



Speaker:
Paul Forrest

Christ Made Unclean for his Elect

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 5 of 5

5/27/2020 (WED) | Bible: Mark 1:29-45

Today we shall be considering verses 29 to 45 of Mark's first chapter.

You will remember from last week that Jesus had taught in a synagogue and had exorcised a demon from a man. So although that was a week ago for us, verse 29 picks up the account just minutes after Jesus' encounter with the demon possessed man.

He and his disciples leave the synagogue. They go to the house of Simon and Andrew, who were of course brothers. Simon was married, and his mother-in-law lived with them.

When the team arrived at the house Jesus was informed that Simon's mother-in-law was ill. And knowing that Jesus had the power to heal diseases, they tell him, in the hope that he will heal her.

It's said that she had had a fever. A high fever. And we know that fevers can be caused by different types of infections and even by too much exposure to the sun. Perhaps it was due to what followed that Peter would later in life pen this verse in his first letter. In 1 Peter 5:7 he encourages believers in this way: "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."

We see that it **was** Jesus' intention to heal the woman.

- We've seen him speak to men and effectually call them to ministry.
- We've seen him speak to a demon and effectually remove him from his host.
- And now we see Jesus speak as it were to the fever and effectually end it.

Remember that a fever is a symptom, not an illness in itself. In this miraculous act, Jesus was healing the underlying cause of the fever. But just as amazing was the woman's immediate recovery. We should expect following a fever some time being taken to recover. But here Jesus accelerates that recovery

from what should be days into a second! One minute she was sweating, shaking, unable to move. And in a flash she was up and at it!

Can you imagine someone in hospital today suffering badly with Covid-19? Imagine Jesus walking on to the ward, taking hold of that poor soul's hand and helping them to their feet. Imagine them standing there full of life, full of energy, offering to put the kettle on and make everyone a cup of tea! We can barely imagine it.

Jesus has power both to call and to banish, and sinful men and women would be wise to take seriously the question, *What think ye of Christ? What do you believe about Jesus Christ?*

This woman would have been happy to have been healed even if it **did** involve a period of recovery. The instantaneous removal of all residues of her affliction was nothing less than adding blessing to blessing. And you who are believers have experienced something similar. Because not only did you receive complete forgiveness of sins at conversion, but God *gave you, is giving you and will continue to give you* grace to live.

Verse 32 tells us that when the evening came—at sunset—people started to gather outside Peter's house. Remember that sunset marked the end of the Sabbath. Perhaps the people waited for fear of what the religious leaders would say. Or perhaps they were not God-fearing men and women but were simply superstitious.

In any case, they waited. Then one by one, family by family, they turned up. No doubt some came because they had an illness of their own. Others brought friends and family who either were unable to take themselves or they needed to be encouraged to go.

Note here that the people were suffering with both diseases **and** demonic possession. It was recognised even back then that not all diseases were caused by the presence of a demon. Having said that, we should admit that it is difficult, if not impossible, to know the extent of Satan's involvement in human disease. Although I'm inclined to deny the existence of complete demonic possession in our day, I'm still open to the possibility that God engages the devils to bring about illness and suffering. For all I know, all disease, all disability and all mental illness could be sent by God through the agency of Satan and his angels.

We know that these sinful angelic creatures are able to cause illness in humans. A good example was Job. By the permission of God, Satan was allowed to exercise his power in the material realm of this saint. He was able to affect the weather, move men to launch an attack on Job's property, and even cause some kind of disease in the man himself.

I am certain that if a doctor from our day was able to examine Job at that time they'd be able to explain his disease in medical terms. Yet it was caused by Satan. Therefore when we see disease around us and within us today, we have to acknowledge at least the possibility that God could employ devils to cause them.

Verse 33 informs us that the whole city was gathered outside Peter's house. Now you and I, and every rational person, understands that this is a figure of speech. "All the city" means **many** from the city. We heard how "all the land of Judea" went out to meet John the Baptist, and we likewise concluded there that it simply meant a large proportion of them.

