

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

As Many As Touched It Were Made Well: An Excursus On Healing

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Mark 6:53-56

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 6:53; that’s on page 842 in your pew Bibles. Now as you read through the bible this paragraph looks for all the world like narrative filler. It is a summary passage and Mark places it between two very significant events. It comes after what is probably the most important miracle in the Bible – apart from the resurrection of Christ. It comes before the Jewish authorities from Jerusalem come to officially inquire into all of these rumours that have been spreading about the identity and significance of Christ. And I think that framing is very significant. While the crowds and the disciples wrestle with what they have just seen and while the Jewish authorities in the capital city begin to mobilize in official opposition, Jesus travels around the countryside ministering to human need. I don’t think that’s an accident. I think its an invitation to lean in and to think deeply about the significance and meaning of these healings. And so that is what we are going to do this morning. We are going to lean in. We are going to have a detailed discussion of the meaning and significance of healing.

Hear now the Word of the Lord:

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. 54 And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him 55 and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside,

they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well. (Mark 6:53–56 ESV)

I want to ask 4 questions of this text – I think they are the most basic and the most important questions we would want to ask when dealing with this topic. The first one is this:

1. Why Does Jesus Heal People?

I think you have to start here for the simple reason that Jesus himself in Mark's Gospel says that this is not what he came to do. He says that in Mark 1. In Mark 1:29-34 Mark records that Jesus healed MANY PEOPLE. He says:

the whole city was gathered together at the door. 34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. (Mark 1:33–34 ESV)

As you can imagine, word began to spread and the crowds continued to grow. Anyone within walking distance who had a sick relative or a sore back or a strange lump or a wonky knee was on their way to Jesus – and the Bible says Jesus ran away. He went up a mountain to pray, the disciples went looking for him and they told him about the huge backlog of people down the hill waiting to be healed and then Jesus said something absolutely amazing. He said:

“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1:38 ESV)

Jesus says, “I thought about it, I've prayed about and I've decided not to heal those people who are waiting for me down the hill. That's not why I came. I came to preach.”

I came to preach! Jesus came to speak about the ULTIMATE ISSUE. The ultimate issue was mankind's alienation from God because of human sin. That was the ultimate issue and Jesus was resolved to keep his eye on that ball.

And that begs the question – then why did he continue to heal?

If that wasn't the mission, then why did he do it? Because he did do it! We are looking at him doing it in chapter 6 after saying that it wasn't the mission in chapter 1. So why is Jesus continuing to heal hurting men and women?

I think there are two answers to that question. The first answer is:

i. Because he is compassionate

Praise the Lord! Jesus allows himself to be interrupted by human need! He had a purpose and he had pity. We just read that earlier in this chapter. Mark 6:34 says:

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mark 6:34 ESV)

Sometimes Jesus changes the plan when confronted with human need. He calls an audible at the line because he sees something and he wants to respond.

Now listen, I'm not sure I can articulate how this goes together with the fact that Jesus is God and as God he is intimately familiar with every ounce of human suffering in every corner of the world at every second of the day – I don't know how a God who knows everything, always, can also be EMOTIONALLY IMPACTED BY HUMAN SUFFERING. I'm not sure I can articulate that – if you can I'd like to meet with you after the service – all I know is that in this text – in the person of Christ – God is saying that he is in fact, RESPONSIVE TO HUMAN NEED.

God sees and God cares.

I find that truth intellectually overwhelming, I find it beyond my ability to fully understand or articulate but I see it in the text and I am glad.

There is no doubt that the primary reason that Jesus continues to heal people is this marvellous and mysterious truth that God cares. He is compassionate.

The second reason that Jesus continues to heal, despite that it is not the mission, I think is this:

ii. Because he is communicating

See I don't think that Jesus PAUSES from the mission in order to be compassionate – I think he does compassion in a way that advances the primary mission. I think he is preaching THROUGH THE MIRACLES.

Now I think I'm on firm ground here. Dennis Nineham for example writes:

“there is more in miracles than their outward appearance; they are, to use the fourth Evangelist's word, ‘signs’ of the power of God. According to Mark the miracles like the parables are understandable and ought to be understood”¹

Are you hearing that? Miracles are just like parables! They contain a much deeper meaning for all those who are willing to lean in.

