

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Mark</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Text</b>	<b>Mark 1:29-45</b>		Mason Depew
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### THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

In this passage, Jesus continues his ministry alternating between teaching and miracles to verify his teaching. But once again, as before, the way he goes about this is not the way we would typically expect. He rejects self-aggrandizement and avoids the adoration of large crowds in favor of communing with his Father through prayer. Examining this text closely foreshadows the real mission he has come to accomplish, and it is not healing people for their own sake. It is a foretaste of something far deeper, wider, and more wonderful than any of the crowds, or even his own disciples, could imagine.

#### 1. Healing Fever | Verses 29-34

- a. This healing appears to take place on the same Sabbath as the previous section, when Jesus rebuked the demon. Therefore, this is still in Capernaum, which is a very small fishing village, so it is indeed possible that the whole town gathered at Simon's door (v. 33) for healing!
  - i. There is no way of knowing exactly what Simon's mother-in-law's illness was here. In the ancient world, people generally considered fevers to be dangerous illnesses in and of themselves, not a symptom of something else as we understand them today. So they would not assume this was just a seasonal flu that will pass in a few days. When someone was observed to have a fever like this, it was anyone's guess whether the patient would live or die.
  - ii. Not only does Jesus remove the immediate problem, but we can see that the woman makes a full recovery! That is why Mark includes the detail that she immediately began to serve them. She must have felt great, and deeply grateful at the same time.
- b. Why does Jesus heal in the way that he does? He often seems to do it in confined places, like Simon's house, here, or at his own house in the next chapter.
  - i. Is this the way faith healers today work? Do they heal large numbers of people, but in small, private settings? No! They tend to put on a huge show over healing very few people, and their claims to actually heal anyone at all are dubious. They usually involve conditions that are more subjective and may even be psychosomatic. This tells you what their priorities are: maximum publicity for minimal actual healing. It's a great tragedy that so many are taken in by them.
  - ii. Christ's healings follow the opposite pattern: simple and private, but generating huge crowds simply because they are so undeniably *real*. The news spreads organically. People who have had deadly or chronic illnesses suddenly being fine again will turn heads *without* all the showmanship and television broadcasts.
- c. We should also notice that the scale of these healings is on another level from anything before this in Scripture. There is no prophet in all the Old Testament who heals like this.

Elijah and Elisha definitely had some noteworthy healings but they were relatively few and far between.

- i. The incident of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21 is probably the closest point of comparison for scale. Moses does not tell us even rough estimates for how many were bitten versus how many healed by looking at the bronze serpent, but we can assume it was a large number based on the size of the people at that time.
  - ii. The key difference with this, however, is that the bronze serpent is set up as a test of faith. That is, it exposes which of the people believe Moses is a prophet of God and follow his words, versus those who have totally hardened hearts and will not listen. This miracle is not really designed as a sign of grace so much as an ordeal to sift out the most hardened unbelievers among the people.
  - iii. On the other hand, there are numerous grand prophecies in the Old Testament of mass healings *to come*. This is a major sign of the Messiah's coming. In fact, one of the most striking of these prophecies, Isaiah 35, also claims that the Lord will make rivers of life and a highway in the desert, sounding a lot like John the Baptist's calling earlier in Mark 1.<sup>1</sup> There is even a reference to the jackals in the wilderness, who definitely fit Mark's description of the wild animals in Jesus's temptations, too. It seems highly likely that Mark was thinking of Isaiah 35 when he wrote these first few chapters of his Gospel.
- d. What do the crowds want here? Do they understand what Jesus has come for? Do they really want Jesus himself, or just his power? Do they just want a practical problem taken care of so they can get on with their lives? The next several stories Mark recounts give us the answer.

