

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)*

I Will; Be Clean

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Mark 1:40-45

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 1:40; that’s on page 836 in your pew Bibles. Last week we looked at Mark 1:29-45 from the forest level – we took the big picture view and we noticed that Jesus had a very clear sense of purpose – he stated that purpose to the disciples in Mark 1:38. 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)

So there is no question that Jesus came to preach the Gospel throughout all Israel – that is why he came out. But it is also clear that Jesus was always responding to human need. He was seeing hungry people and feeding them. He was seeing sick people and he was healing them and he was seeing demon possessed people and he was setting them free. He was doing that even though it threatened his primary mission. Every time Jesus healed somebody it drew a crowd and it threatened distraction. But he kept doing it. He risked distraction and he maintained focus. He does all things well and there is so much that we can learn from him and so today we are going to do that. Today we are going to ZOOM IN on one of those twigs we PASSED OVER last week. Last week we read three stories together that are meant to be seen together, now this week I want to zoom in and drop own to the forest floor and I want to look at one of the most marvellous stories in all of Scripture. This is the story of Jesus cleansing a leper. Hear now the Word of the

Lord, beginning at verse 40.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” 45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter. (Mark 1:40–45 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

We read the Bible, first and foremost to learn about God, and when we are reading the Gospels we are seeing God in the flesh. We are seeing the WORD OF GOD – Jesus Christ – the perfect revelation of God’s character and nature. Jesus is what God wants us to know about himself so the first thing we want to do this morning is ask the question what does this story tell us about Jesus Christ.

About Jesus:

It tells us first of all that:

1. **He is willing**

That was the question in the leper’s heart. He knew full well that Jesus was ABLE – he had heard and even seen Jesus heal many, many people. Galilee is a small region and news travels so the leper knew that Jesus had miraculous “exousia” – he had AUTHORITY. His word made things happen. Jesus rebuked a demon in Mark 1:25 – and the demon fled! Jesus healed a sick woman, just by touching her hand in Mark 1:31. Jesus healed many people who were sick with many diseases and he cast out many demons according to Mark 1:34 so it is not surprising that this leper came looking for Jesus in Mark 1:40.

He knew that Jesus had authority – he knew that Jesus COULD DO things other people could not do – but what he did not know was whether or not Jesus was willing. You see, in Jewish culture leprosy was generally understood as the punishment of God upon sinful people. Now, you can see where they might get that idea because leprosy sometimes WAS the punishment of God upon

sinful people. Do you remember the story of Miriam in Numbers 12? She rebelled against Moses' authority and wanted to position herself and Aaron as co-equal rulers with Moses over Israel. God was not pleased with her arrogance and so the Bible says:

the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed. When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow. (Numbers 12:9–10 ESV)

Alright, so, let's be clear. Sometimes leprosy WAS the punishment of God for sin. But that doesn't mean that it was ALWAYS the punishment for sin. Jesus reminded the disciples in John 9 that we have to be real careful about drawing direct lines from particular suffering to particular sins. Sometimes a sickness might be God's punishment for a particular sin – but often it isn't and we just don't know enough to speculate about such things. What we know for sure is that all people are sinners and what we learn in this story is that God is willing to forgive and to restore.

We don't know whether this man's leprosy was the direct result of his sin or just a general sharing in the fallenness of the world – the text doesn't answer that question. What we know is that this man knew himself to be a sinner and likely assumed – as any Jew of that generation likely would have – that his suffering was due to his sin. He felt himself under the curse of God and he was desperate to learn whether or not Jesus was willing to cleanse him. That's what he says:

“If you will, you can make me clean.” (Mark 1:40 ESV)

There is a lot of assumed theology and history behind that simple statement and there is a world of revelation contained in Jesus' marvellous reply:

“I will; be clean.” (Mark 1:41 ESV)

Jesus is the expression of God's willingness to heal and restore human beings. God is willing. Sin is a problem, but God is willing to make us clean – thanks be to God!