Mark gives us a clue here in chapter 6 to that very reality. Look carefully at the last verse in our text:

they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were **made well**. (Mark 6:56 ESV)

The KJV version has it as:

as many as touched him were **made whole**. (Mark 6:56 KJV)

The Greek there is *sodzo* and it normally means “saved”. Now it can mean restore or heal or make whole but most often in the New Testament it means “saved”. Mark uses that word twice in Mark 8 when Jesus says:

For whoever would **save** his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will **save** it. (Mark 8:35 ESV)

That's the same word – so why is Mark using it here? Is he saying that everyone who was healed that day was also saved? Not exactly. In discussing the significance of Mark's use of this word in verse 56 one scholar puts it this way. He says:

The compassion of Jesus has fed, satisfied, and healed the crowds, but the blessings of his compassion raise the ultimate question whether those who experience them will enter further into Jesus' saving purpose. The physical

¹ Dennis Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 181.

blessings of Jesus are not an end in themselves, but a fork in the road, one branch of which leads to Jesus' final saving purpose, the other to a false understanding of Jesus as simply a wonder worker.²

Are you seeing that? Mark uses the word to raise the question. Will you go DEEPER into the saving purposes of Jesus than this? Will you look to Jesus for more than PHYSICAL BLESSINGS? Will you meet Jesus here at the point of your most immediate need and will you go DEEPER WITH JESUS, FARTHER IN AND FURTHER UP into the fullness of his power and saving work?

That is what is going on here and that is what is going on in EVERY DISPLAY of compassion and power. Every time Jesus heals anyone THIS IS THE ULTIMATE QUESTION. Can you see past this to your ultimate need of spiritual healing and salvation?

Or is this enough for you? Is this all you want? Is this the only need that you are aware of? Is this the only reason that you have come to me?

You see, that is the fork in the road. That is the invitation that is contained in every single act of healing.

Now, before we move on to the next question I just want to sit with you and be convicted. This text is saying a lot of things, but one of the things it is saying is that ministry – if we are following Jesus – is about meeting people at the point of their most obvious need and calling on them to go farther in and further up with Jesus. It is about meeting them where they are at and calling on them to go DEEPER. Its both or its not Christian ministry. If you are only up here – living in the fullness, plumbing the depths, going deep, but you are never stooping down to the point of human need then you are not doing ministry the Jesus way. You're not meeting people where they are. And if you are just sitting with people in the place of obvious need and never calling on them to leave aside the bread that perishes in pursuit of the true manna from heaven then you are not doing Christian ministry. And so I just think there is a call to self reflection here. Are we as a church doing enough to meet people at the point of their most obvious need? Now, I think we are doing a lot here. This is what Family Circle is. This is what reCOVER is. This is what children's ministry is. We are doing a lot – are we doing enough? And are we meeting

²James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 203.

people there and then grabbing anyone who leans in by the nose and leading them farther in and further up? Are we grabbing those people who lean in and showing them all of the beauty, all of the goodness, all of the holiness of Jesus Christ? Are we doing that? This passage demands that we ask ourselves that question. I want you to think about that. I want you to pray about that. That is an appropriate response to the message of this passage.

The second question we need ask is this:

2. What Kind Of Person Gets Healed?

I'm interested in that. I'm interested in why Jesus heals, but I'm also interested in why some people are healed and some people are not. Jesus doesn't heal every sick person he sees – we know that because we're told that in multiple places in the Bible. Earlier in this chapter we read that:

he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. (Mark 6:5 ESV)

So not every sick person in Nazareth was healed on that day. The village of Nazareth saw less of the power of God and experienced fewer miraculous healings than most of the other villages where Jesus visited. Why is that? Why do some people see more power and experience more healings than other people? That's a really a good question and I want to know the answer. I want to know what kind of person gets healed and I think there are some clues in the text.

