

Finally, in the same way that Jesus did not want the people to follow Him because they were told He was the Messiah by the gossip of demons and follow him out of curiosity rather than commitment, so He did not want followers who wanted their own needs to be always met first of all. Understandably, when people heard that Jesus was a healer, they would bring their sick for His ministry; but Jesus' concern was far bigger. It was the preaching of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God, through which people would receive the greater healing of salvation! This is the reason why Jesus did not respond to the disciple's call; 'everyone is looking for you' (1:37). Indeed, what they said appears to have convinced Jesus that it was time to move on (1:38). Jesus did continue to preach and cast out demons in the towns and cities of Galilee, but it was a ministry which only lasted for a relatively short time. In due course Jesus would set His face to Jerusalem and the Cross (8:34). His ministry was to bring salvation to the world and call people to faith in Him. The ministry of healing was always only ever a part of the Gospel; an important and completely necessary part, but still a part of a much bigger salvation. This is an important lesson for us today, in both our promotion of the healing ministry and our attempts to find its rightful place within the wider ministry of the church.

Application

The Christian healing ministry is one which has been tragically overplayed by some and underplayed by others, and we can only look to Jesus to get this matter right within the life of the church. Certainly, Jesus performed healings as 'signs and wonders' which helped people come to faith in Him. This may have been true of Simon's mother-in-law, for example, although it is not said that this is so in the Gospel. We too, are therefore justified in using the healing ministry to help people meet Jesus, their real Lord and Saviour. However, the simple assumption that healing will take place if a healer and / or someone who is ill has enough 'faith' in Jesus, is naive and far from the truth of Jesus healing ministry. In most of the recorded cases of where Jesus healed someone, he did so whilst on His way somewhere (as in the story of Blind Bartimaeus – Mark 10:46) or when summoned specially to attend to the needs of someone who was ill (the daughter of the synagogue leader – Mark 5:21f.). Jesus' actions were immediate and He healed according to real need He encountered rather than setting up meetings to draw crowds, for example. Indeed, in Mark's Gospel, He tends to leave the crowds alone!

There is a great deal we can take from this passage which is positive about the healing ministry, however; the compassion of Jesus towards Simon's mother-in-law and her restoration to normal life, for example, which is one of the best testimonies to healing possible. Secondly, as with the previous episode in the synagogue, the matter of dealing with the demonic was not the 'big deal' that it is often made out to be in our present day and age. It was simply part of dealing with the real life situations in which people found themselves. Thirdly, despite the problems of the crowds and all the potential misunderstanding of His ministry, Jesus continued to heal people. This is the reason why it should always be a part of the life of the church today.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Why is the subject of healing ministry a matter of controversy in the church today?
2. Why is the subject of the deliverance ministry a matter of controversy today?
3. Discuss in your group the importance of regular times to pray and speak to God. Does this passage suggest regular devotions are important?

Discipleship

Take time to reflect upon how you can help others who are sick and unwell. What are the different ways in which we can operate a 'healing ministry'? It can be useful to talk to other people in your own church about how the healing ministry is exercised in the church by individuals and as a congregation. Sometimes, we do not know what is done because ministry is offered or given without people knowing about it. Seek to ensure that Jesus' ministry to heal is something that is reflected in your life in some way.

Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, help us understand your life and work with such clarity, we may have no fear of speaking to others about You or explaining the Gospel of Salvation. May we always treat Your Word with respect, and use it with dignity and care, all our lives. AMEN

Prayer

The beauty of Your presence, Lord, illuminates our lives. All praise to You, Lord God, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. You are the King who acts justly, the friend who stands by those He loves, the servant who does what is right for everyone, and the Master who cares for His household. Thank You, Lord God, Thank You. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: World Politics

Please continue to pray for the political situation in Kenya, which has destabilised the region. We know of a YWAM team in some danger trying to get home to Uganda from Tanzania via Kenya, having done the Lord's work on mission. Please pray for these and any others you may know who are in difficulty whilst the politicians either talk or create more trouble.

Meditation

Dear Jesus, You are the great comforter and provider,
You have helped us before; help us again.
When suffering and distress enwrap our souls
Cover us again with Your love and care.
When worry and fretfulness eat away at our hearts,
Cloak us with the comfort of Your peace.
When fear and dread fill our faltering emotions,
Surround us by angels, ready to fight for the right.
When panic and horror takes an ever firmer grip on us,
Strike the enemy, expose him and throw him out.
When misery and torment make our spirits dull,
Raise Your flag of righteousness and draw us near.
Dear Jesus, You are the great comforter and provider,
Your power is sufficient for all our needs!