The second thing we learn about Jesus in this story is that:

2. He cares about immediate and ultimate needs

We talked about this last week. These healings actually represent a threat to Jesus' primary mission. He didn't come to be a travelling healer – he came to preach and to effect redemption. He came to address ULTIMATE ISSUES! He came to secure ETERNAL LIFE for God's people. He did not come to fix whatever wasn't going right in your present situation – he didn't come to be your doctor, your therapist or your PSW – he came to be your Saviour. But unfortunately, that wasn't what people were most excited about. People were most excited about the fact that Jesus could make bread, seemingly out of thin air. They were most excited about the fact that he could heal the sick. They couldn't think of anything better than full bellies and healthy bodies – but Jesus could. And so last week we actually saw Jesus leaving behind a crowd of hungry and sick people – do you remember that?

Mark 1:32-34 says that when people heard about the miracles that Jesus was doing they came from everywhere bringing their sick and their hurting and they were looking for Jesus. Jesus, Mark says, actually went out and hid from them and he prayed in a desolate place. The disciples are tracking him down because they are eager for him to do more of this crowd pleasing, need meeting ministry and quite surprisingly Jesus said to them:

“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)

I imagine that was one of the hardest things that Jesus ever had to do. Mark presents it as a crisis moment – there are only 3 times in Mark's Gospel where Jesus is recorded as praying and they are all at moments of intense conflict and crisis. This is a crisis of the human soul. Jesus had a human soul and more than that he was a perfect human whose love and compassion had not been dulled and diminished by human sin. So he was PERFECTLY compassionate and yet he knew things that these people didn't know because he also had a Divine nature and an eternal perspective. Jesus had existed as God from eternity past – he came down to earth and time from heaven and eternity - Jesus says that about himself in John 3. He says:

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:13 ESV)

Jesus says that the reason he does what he does and says what he says is that he has a perspective that no one else has. He has descended from heaven. He knows what is at stake. The one who

inhabits eternity understands the significance of eternity. He knows that even if he fills your belly and heals your wounds – if he does not also save your soul then he has done you no great favour. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

So he tells this man that he has healed:

“See that you say nothing to anyone (Mark 1:44 ESV)

Don't make it any harder for me brother. Don't get people so fired up for BREAD and WELLNESS that they fail to hear the message of eternal life.

How well Jesus knows us! I often wonder if one of the reasons we don't see more healings is because we so desperately want to see more healings. I remember a couple of years ago we had some REMARKABLE answers to prayer. Just amazing and all of the sudden there was a bit of buzz around Orillia and people came here to this church not to hear the message of the Gospel but to have a front row seat for the next healing. And I remember saying to our elders at the time: “I hope we never get to the point where we are more excited about a healing than we are about a baptism.”

What do the angels in heaven celebrate hardest? They live in eternity, so they have a different perspective. What do they celebrate HARDEST? You don't have to guess, Jesus tells us:

I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10 ESV)

The angels – who inhabit eternity – rejoice more over one sinner who repents than over 5000 people who are fed. The angels in eternity rejoice more over one sinner who repents than over 10 lepers healed. Lepers healed, who remain unsaved, die and go to hell. So Jesus is eager to protect the ultimate from the urgency of the immediate.

Let me bring this point to a practical close. I believe that God heals. I believe in healing, I even believe in the gift of healing. I think that healings are always a gift from God and I think that he has gifted some people with the particular capacity to pray for and to pray in particular healings. I believe that and I've seen that. So I believe that God heals. But I also believe that God is

judicious in handing out healings. God is aware of our near unlimited capacity for distraction and so he is very careful about giving out GOOD things that can distract from ULTIMATE things. That's what I believe. I believe God is good and also WISE.

The third thing we learn about Jesus in this story is that:

3. He respects the Law of Moses

That's an important point. It is sometimes said Jesus didn't care about the law, or even worse that he broke the law. You better hope that Jesus never broke the law because if Jesus ever broke the law then he was a sinner and his death would have been merely the death he owed to God – it would have been powerless to do anything for you and me. So its pretty important for us to see that Jesus never broke the law. In fact Jesus fulfilled the law – he kept the law perfectly, precisely and entirely; a point that New Testament scholar Dennis Nineham is very eager to make. He says:

“the command to carry out the requirement of the Law showed Jesus as fully obedient to this Law.”¹

If Jesus wasn't fully obedient then you are still in your sins – this is a pretty big deal. The Apostle Paul says:

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19 ESV)

If Jesus had not been perfectly and precisely obedient to the law at every point then you would not be saved. So thanks be to God, Jesus was very careful here to obey the law.