## 2. Avoiding the Crowds | Verses 35-39

- a. The fact that Christ keeps going out to “desolate places” foreshadows two important points:
  - i. There is a side to him that no one, not the crowds or even his disciples, really understands, and this will become more and more obvious as Mark continues to recount Jesus's life to us. Instead of wallowing in self-pity (as we often do when we feel misunderstood), he seeks fellowship with his Father through prayer (v. 35).
  - ii. He is still trying to manage his popularity and avoid building a massive movement. As we saw from the earlier section of Mark 1, Jesus treats his Messianic identity as something of a secret. At the same time he is displaying divine power, he does not want either those he has healed or even the demons themselves to tell people who he is (v. 34).
- b. Notice again how different this is from faith healers! When there turns out to be another side to one of them, it's not a deep prayer life, but a hypocritical double life. Mike Bickle is one of the most notorious recent examples of this. He was dismissed from leading the International House of Prayer in Kansas City in 2023 after credible accusations from 17

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<sup>1</sup> “Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.” - Isaiah 35:4-8

women of sexual abuse.<sup>2</sup> Other prominent Christian teachers and authors, like Francis Chan and Sam Storms, had to publicly distance themselves and apologize for endorsing him in the past.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Healing the Leper

- a. The way the Jews thought of leprosy was profoundly shaped by the Law of Moses, and especially Leviticus 13-14.<sup>4</sup> Like many other things associated with the death and decay of living in a fallen world, leprosy made you unclean and therefore unworthy of entering into God's presence for worship. Much like fevers were poorly understood and therefore could include a multitude of diseases we have since distinguished, the term "leprosy" could cover a wide range of visible skin diseases.
  - i. This is very confusing and frustrating for modern Christians, who tend to take it for granted that everyone should be welcome in God's presence, and *especially* the most needy, such as those with chronic illnesses.
  - ii. Having leprosy made you unclean, but that doesn't mean you were blamed for it as being especially sinful. As Michael Morales explains it, sin and uncleanness are connected, but not the same.<sup>5</sup>
  - iii. This view, although it seems counterintuitive at first, is important because it is actually honest about what a serious problem these kinds of illnesses are. The Bible doesn't try to downplay people's real problems by ignoring or minimizing them. Instead, Scripture tells us that yes, chronic illnesses like these are a big deal.
  - iv. Think of how it would feel to be a leper: it would be as if your life is already over. No one would want to be around you; even if the Levitical laws didn't exist you would still be an outcast and wouldn't be allowed inside a busy city like Jerusalem. You would be reduced to trying to survive day by day. You would feel more like an animal than human.<sup>6</sup> This perfectly represents the misery that the Fall brought on humanity. We are cursed to die little by little, be divided from one another, and feel the weight of our sin each day.<sup>7</sup> Leprosy is just one of the most painfully obvious forms of this, but everyone bears a version of this curse in Adam.

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<sup>2</sup> You can find links to the unredacted report of the independent investigator as well as a YouTube video of IHOPKC's response on their website.

<sup>3</sup> You can find Francis Chan's apology on his website, [crazylove.org](http://crazylove.org), and Sam Storms's on his website, [samstorms.org](http://samstorms.org).

<sup>4</sup> Jakob Milgrom, the renowned Jewish commentator, summarizes the Levitical view of leprosy this way: "Israel's neighbors ascribed illness to a demonic entity that overtook the body. To heal the afflicted person, a healer exorcised the demon, banishing with it the demonic illness. Israel rejected this vision of illness and, with it, the vision of the pagan physician or magician. Healing comes from God alone, either directly (Exod 15:26\*) or through a surrogate, the prophet (e.g., Moses, Exod 15:25\*; Elijah, 1 Kgs 17:22\*; Elisha, 2 Kgs 2:21\*; Isaiah, 2 Kgs 20:7-8\*). Disease is not a demonic entity independent of God, nor is ritual an intrinsically effective agency of healing. Both disease and healing, the ailment and what cures it, stem from the one God. The ritual, bereft of its inherent power, is transformed into a symbolic purification; it becomes a religious, and not a therapeutic, act. In a provocative insight about the nature of illness and health, the Leviticus text ascribes them both to the same divine source." - Jakob Milgrom,

<sup>5</sup> "To summarize, while in Leviticus 11-15 uncleanness is not flatly or immediately equated with particular sinful acts, it is nevertheless treated as being generally or ultimately the result of sin: uncleanness represents the pollution of sin. Contact with a carcass results in uncleanness, therefore, not because such contact is in itself a sin, but because death and mortality are the result of sin. Precisely here the correlation between holiness and life/wholeness is critical. Physical imperfection, disruptions, deformities and maladies, though not considered sinful in themselves, nevertheless still reflect sin's damage and pollution of the earth, and therefore require ritual cleansing." - L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, 161.