Bible Study - Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the house of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Him about her immediately. ³¹ He came close, took her by the hand and helped her up. The fever then left her, and she served them.

³² When it was evening and the sun had gone down, they kept on bringing Him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ The whole city gathered around the door, ³⁴ and He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He would not allow the demons to speak because they knew Him.

³⁵ In the early morning, while it was still very dark, He got up and went away to a place which was deserted, where He prayed. ³⁶ Simon and those with him searched for Him, ³⁷ and when they found Him, they said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for you.'

³⁸ He replied, 'Let us go on to other towns nearby, so that I may preach there as well; for that is what I have come to do.'³⁹ So He travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Review

Here are three short incidents which Marks tells us happened immediately after Jesus had spoken in the synagogue at Capernaum and evicted a demon from an unclean man. The first two stories tell us about Jesus the healer (1:29-31, and 1:32-34) and contain some fascinating insights into this work. The last story tells us more about Jesus Himself and His sense of purpose at this early stage of His ministry (1:35-39). Clearly, after His baptism and the wilderness temptations, things began to happen very fast, and Jesus found Himself dealing with a rapidly unfolding situation. We

may wonder why so many people responded to Jesus so quickly in those early days, and what caused them to flood into Simon Peter's house that evening (1:33f.), but all we know for certain is that everything that happened during the day caused Jesus to draw to one side to pray (1:35). After prayer, He knew that God wanted Him to continue to preach around the region of Galilee, and as we will see in coming studies, He gave Himself to this task.

In the first story of this passage, Jesus healed a woman who was sick, in stark contrast to what he had just done in casting out a demon in the synagogue (1:21-28). We may think it would have been natural for Jesus to do such a thing, given that the woman was the mother-in-law of His new disciple, Simon Peter. However, nothing Jesus did was normal or could be kept private. In those days, men and women were kept apart, and it would have been unthinkable for a man to go into a woman's room when she was sick, yet Mark makes the point that Jesus 'touched' her and took her by the hand to raise her up. Liberated by Jesus' ministry, she stood and took her place in the household, serving (1:31). This return to work demonstrated her complete healing, and already, Jesus was showing how boundaries could be broken down. Imagine the furor that such an action would have unleashed amongst the authorities at the synagogue!

News of Jesus' words and deeds at the synagogue and at Simon's home had spread quickly, and by the evening, when the Sabbath was formally over, the people of Capernaum came in their droves to find the healing and deliverance they felt they needed. The picture painted for us is of a clamorous crowd gathering at Simon's house, even the 'whole city' (1:33) but Jesus could only heal people or help them as they presented themselves to Him. The disciples with Him observed that amongst the many people He healed that evening, a pattern was clearly observable; they probably noticed it because it was similar to the dramatic way Jesus had dealt with the unclean demon at the synagogue. Jesus 'would not allow the demons to speak because they knew Him' (1:34). He would not engage with evil; he stood above it.

In the morning after all this happened, Jesus rose before dawn and went away to pray, to a place where he would not be found! The story in verse 36 indicates that Simon and the others had difficulty finding Jesus, but they eventually found Him (1:37). Then they told Him that many other people were also looking for Him, presumably to seek the same ministry Jesus had given the day before!

Jesus, however, saw beyond this situation. How easy it would have been to spend a long time ministering to people in one place alone, meeting expectations and responding to people's perceived needs. Jesus knew, however, that the message of the Kingdom was bigger, wider and more important than the needs of the people in any one place, so He took the difficult decision to move on (1:38). We can learn a great deal from Jesus' ability to read situations not simply from the public response, but from what God required of Him, and the two were not the same. Jesus followed the Father's will by taking His ministry God further and to other people. Jesus was always moving on.

Going Deeper

There has been a great deal of debate about the theme of apparent secrecy in Mark's Gospel, because Jesus forbade the demons to talk so early in His ministry. We will look at this in more detail now, along with the other features of the story; in particular, the comparatively rare and important reference to Jesus' private prayer.

Jesus at Simon's house

On several occasions in our reading today we will notice the use of one of Mark's most used words which is 'immediately', or 'as soon as'. In this small story (1:29-31), it occurs twice! We are certainly given the impression that things moved fast once Jesus had announced His ministry in the synagogue. It was common in those days for fishermen to have several 'homes' around the sea of Galilee which were used according to the time of year and the availability of fishing. It was Simon's house in Capernaum, however, where his mother-in-law lived. In common with most women of the day, their lives were lived in service of their men-folk, although they had a considerable degree of autonomy and authority within the home.