The first thing I see in this story is:

i. People who are desperate

Look at the text. It says that as soon as people recognized Jesus they started RUNNING. And they began to CARRY sick people to Jesus on beds. Have you every tried to carry a sick person? Have you ever tried running while carrying a sick person? But you would though, wouldn't you, if it was your 12 year old daughter. You would though if it was your 6 year old son. You would run to the point of exhaustion and death if you could just get your kid in front of Jesus. You

would do that wouldn't you, moms and dads? You would do that particularly if there was no where else that you could go.

These people didn't have hospitals. They didn't OHIP. They had Jesus! In their region and so they RAN TO HIM. And when they found him they IMPLORED HIM. They BEGGED HIM to give them a healing.

Listen, there is something about desperation, fervency AND NEED that is always associated with healing in the Bible. Let me put it this way. If there is something else that you think might work to fix whatever is wrong with you, then why wouldn't you try that? Right? I don't think that is a lack of faith because God often heals people through ordinary means. He heals people of high blood pressure through apples, oranges and exercise, he heals people from the common cold with chicken soup and a few days of rest – so I don't think you should go to Elder Prayer seeking healing for that stuff until you have made use of the ordinary means. Try normal stuff first – because almost invariably the healings we see in the Bible are in response to desperate need. You can't feel desperate until you've tried everything else.

Do you remember the woman with the issue of blood? What are we told about her? We are told that she:

had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. (Mark 5:26 ESV)

We are told that she had tried everything! And nothing worked. We are told that she was DESPERATE. And that is almost invariably the condition of people to whom God grants a miraculous healing.

You can't fake desperate. You get desperate after you try everything you should try and nothing works. By the way, I think that is one of the major reasons that we see fewer healings in North America than missionaries see in pioneer contexts. In the jungles of Africa or in the slums of India, the poor have NO HOPE BUT JESUS! They don't have other options – they have Jesus and so they see a lot more healings than we do here.

I don't think that is actually cause for concern – as long as we don't lose faith in Jesus to give us what we desperately need. Because sooner or later you will need something that no power on this earth can give. On that day you will know what it is to be desperate and you will be in exactly the right place to receive a healing.

The second thing I think we can say about the people who receive a healing is that they are people who demonstrate faith.

ii. People who demonstrate faith

The Bible is big on demonstrating faith. By and large as you read the Bible it does not appear as though God takes people at their Word. Abraham said he was a person of faith, but God tested him anyone just to be sure. Abraham was DECLARED a person of faith after he put his son Isaac on the alter. Similarly Jesus says:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46 ESV)

Jesus isn't taking people at their word either. They say that they are his followers but Jesus says: “Why don't you show me that by doing what I tell you?”

The Bible is big on demonstrations of faith and we see that in this story. Mark says:

And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well. (Mark 6:56 ESV)

Now let me ask you. Was that little tassel on Jesus' robe magic? Was it made of miracle fibres? Should you send \$50 to some television healer because he has a jar of water that has been stirred with the fibres of that tassel? No. No. There was nothing magical about the tassel on Jesus' robe but however imperfect it was, Jesus received this effort – this reaching out and grabbing him – as a demonstration of faith.

Listen I'm a Protestant, ok, so I am not into relics or pilgrimages per se – not even close to per se. But I do believe in physical communication and I do believe in a merciful God who is well acquainted with our stupid and therefore I am not prepared to dismiss out of hand every story

about some desperate old woman in the Middle Ages who went on pilgrimage to touch a nail that some huckster said came from the cross of Christ who then experienced a miraculous healing. Was there something magical about that nail? Certainly not. But it communicated something about the faith of that poor woman. It was a very imperfect, very confused, but very sincere gesture of faith and I think God is moved by that. I think this story PROVES that God is moved by that.

I think there are probably a bunch of us in this room who are a little bit offended that Jesus doesn't rebuke them for their superstitious ways in this story. Why doesn't he turn on them and say: "You knuckle heads, stop grabbing at my robes. Just believe in me and ask in faith and thou shalt receive." He could have said that – maybe you think he should have – BUT HE DIDN'T. He just healed them.

You don't have to have perfect theology to receive mercy from God – you just need to have faith.