<sup>6</sup> Look at how much Naaman's king wanted to pay to have him cured, because he was a valuable man! "And the king of Syria said, 'Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel.' So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, 'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy.'" - 2 Kings 5:5-6

<sup>7</sup> This is why God cursed Adam and Eve not only with literal death, but with misery throughout regular life, as well. "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of

- v. It would not actually be kind to downplay this and act like nothing is wrong. Instead, Scripture offers a solution. In Leviticus 14, cleansing rituals are given to purify a person who has recovered from leprosy, so he or she can be received back into the people of God. There is even a less expensive version of the ritual for the poor.<sup>8</sup> It is no doubt these laws that Christ had in mind when he told the man to “go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them” (v. 44).
- b. With this healing, Jesus is showing that he has not come to cure the common cold, or to give people a placebo, but to undo the Fall itself. He shows that he is the Creator who made all things “very good” in Genesis 1, and can make them very good again. Notice how the leper recognizes Jesus’s overwhelming divine power with his simple, humble, request: “If you will, you can make me clean” (v. 40).
    - i. Notice how even though Jesus tells him to go to the priest for the ritual, it is absolutely clear that the leper has already been both healed *and made clean*. The leper says Jesus can do this in verse 40, Jesus says he will in verse 41, and Mark confirms this is what he did in verse 42. This shows how much better Christ is than the priests of the Old Covenant. The best they could do was contain God’s holiness in the Temple, and contain the people’s uncleanness outside, to keep the two from mixing and causing an explosive reaction. But our great High Priest Jesus radiates cleanness and righteousness and life from himself in a way that no one else can.<sup>9</sup>
    - ii. Since he has not yet been crucified to atone for our sins, the crowds and even his disciples cannot yet understand this. So he continues to try and contain the growth of his reputation, but this leper ungratefully disobeys his command (v. 45).<sup>10</sup> Jesus therefore avoids towns and villages for a while, and ministers to those who come to him in the wilderness, much like John earlier did.
    - iii. We will see this even more clearly in the next chapter, where our Lord heals a paralytic and forgives his sins simultaneously. His critics scoff at the idea he can forgive sin, so he silences them by healing the Fall’s effects, in this case paralysis. Just as uncleanness and sin are linked, but not the same, Jesus’s mission is not healing per se, but it is linked to his mission inasmuch as it proves he can do the job he has come to do.
  - c. All of this foreshadows the consummation of the New Creation at Christ’s return. With our atonement paid for in his first coming, he will finish what he started with his second. This is John’s glorious vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:3-4, where our Lord declares, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”
    - i. This gives us something very important to say to those in our midst who are suffering right now with illness or disabilities that seem like they will never go

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which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” - Genesis 3:16-19

<sup>8</sup> “This is the law for him in whom is a case of leprosy, who cannot afford the offerings for his cleansing.” - Leviticus 14:32

<sup>9</sup> “...who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.” - Hebrews 7:16

<sup>10</sup> To be fair to the leper, though, it would be very hard not to tell people about this, particularly since people in small towns like this would recognize him and ask what happened. That doesn’t excuse his actions, since Mark says he told people “freely,” i.e. he was not trying to contain it at all, apparently. But it is easy to imagine how we might do the same.

away. When Christ returns to take us into his new creation, *all things* will be made new. You will not be left out. You will be made whole, more completely healthy and vigorous than any of us are today by virtue of Christ's indestructible life.

- ii. For the time being, we need to turn our attention instead to our more basic problem, which is sin. We *all* deserve to have our bodies broken with conditions worse than leprosy. So the question is, will you come to Jesus and have your sins forgiven? What prevents you? Do you feel that you are too sinful for the Lamb to cover? Are you more twisted than the Creator can straighten out? Do you want to try and partially fix yourself before he will heal or forgive the rest? You may think you are being humble if you think these things, but you really have nothing but pride. There is no one on earth who should not say, "If you will, you can make me clean" to Christ. But many will refuse to do that, because their hearts are hardened by unbelief. As a classic hymn says, "Come, ye weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall; if you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all."