

The Servant's Touch

Mark 1:29-1:34

This morning it was so tempting to start off with a mother-in-law joke. But, I have several problems.

First, I have been assured that it would be in very poor taste.

Second, it would be a horrible thing to make light of this woman that was reported to be sick.

Third, I have a really great relationship with my mother-in-law and I can't dishonor that.

Last week we looked at the voice of Jesus, and how his voice breaks the allure of temptation and brings us back into reality. We looked at Jesus' announcement of God's Kingdom, his calling of people to follow him, his teaching, and his rebuking of the forces of evil. Each time Jesus spoke his words broke through people's lives. Today we're going to talk about his touch.

But before we start, let me talk a minute about how I'm going to suggest we apply this section today. When we talk about Jesus touching people, it's hard to relate that to today because Jesus isn't physically present with us today. Although Jesus rose from the grave on the third day, according to the Bible His physical presence is in now heaven at the Father's right hand as our Savior and Advocate. So how can people experience the touch of Jesus today if He's not physically present?

Well the primary way is through Jesus Christ's Church. You see, the Bible calls the Church "the body of Christ." That means that although Jesus' physical body is in heaven, the Church fills the void created by His physical absence. So one way Jesus touches people is through His community, His gathered people who seek to love and follow Jesus. So although His touch certainly isn't limited to the Church, I believe the gathered Christian community is one of the primary ways people experience the touch of Jesus in their lives today.

So as we apply this section of Mark to our lives, I'll be suggesting that we apply it to ourselves individually and also to ourselves as a church.

Open your Bibles to Mark 1 as I read verses 29-34:

29 Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once.

31 So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.

32 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed.

33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

34 Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

Now in this passage, Mark records essentially for us a day in the life of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. What we see in a day in the life of the Lord Jesus, was that He was constantly serving - that ought to be no surprise to us: the Servant of the Lord constantly serving.

Last week we saw Jesus go to the synagogue and preach and heal with Divine authority. He cleansed a man of an unclean spirit and astonished those who witnessed and heard. His fame spread abroad throughout all the region around Galilee.

So we saw last week in verses 21 to 22 the authority that there was in the teaching of Christ, the word of the Lord. Then we saw also in verses 23 to 28 that that authority was manifest and demonstrated in the authority that Christ had over the demonic spirit that was in the man. Now we will see, this morning in verses 29 to 34, that the Lord had authority not only in His words and teaching, and authority over the kingdom of darkness, but He also had authority over sickness.

Mark says immediately when they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Once the Sabbath morning service in the synagogue was over, they moved on to Simon Peter's house, but instead of a delicious, Sabbath feast, they found a sick cook.

We're going to see Jesus' healing touch. This is one of about three dozen specific healings Jesus performs that are recorded for us in the New Testament.

Now there were lots of self-proclaimed "healers" in the ancient world, and most of them were similar to the faith healers we see on TV. Most of them were charlatans and quacks, people who put on a show and tried to line their pockets at the expense of desperate and hurting people. Ancient faith healers were quick to call attention to their exploits, making sure everyone knew of their supposed healings. But this first healing in Mark's story doesn't fit the pattern of ancient faith healers. This healing comes in private, witnessed by just a few people.

The setting is Jesus' visit at the home of Simon and Andrew. Archeologists have actually uncovered a ruins of a home in the ancient city of Capernaum that they believe to be the home spoken of here. They believe it to be Peter's home because it has graffiti and drawings on the walls with Christian symbolism dating back to the time of Jesus.

Simon's mother-in-law is home, sick in bed with a fever. Now technically, a fever isn't an illness, but it's a symptom. But for whatever reason-maybe she had the flu-she was so feverish that she couldn't even get up out of bed. So Jesus heals her, but he heals her without saying a word. Most self-proclaimed faith healers in the ancient world would use incantations, elaborate rituals, or special potions to try to heal people. And most of their supposed healings would take days to accomplish. But what Jesus does is very different. He simply takes her hand, helps her up, and as He does, immediately the fever breaks. Jesus doesn't say a word. His touch is all she needs, and when His hands are on her, He heals her.

The rabbinic rules for visiting the sick - maybe you didn't know there were any! - stated that visitors were not permitted to sit on the bed or on a chair, but had to stand on the floor. They even had rules about how you visit the sick! But the Lord disregards them, and He touches the sick person. We're going to see later in this same chapter, verse 41, that He even touches a poor man with leprosy - and His

extension of hand was simply an expression of His love, how His love was going out to this wretch who was rejected. I wonder do we reach out like that?

This woman's immediate response to the touch of Jesus is to begin waiting on them. The word for "serve " here in v. 31 is the same word Jesus will use in Mark 10:45, when he says that he didn't come to the earth to be served, but to serve. The point of this event is that a Christian's place is serving others. When Jesus touches a person to heal them, the natural response is to serve God's people, to use the opportunity of being restored to health as an opportunity to serve. We are saved to serve.

Now this miracle isn't very spectacular. It's in the privacy of a home, witnessed only by Simon, Andrew, James and John, and of course, Simon's mother-in-law. Yet by that evening, the entire community gathers at the doorway to Simon's home for healing and prayer.