Now we need to get our attitude straight on the law. Evangelicals have developed a bit of a bad attitude towards the law in recent decades. We found the “legalism” of our parents and grandparents to be chaffing so we have over-reacted and we have started talking about the law as if it were a bad thing. But the law is not a bad thing – its just not a saving thing. You see, the problem with the law was that human beings never kept the law and so it became, in fact, the instrument of our condemnation. It was like an electric fence that was intended to keep us safe

¹ D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 87.

but that the devil lured us onto thus causing our electrocution and death.

But the law itself was good and these laws about leprosy were good. There was no cure for leprosy in those days – as indeed there is not today – and so the only way to stop the spread of the disease was to enforce a type of quarantine. And because there were many types of leprosy and many lesser ailments that might present as leprosy, part of the job of the priest was to ensure that a person’s skin had indeed recovered so that they could be declared “clean” and therefore eligible to return to the community. Jesus shows respect for those laws in commanding this man to go to the priests in order to be declared healed and clean.

Note this however. While the law could declare this man clean it could not make this man clean. That’s the reality and the limitation of the law. The law is a good thing, but its not a saving thing. The law tells us who we should be and where we should be but it cannot keep us and it cannot CHANGE us. For that, we need Jesus.

The fourth thing we learn about Jesus in this story is that:

4. He uses signs and wonders to reveal his true identity

He sends this brother to the priests so that they can examine him and declare him healed and clean and eligible to return to the community. But then he adds this little bit; he says, show yourself to the priest and offer the thanksgiving offering:

for a proof to them. (Mark 1:44 ESV)

For a proof TO THEM. Do you see that? You see if the priests declare this man healed and clean then they are going to ask the question: who did this to you? And he’s going to say: Jesus. And that is going to get them thinking; that is going to force them to wrestle with the identity and authority of Jesus Christ. William Lane puts it this way, he says:

“if the priests establish that healing has taken place and accept the sacrifice for cleansing but fail to recognize the person and power through whom healing has come, they will stand condemned by the very evidence which they have

supplied.”²

Now, let’s be clear, Jesus didn’t DO this healing in order to witness to the priests – Mark tells us why he did it in verse 41:

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him (Mark 1:41 ESV)

Alright, so this was not strategy, this was compassionate response, but because Jesus has his eye on ultimate issues, he USES this healing to point people to his identity and authority. He uses compassion to call for conversion. He moves from the physical to the eternal and so should we.

If we are going to “do like Jesus” then I think this story would suggest that we should respond to the needs that we are confronted with. Jesus didn’t go looking for this guy – this guy was right in front of him! This was the need and so Jesus responded – so should we. We should NEVER close our eyes to the needs that are right in front of us! So, let’s be practical here – we live in Orillia, we did a needs assessment and guess what we found out? Orillia has a single parent problem. We have an incredibly high proportion of single parent households – mostly single moms. So guess what – we created Family Circle. Is that our mandate as a church? Was the church created to go into all the world and help single moms? No. But that’s the need in our community and we’re not supposed to turn away from that.

What else did we learn in our little community survey? Orillia has an addictions problem and it goes way back. This town was established upon the profitability of addiction and addiction is still one of the major drivers of our local economy – is it not? That’s why it seems like nobody in our town has any self-control – it has been eroded by drugs, sex and gambling. People have been reduced in this town and are being held captive to these modern day demons. So are we going to turn away from that? No. We are going to start a program called reCOVER. Is that our mandate? Did Jesus send us into all the world to counsel alcoholics and drug addicts? No. But that is the need before our face.

