

## The Place of the Miraculous

### Mark 1:29-45

#### Introduction

Are miracles real? There is the story of a minister who had been trained to explain away miracles in the Bible. The minister was preaching on the Israelites escaping from Egypt and the minister refers to the Israelites passing through the Red Sea, to which a member of the congregation cries out, “Hallelujah! All those Israelites passing through the deep water on dry ground!” The minister continues though saying, “However, we know that the translation here should be “Sea of Reeds” which is really not very deep at all and so it wouldn’t have been hard for the Israelites to cross over.” And the congregation member cries out again, “Hallelujah! All those Egyptians drowned in only two inches of water!”

We certainly may look in greater detail at the evidence for the miraculous in the future but it’s not something which is ever really defended in the Bible. The miraculous simply is. What is of interest in the Bible, and the Gospels in particular, is what miracles represent (or point to) and how are they to be responded to.

Miracles will be presented all through Mark’s Gospel but in this section, at the end of chapter 1, healing miracles first come to the fore and we’re given insights into the motivation of Jesus in performing healing miracles and what is the appropriate response of people to the miracles.

#### Reasons Jesus Performed Miracles of Freeing People From Sickness and Demons

There are a number of factors which influenced and motivated Jesus to perform healing miracles and so I’ll put them up on the screen to hopefully make things clearer.

First, **Jesus heals because he cares (vv. 30-31; 41)**. For some, Jesus’ miracles are all about the power that Jesus has and the miracles do indeed

demonstrate that Jesus has power over sickness, death, Satan and demons, nature, provisions, etc. However, what motivates Jesus to express that power is his care for people. There is a beautiful little personal touch when Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus "took her hand and helped her up." Jesus' tender helping of Peter's mother-in-law is also seen in his willingness to heal the leper. Not only does Jesus say that he is willing to heal the man, and does so, but Jesus "reached out his hand and touched the man." Lepers were unclean and anyone who touched one became unclean. How long had it been since the man had been touched? Jesus shows great love in touching the man as he heals him.

Second, Jesus was motivated to bring **healing to body and soul as well as community (vv. 32-34; 40-44)**. This motivation is brought out more clearly in some other accounts of healings but it is still indicated here. In the very brief account in verses 32 to 34 we're told, "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was." Jesus heals people whether their sickness is explicitly physical or connected to demonic forces. Jesus is concerned with people's total well being.

Jesus' concern for people wellness goes beyond the individual and also extends to community care. With the cultural gap between us and this story it's harder for us to see it but we can note it in two places. First, we're told, "the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed." These aren't individuals coming to Jesus for an appointment, this is a town moving so that they themselves, or family members, or neighbours, can all be healed. Second, when we're told that the leper was healed, the wording is significant, "'I am willing,' [Jesus] said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed." The man was healed, "the leprosy left him," but he was also cleansed. The man was able to re-engage with his community and family.

While Jesus isn't providing a textbook for medical care here, it is interesting that best medical practice today includes an awareness that treatment of patients has to

factor in aspects relating to patients' physical, mental, emotional well-being as well as broader societal and community factors at play.

The third factor in Jesus performing miracles is that **Jesus' healings are guided by his Father's plans and priorities (v. 35)**. I wonder what was going through Jesus' head when he could finally lie down at Simon's house and get some rest? Was Jesus' brain spinning as he remembers the large number of people who had been healed and how the whole town had come to him? Jesus would have been aware that surely the numbers would swell again the next day but rather than assuming that chasing after numbers and influence was to be the priority, he takes himself away to pray and to listen as to what was to be the priorities. This leads us to the next point, which is that **Jesus' healings are not about attracting a crowd (v. 37)**. This point is made even more clearly at the end of the chapter where the report of Jesus healing the leper meant that "As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."

So then, if Jesus' healing ministry wasn't about attracting a crowd, what was Jesus' motivation? My fifth point is that **Jesus' healings are secondary to his preaching ministry (vv. 38-39)**. After Simon and the others had excitedly told Jesus that "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come." Jesus priority was sharing his message which was focused upon the Kingdom of God and its coming with his presence. However, we need to not draw too sharp a distinction between Jesus' preaching ministry and his healing ministry because look what we're immediately told next, "So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons." As such, we can say that **Jesus' healings are connected to his preaching (v. 39)**. Holding these two principles together means that we recognise that Jesus' healing ministry demonstrates the values and power of the kingdom of God which was the content of Jesus' message as well as the authority which Jesus has as the Holy One of God who brings the kingdom.

Moving on to the final two factors which motivated Jesus' healing ministry, we're going to focus on Jesus' interaction with the man suffering from leprosy and I'm going to need to take a little bit of time to explain things as this section is a bit difficult with the language. Let me read this section again for us,

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.'

Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

There are two sections here that cause some problems. First, when the man asked Jesus to make him clean, we're told that "Jesus was indignant." Now while some versions use the sentence, "Jesus was filled with compassion." That's almost certainly a later change because the first one seems awkward and is more likely to be original because a scribe would more likely make things easier to read. Why would Jesus be indignant because a man is asking for healing? Jesus' indication makes more sense though if we realise that his indignation is at the sickness which now blights his creation. Thus we can say that **Jesus' healings are connected to his great frustration at the fallenness of the world and Satan's binding of people (v. 41).**

Jesus' frustrations are also in view when we're told how Jesus spoke to the leper once he had been healed, "Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.'" Now it's easy for us to read Jesus' strong warning in light of the fact that the man later went out and spread news about what Jesus has done but I don't think that's the focus here. The expression is almost one of saying that Jesus growls or snorts out his statement

before driving the man off but who's the target of his frustration? Critically, the phrase, "But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." does not have to be viewed positively but can be translated negatively. If this phrase is to be read negatively the testimony is against the priests. Jesus' frustration was not at the leper but at the priestly system which had shown itself in being completely ineffectual in bringing healing and hope to people who were hurting and alienated from their communities. Thus, another motivation for Jesus is that his **healings demonstrate his power in comparison with the impotence of the priestly system (vv. 43-44)**. The impression here is that Jesus is indignant at seeing how Satan is able to bind people into sickness and then, after healing the man, sends him away with a statement to the priests saying that God's kingdom is coming in him in a way that hasn't happened under the priests' watch.

### How Are We To Respond to Healings?

Now that's a lot of points as to what influenced and motivated Jesus to perform miracles to free people from sickness and demons. You'll be happy to know that I only have two points as to how people are to respond to healings.

First, we have the simple and encouraging account of Peter's mother-in-law. We're told, "[Jesus] went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them." This has sometimes been summarised as saying, "We're saved to serve." While it may be a little simple, it is true that a right response to receiving healing is **service (v. 31)** of Jesus and others.

However, service by itself can sometimes be directionless and so, I would suggest that service is to be guided by **obedience (cf. vv. 43-45; cf. Mark 5:18-20)**. We have a negative example of obedience in the leper. Jesus had strongly warned the leper not to tell anyone about the healing but the leper did so anyway and Jesus' ministry was hindered as a result. Now it's important to see that the problem wasn't with the man telling people, as such, but in his telling he was disobeying a command of Jesus. Later in Mark, Jesus heals the man possessed by Legion in Gerasene. At

the end of that story we read in Mark 5 verses 18 to 20, “As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” On that occasion the man did the right thing by telling other because that was being obedient to Jesus.

People may be able to tell you that they’ve experience an amazing healing or miracle from God or Jesus but that doesn’t mean that the person is growing as a follower of Jesus. What brings about growth in a Christian’s life is trust in Christ and particularly as that trust is expressed in obedience and service.

### Conclusion - Application

Finally, let us consider how we will apply what we’ve learnt today from God’s word to our lives.

First, **if Jesus needed to pray how much more do we?** As we are wanting to determine how we individually and as a church will serve the Lord and bless our community we need to pray and ask our Father what are his priorities, what are the ways in which we he has equipped us to live for him and so on.

Second, **are we willing to submit to our Father’s agenda or to set our own (especially if the focus is on popularity)?** Obviously this is related to the previous application but there is always such a powerful temptation to grow big and grow fast. Does our Father want people in Laidley, Hatton Vale and throughout the Lockyer Valley to come to know Jesus and gather into Christ’s body, the Church? Absolutely! But we need to keep accepting that the Holy Spirit will work in people’s lives in his timing, not ours. Will we accept a slower growth time if that’s what will bring the most glory to God?

Third, **are we motivated by love for those we’re serving and sharing with?** Jesus’ healing miracles may have been acts of power and demonstrated his frustration with both Satan and an impotent religious hierarchy but Jesus was clearly

driven by love for those who were in need. As we consider what ways our Lord would have us serve the people around us, let us be motivated and characterised by what motivated and characterised Jesus, his love for people.

Fourth, **are we willing to express the gifts which God has given us (even if it may be regarded as an unusual gift)?** I probably will return to this in the future to explain it better but I wanted to say in passing that we should use the gifts and talents which God has given us. Some of you may actually be aware that you have been given a spiritual insight when praying for people or indeed have a gift to heal people through prayer. I pray that we as a church feel free to express whatever gifts the Lord has blessed us with for his glory. Alternatively, if you feel that your gift is unusual because it's banjo playing then please be willing to share your gift with us here with our music ministry.

Finally, **will we be obedient?** It's not spectacular, it's normally not unusual, and sometimes it seems that it's a thankless task but we are called to serve obediently. Yes, we know that we can't "obey" our way into a relationship with God if we think about obedience as being about rules and doing enough works to earn a reward, but when Jesus and the apostles speak about obedience they describe it more as an expression of love and an out-working of trust. Do we love and trust Jesus enough to obey what he calls us to do?

May we as a church be motivated by love for Jesus and trust in him. And may that be seen in the way we obey Jesus' commands and the way we love and serve our church, our neighbours, and our communities.

[Pray to close]