At night it seemed as if all Capernaum, having heard of the man in the synagogue being healed, gathered at Peter's door bringing sick people, demon-possessed people. The Greek verb indicates that these folk kept bringing people, they kept on coming. Now, as long as it was still the Sabbath, people dared not bring people who couldn't walk, or see, or the demon-possessed, because it would entail carrying them, and the law said that carrying a burden through a town on the Sabbath day was forbidden. So they had to wait until the Sabbath was ended - do you see how these people were all strapped with rules and regulations that prevented them serving and helping others?

Imagine the scene, with people having every possible kind of sickness, limping, walking, being carried or dragged to this miracle worker named Jesus. Amputees who lost limbs in battles, epileptics, people with birth defects and abnormalities, people feverish with deadly viruses. Picture the scene as a multitude of sick and diseased people gather in front of the house for help. What a sight it must've been.

The town also brought the demon-possessed, people who were oppressed by demonic spirits. Jesus heals many of the sick and diseased people, restoring them to physical health. When He drives out demons, Jesus silences the evil spirits so they don't announce who Jesus is. As we said last week, most likely, Jesus' reason for this is because He doesn't want the truth about who He is announced by a demonic spirit. A demon is a bad character witness.

Here in this section we find Jesus' HEALING TOUCH. By touching others to heal them, Jesus shows us His authority over disease and over demons. Jesus' healing miracles are another sign that God's Kingdom has invaded human history. So the miracles point to something else, to God's intervention in human history in a special way. The rule and reign of God has broken through our rule and reign on earth.

Late into the night miracle after miracle took place. Diseases were defeated, demons were denounced and all of these miracles were, in Matthew's words, "to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES." Matthew 8:17

Now Jesus didn't heal every sick person he came in contact with. And even those he did heal eventually got sick again and eventually died. So Jesus' healings here are partial, and temporary, a mere foretaste of future life in God's

Kingdom. Physical healing merely points us forward to our eventually resurrection and enjoyment of immortality in God's presence.

And Jesus' healing touch still comes to people, and it often comes through His Church. As we gather and worship together, as we pray for each other and follow Jesus together, the healing touch of Jesus comes to people.

Many of you have been healed by the Lord from illnesses and injuries as the people in this church have prayed for you.

Yet Jesus still doesn't heal everyone. My mother was a godly woman, a follower of Jesus Christ who believed in prayer. But she died of ovarian cancer at the age of 51.

Why does the healing touch of Jesus come to some people and not others? I don't know. I think it's just a mystery, a mystery we can't explain and shouldn't try to explain. I certainly don't think it's because we don't have enough faith or that there's hidden sin in the sick person's life. I think it's cruel to blame a sick person for their own lack of healing.

We need to constantly remember that physical healing in this life is only a foretaste of the real thing. When healing does come we should rejoice and thank God. But when it doesn't come we shouldn't beat ourselves up or try to figure out just the right formula. We simply keep walking, keep following Jesus,. Full and final healing will come at the resurrection, and until then, the healing touch of Jesus is mysterious.

Now as I conclude this message I just want to point out a couple things. I want to first of all contrast these two types of healings in this passage. What am I talking about? Well, there is the healing of Peter's wife's mother, and then there is the healing of all those in the crowd. Most of the crowd, I freely admit, all they wanted was for Jesus to do something for them. They wanted something from Jesus. To put it bluntly: they were just using Him, most of them anyway. I can't blame them for that, because if I had a sick child I would be using Him too. Yet they tragically foreshadow millions in our world even today who want Christ for what they hope to get out of Christ, but are not willing to serve and follow Christ.

That so easily can be us: we want Jesus for what He can do for us - He can take all our sins away, He can take us to heaven, He can give us a reason to live - but follow Him? Be His disciple? Carry a cross? Lay our lives down for others? So many are like those who Jesus said, after He fed 5000 people in John 6:26: 'Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled'. Who will we be like? Will we be like the crowd around Peter's door? Or will we be like Peter's mother-in-law? She was healed and strengthened and immediately she began to serve. We are saved to serve God and to serve others!

When Jesus touches us, we need to get up immediately and begin serving.

When Jesus touches us with power, it is not to make us feel important. His touch of power is for service, not for feelings of self-importance.

When Jesus touches us with power we are not to wait until others begin serving. We are to get up ourselves and launch the ministry of reaching others for the Lord.

And second, we find the greatest contrast is with the greatest Servant: how do we measure up in our service? This convicts me to the core. If we were to take the Lord Jesus as our example, a day in the life of His service: we see three times here Jesus healing people, look at it. First He's in the synagogue, equivalent to where we are now; second He's in the house of friends; and third He's in the street. Do you know what that tells me? Wherever there was trouble, wherever there was a need, wherever there were people, He was there. He was ready to use His power, He was ready to give what God had given to Him to serve - and the people flocked to Him, why? Because they perceived this in Him, that He was ready, He was willing, He was able to help - and even when He knew that they were only superficial, and they only wanted the loaves and the fish, and they only wanted their loved one healed, His compassion compelled Him!

Well, how is our service? How is mine? What is a day in our life like? We waste so much time on things of no profit, don't we? - and I'm including myself in this. John Wesley, the great evangelist, each evening took an appraisal and a review of every hour of his day to account for whether or not he was really serving the Lord.

People today are looking for healing, recovery, and wholeness, and whether they use the word or not—they are looking for salvation!!! We are the ones who have been transformed in order to serve the world and bring the message of Christ's salvation.