But here is the thing – we are going to use these compassionate ministries to POINT PEOPLE TO THE PERSON AND POWER OF JESUS CHRIST – if we don’t do that then we are not the

² William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 88.

church. We are going to take our stand IN THESE IMMEDIATE NEEDS and we are going to point people to Jesus Christ – amen? Amen.

That’s how you do it the Jesus way. You don’t turn away from the need but you don’t get distracted by the need; you don’t get co-opted by the need. You stand in it and you point beyond it to the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Now, very quickly I also want to say a couple of things about the leper himself and about what his healing says about the salvation that is ours in Christ. We read the Bible primarily to learn about God – but then also, secondarily to learn about us – about humanity – and about how God saves and redeems humanity through Jesus Christ. So let’s take a quick look at what we can learn about those things as well.

About The Leper:

In terms of the leper we learn 4 things in rapid succession. We see that:

- 1. He came**
- 2. He knelt**
- 3. He prayed**
- 4. He received**

That’s all in verses 40-42. Now in Greek the progression of verbs is very interesting. The main verb is “he came” and it is supported by two participles “he was kneeling” and “he was praying or imploring”. That’s what the leper did – he came, he knelt and he prayed. The last verb is a passive verb – meaning it describes what was done TO HIM by Jesus. He was made clean.

I think there is an obvious lesson in there for us. You cannot heal yourself. But you can put yourself in a posture to receive. God responds to a certain type of human posture. There is no doubt of that. God says in Isaiah 66:2:

this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

Well who is that in our story? That's the leper! He is humble – he is on his face before Jesus, he is contrite – he knows himself a sinner and he knows himself under the judgment of God and he is trembling – he is so eager for an authoritative word from Jesus. O Jesus will you rebuke my leprosy as you have rebuked the illness and the sickness of these others. Will you speak a word of healing and salvation OVER ME.

And God responds.

And so maybe the lesson here is that if you have not received healing and saving grace from God maybe the problem is in your posture. Are you on your face? Are you at the end of yourself? Are you looking for help or salvation? Are you looking for advice? Or a saving word?

It makes all the difference in the world my friend; it makes ALL the difference in the world.

this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

Lastly, we want to consider what this healing reveals about the salvation that is ours in Christ.

About Salvation:

Now, this is just one story and it early on in Mark's Gospel. Each of these stories adds a little something to our understanding of the salvation that Jesus has come to bring – so this doesn't tell us everything about salvation but it does tell us something absolutely essential. This story tells us that salvation is fundamentally a transfer of holiness from God to us.

You see that is the message hidden inside this miracle.

Why were lepers required to live outside the community? Because if a leper touched another person that person became UNCLEAN – but what happens in this story? Jesus touches a leper and that leper becomes clean. That's not supposed to happen – that is a miracle and that is a message! And the message is pretty hard to miss. This healing proves that the holiness of God is

contagious! This healing proves that the righteousness of God that is in Christ can somehow be TRANSFERRED to men and women, boys and girls – that is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Gospel. This is what got the Apostle Paul out of bed in the morning. In Romans 3:21-22 Paul says:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.** (Romans 3:21–22 ESV)

That is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Gospel – this idea that the righteousness of God can somehow be TRANSFERRED to people through faith in Jesus Christ. This is what theologians call “the great exchange” – the idea that somehow through faithful contact with Jesus our sin can be absorbed and obliterated by him and his righteousness can be absorbed and retained by us – that’s THE MIRACLE that this miracle was supposed to witness to.

This actual miracle that we are talking about today – the cleansing of the leper – is NOTHING in comparison to THAT MIRACLE. That leper is DEAD! He got some other sickness later on and he DIED but if he made contact with Jesus Christ through faith that day then that LEPER IS ALIVE! He is with God in heaven FULLY AND FINALLY HEALED. That is the Gospel! That is the MESSAGE that changes the world.

And that is the miracle that is still available to men and women, boys and girls from every tribe, tongue and nation even today. If you come and you kneel and you pray to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour – if you reach out to him in faith – then he will take your sin and you will receive his righteousness and you will be saved. That offer is still on the table TODAY. That is the standing miracle of the Gospel and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.