mark records in verse 39 that Jesus went throughout Galilee, he proclaimed the message in the synagogues and he cast out demons.

And then with that general statement, Mark comes and he focuses in on one miracle. A leper came to Jesus begging him, kneeling, he said to him, if you choose, you can make me clean.

And the man's condition is described by a term which actually embraces quite a breadth of skin diseases and within that breadth there is certainly true leprosy or what we would call Hansen's disease.

[20:28] Leprosy of course is a chronic infectious disease, it attacks the skin, it attacks the peripheral nerves and the mucous membranes, things like eyes and the respiratory tract. And because leprosy attacks the surface nerves in the cool spots of the body, your fingers and your toes they become anethonised, they stop feeling any pain.

And because they're not feeling any pain they're extraordinarily prone to injury, to stiffness, to cuts, to burns, to bruises and you don't feel anything. An infection sets in.

Leprosy in all ages has been considered to be one of the most despicable of all diseases. And throughout history, victims of leprosy, sufferers of leprosy have been despised and they've been kept in separate places.

And even today, those with leprosy are shunned by their neighbours and they're held at arm's length. And we know as we look at this account in verse 44, that the laws that we can read in Leviticus 13 and 14 were still in operation in Palestine at this time.

And what the Jews called this scale disease, in scale disease, this disease was considered a threat to Israel's purity. And in fact in Numbers 12, the book of Numbers, sufferers were regarded as the living dead, the living dead, and they were excluded from the community.

[22 : 04] the Jews believed that God was the only one who could cure it. In fact, being healed of leprosy was considered, if you like, in the same vein as being raised from the dead.

And so, when you read Leviticus, you see that a priest can offer no healing. What the priest seeks to do is safeguard Israel's holiness. And a leper was confined by a strict set of rules.

But this leper, this leper approaches in defiance of the taboo. He breaks through, if you like, all of the religious barricades to confront Jesus and he casts himself at Jesus' feet.

Think about it. This man, this outcast, this mass of rotting flesh. At one level, that's what he was.

But it's interesting that this man, with just a disgusting physical appearance, had an appearance and an insight that was, I think, demonstrably different to lots of beautiful people without leprosy in our city of Melbourne.

[23 : 18] Because this man, this man in this terrible physical condition recognised Jesus' sovereignty and his power. He says, if you choose, you can make me clean.

See, here was basic faith. The man didn't question Jesus' ability to save him. He didn't have a question about whether Jesus was willing. And look at Jesus' response in verse 41.

moved with pity. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I do choose, be made clean. Think carefully about the significance of that.

Think carefully about it against the title of this sermon series. Who is this man? You see, the Torah, that is the Old Testament law, and the priest, all they could do was to declare that the man was unclean.

But Jesus of Nazareth, what does he do? He transcends the law, he transcends the Torah, he transcends Moses. His presence could do what the reading of the Torah could not do.

[24 : 32] immediately we read the leprosy left him and the man was made clean. In that first chapter of Mark, Jesus commands both the demons and also this healed leper to keep silent.

We sort of read that and think, oh, that's a bit curious. Why would that be the case? There's a number of reasons, I think, for that instruction. Firstly, Jesus didn't want to fuel the wrong expectations of the Messiahship.

He didn't want to be seen as coming as some sort of military hero who was going to overthrow the Romans. And he didn't want his faith to be based on spectacles.

Jesus didn't want an adoring crowd who had no understanding or proper commitment to him. And importantly, Jesus' primary mission of salvation involves suffering.

It involves death on a cross. You see, he didn't simply come as a wonder worker. He came to give his life as a ransom for you and for me.

[25 : 42] Do you know this man? Because outside of a relationship with Christ, the reality is we're actually all spiritual lepers.

We're cut off from communion, from interaction, if you like, with the living God, from relationship. Our only source of holiness, our only source of purification is trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.

And God is compassionate and he reaches out to us and he reaches out to us through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to touch us, to restore us.

And I know as I speak to this 10 o'clock congregation that the great percentage of people that are listening to this message this morning know the reality of Jesus' restoring power in your lives.

But friends, we're actually surrounded in our daily lives by spiritual lepers, whether that's our neighbours, whether that's friends at college, our work colleagues, whether it's people at our senior citizens club, spiritual lepers cut off not in relationship with the living God.

[27 : 07] And sharing the extraordinary, the wonderful good news is in fact our fundamental duty. It's our fundamental duty to alert people to their condition.

And so we just have a wonderful opportunity don't we on July 11th to do just that with the introducing God series. Let me encourage you to be prayerful even as we worship together this morning as to who you might be able to invite.

The responses are probably can only be three. Yes, I'd love to come. No, absolutely not interested. I'll think about it. To think about it probably means not interested. But it's probably just one of those three.

let me encourage you to be prayerful about that. Surrounded by spiritual lepers and we as the proclaimer of the good news that Jesus indeed is the healer.

He is the deliverer. Let me pray for us. Father, we thank you that you are a compassionate God.

[28 : 15] We thank you that in your compassion and love you sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die on a cross to pay the price of our sins. Lord, we praise you that we can be part of your glorious and eternal kingdom of God by faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, we thank you for your powerful word. We thank you for your powerful spirit. And I pray that as we've considered this passage this morning that we would continue to be open to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in each of our hearts as he challenges us, as perhaps he convicts us, as he encourages us, as he teaches us.

Lord, may we be open to your continued ministry to us through our time this morning and through the days ahead. We ask these things for Christ's sake and in his name.

Amen.