The third question I want to ask of the text is this:

3. Does Jesus Still Heal Those Kind Of People Today?

And I've got a one-word answer to that question:

i. Yes!

Yes.

Yes – why not? Jesus hasn't changed! He is still compassionate, he still communicates. He still meets people at the point of their most obvious needs and he still calls on people to follow him farther in and further up into his saving power and purposes.

I believe that and I don't see how anyone could dispute that.

Now, I'm not sure that I believe in a "gift of healing". I'm not sure why the Holy Spirit would make "travelling healers". After all, Jesus wasn't even a travelling healer. Jesus refused to be a

travelling healer. He thought that would be unhelpful, so why in the world would he entrust that ministry to you? Or me? Or that guy in the white rhinestone suit? I'm not sure why that would be and I'm not sure that it is.

However, I do believe in "gifts of healing". I believe that Jesus still responds to desperate need. I believe that he still shows compassion to broken, desperate needy people, through his Spirit, through his church, through his Body here on earth – I believe that Jesus still regularly and miraculously gives gifts of mercy and healing.

I believe that.

If that weren't true then why would the Bible say:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (James 5:14–15 ESV)

I believe that! I believe that we should do that and I believe that God will honour that as a promise in his Word.

But - and here is the tricky part, I can't guarantee the timing.

That brings me to my final question of the text:

4. When Will Jesus Heal Those Kinds Of People?

I believe that Jesus will heal those people who are desperate and who have faith. I believe that – 100% but as I said, I can't guarantee the timing. I know that some people are told to wait. The Apostle Paul for example was told to wait. He was desperate – no one would question his faith – and yet:

“Three times **I pleaded**³ with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:8–9 ESV)

³ Same Greek word as in Mark 6:56.

I have reasons for leaving you in this situation. I have purposes that relate to my glory and your good and so, for now, you are just going to have to trust me.

That's what God said to the Apostle Paul – a desperate and faithful man. He said: WAIT.

And so that gives me pause but it doesn't weaken my faith.

I believe that Jesus will heal all people who are desperate and who have faith. I believe that. I believe that:

- i. Some will be healed immediately**
- ii. Some will be healed eventually**
- iii. All will be healed eternally in the coming Kingdom of God**

How that works out I trust, will serve the glory of God and the good of his people and I don't expect to understand. I don't understand why there are people in our midst who have taken their kids to Jesus in prayer and who have not yet received a healing. I don't understand that. I assume it has something to do with his power being displayed in our weakness. I assume it has something to do with acquainting us as a people with sorrow and grief to prepare us as a people to minister to a world that is suffering and labouring under the curse but I have a hard time seeing through this glass darkly. So I'm taking that on faith and I'm not prepared to stop praying because the Bible says – JESUS SAYS that we should keep praying.

He says that we should be like that widow who went day after day after day to the judge in pursuit of justice and who finally received what she was asking for. He says we should be like that but then he ends that parable with a saying that makes me very nervous; he says:

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8 ESV)

Jesus says that sometimes asking over and over and over again is a test of faith and then he says will there be any one left like that on the earth when I come? Will there be any desperate, patient and faithful people who keep coming and coming and coming as a demonstration of their faith? Will there be faith like that on the earth at the end?

Remember I told you that God doesn't always take us at our word – sometimes he requires a demonstration of our faith and in our culture few things demonstrate faith more remarkably than waiting. We are an immediate people aren't we? We are an impatient people. And so some of us will demonstrate our faith through waiting. We will wait a long time and then like the woman, we will receive.

But some of us, according to the Bible, will wait even longer than that. Some of us will have to wait for the return of the Lord and the beginning of the everlasting Kingdom to receive our healing. But no one who is desperate – no one who has faith – no one who has taken hold of Jesus will wait a single second longer than that. The Bible says that on that day God himself:

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.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:4–5 ESV)

On that day everyone who is desperate – everyone who has faith – everyone who has taken hold of Jesus will be healed and will be saved.

the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (James 5:14–15 ESV)

Whether immediately, eventually or eternally – I don't know, but I know it will happen. I believe it will happen, because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.