For a woman to be laid low with a fever was a difficult and dangerous experience for everyone in a family, because although we now know that a fever is a symptom, back then they did not know what it meant and any number of perilous illnesses could, from their point of view, follow a fever. It is interesting that Simon went there with Jesus, and we wonder whether Simon took Jesus to his home because he knew his wife's mother was ill. This is certainly possible. Verse

30 says that Simon and the other disciples 'told Jesus about her immediately'. Remember that Jesus had just called Simon to leave all to follow Him, but it seems that Jesus was quite willing to respond to a family need of one of His disciples.

The method of Jesus' healing comes across as tender and yet direct. He appears to have treated this woman with respect and dignity in her circumstances, and His healing of her is more than just a release from the physical problems of the fever. The passage records that Simon's mother-in-law went back to 'serve them' (1:31), and this appears very menial to us. However, for the woman to be able to do this was like liberation from her illness. She was able to take her place in the home again and be 'whole' through being restored to her accustomed place in the life of the family. What greater healing could she ask for!

In the evening at Simon's house

The beginning of verse 32 is a careful description of the going down of the sun at the end of the Sabbath day. This was an important matter, for the time had not yet come for Jesus to pick a fight with the Pharisees about healing people on the Sabbath. From their point of view it was probably laudable for Jesus to rebuke a demon in an unclean man who should not have been in the Temple (1:25f.) and Jesus was yet to cross their paths in this Gospel. The local people saw what Jesus had done in the synagogue and they waited until all the religious obligations of the Sabbath day came to an end, which was at sundown. This, then, was the signal for a rushed descent upon Simon's house to find Jesus and see if He would heal others!

If you have sat in one place and laid hands on people for healing for an hour or more, as I have, you will know how exhausting such an activity is! The story here in Mark's Gospel indicates that the crowd at the door of Simon's house represented the 'whole city', and it is hard to imagine how Jesus could have dealt with such a large crowd. Moreover, at what time of the night would He have been able to stop such a ministry and get some rest? He may well have had to be very late to bed!

Some scholars believe that Jesus' command to the demons not to reveal who He was is an indication of a theme of 'secrecy' in Mark which shows itself in other ways in the Gospel. Indeed, some believe that Jesus' command to the demon in the synagogue to 'be silent!' (1:25) is the same. As the Gospel unfolds, we will look at this matter very closely, but for now, it is worth noting that there is another perfectly good explanation for why Jesus did not want the demons to speak out His name in public. It was not mere secrecy that Jesus was requiring; He wanted people, not demons, to respond to Him by believing that He was the Messiah and valuing this above all else because through such faith, Jesus could save people from their sins and have a new relationship with them. It is hardly possible that this could be the outcome of demons going around the place telling people that Jesus was the Son of God! No, Jesus knew that people needed to see more in Him than this, and He therefore told the demons to be quiet. He had control over them as the Son of God (1:11), and they therefore had to obey Him!

In the morning; 'morning prayer'

Again, the beginning of the last story of our reading is as careful as the beginning of the second, and it makes it clear that Jesus rose early enough in the morning to get out of the house unnoticed to find a 'place which was deserted' to pray (1:35). It is remarkable that Jesus was able to do this, and perhaps He felt the need to do it after the spiritual drain of ministry to so many people the night before. Jesus was the 'Son of God', but He was also a human being who experienced the realities of life, of sleep and tiredness, and all the other normal aspects of life which we feel.

The Greek words for 'a place which was deserted' are ones which indicate somewhere completely out of the way and some fair distance away from where Jesus had been, and this explains the extensive search (see above) the disciples had to find Him. This was the extent to which Jesus went to make sure He could spend time with His Father in prayer. It was crucially important for Him, and although we are not told what Jesus prayed about, it is easy to read through the stories of the Gospel so far and get a fair idea of what may have been on His mind. The reason we do not know what He said may well have been because on this occasion He did not tell the disciples. His conversation with the Father was private, and if we knew what He had said, then we would make something special out of it like 'the Lord's prayer'. Jesus, however, taught His disciples how to pray when he was asked so to do, but did not tell others the 'chat' of His own personal conversation with the Father; and that's how it should be.