At Peter's, there may have been hundreds! Verse 34 says that Jesus wouldn't allow the devils to speak (or rather continue to speak). I suggested to you last week that the reason Jesus did not want his fame to spread was that it could cause crowd management problems. I acknowledge though that there are other reasonable explanations for Jesus' prohibition.

The important thing is that they all knew him. We should fully expect every angel whether good or bad to know who Jesus was. Don't forget that all these creatures were created by him and spent time in his very presence. If any time elapsed between the creation and the heavenly mutiny of Satan and those who allied themselves with him, they will have been engaged in the highest forms of praise to this very Son of God. It is no wonder then that in his presence now the very holiness of Jesus draws out testimony to his divine nature from the lips of these rebel angels.

After a full day of ministry, Jesus deserves a full night's rest. He has preached and taken on a demon in the synagogue. He has gone back to the house and healed Simon's mother-in-law. And then he kindly sacrifices even more of his time in showing mercy to scores or even hundreds by healing them of their afflictions. What time of night the crowd was finally finished with, we don't know. But I'm sure Jesus could not have had much sleep, if any. For it

says in verse 35 that in the morning he got up while it was still dark and went off to pray. He prays *again*.

I don't think it's going too far to say that, in the purposes of God in sending his son to inhabit human flesh, Jesus relied on the Father. He needed his father's strength throughout the day and so prayed much. It was the will of the Holy Trinity of God that Jesus should be made a little lower than the angels to not only die for sinners, but also to set a worthy example of submission to God.

- Jesus prayed in the daytime, and he prayed at night.
- He prayed in a garden, and he prayed up a mountain.
- He prayed short prayers, and he prayed longer prayers.
- He prayed with thanksgiving, and he prayed with requests.
- He prayed with boldness, and prayed sometimes even in fear.

If the son of God who was utterly sinless prayed without ceasing, how much more should we pray who have indwelling sin! We should pray. And I'm sure we all love to pray. I'm sure we love standing in the throne room speaking to our God. That's not the problem. The problem is **GETTING** to the throne room. **The world** distracts us with its shallow richness. **The flesh** pulls us in other directions. **And the devil** suggests to us 101 other things we could do instead.

If Jesus did deprive himself of deserved sleep this night, that wouldn't surprise us. He often deprived himself of sleep, food and relaxation. And I believe if we are to show God that we are serious about him and about prayer, then it is right that we should from time to time likewise make those kinds of sacrifices. However we also need to recognise that food, drink and sleep have been given to us by God to make use of. He created us in such a way that we need these things. My point then is that we should be sensible how we deprive ourselves for the purposes of religious devotion. If we deprive ourselves of any of these necessary things to an extreme degree, we may be tempting God just as if we threw ourselves off a tall building and expected him to save us.

The disciples here noticed Jesus was missing and went to look for him. After some time they found him. They informed the master that everyone was looking for him. They use a term which understood literally means that *every individual*—at least in this city—was wondering where he was. And again we sensibly conclude that this is also a mere figure of speech. They meant to convey the idea that **many** will looking for Jesus, and Jesus would have understood it in that way. (You may well wonder why the Arminians and four-

point Calvinists insist that when the word “all” is used about the atonement it means every member of the human race.)

Surprisingly, Jesus announces that they would not be going back into the town but would be moving on. He explains that his ministry is essentially a preaching one. This, he says, is why he came. Certainly, he came to give his life a ransom for many. But those few years before his crucifixion were not spent killing time. This season of ministry was a fundamental part of his mission. He preached **the kingdom of God**. He preached **with authority**. He preached **faithfully**. He preached **in the power of the Holy Spirit**. And he preached **widely**.

But what had Capernaum done wrong? Could it be that the people there were willing to have Jesus sort out their problems and enrich their lives simply so they could continue on more easily in the sinful paths they were already on? Think about this: **I doubt there would be a single family in the whole of Capernaum that had not been transformed by having a member of their household healed of infirmity**. They had been blessed beyond measure. But did they repent? Have a look at Matthew chapter 11 with me. Verses 21 to 24 say this: “Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgement, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement, than for thee.”

It doesn't bear thinking about, but the inhabitants of a town so richly blessed in this life will fare worse at the judgement than the people of those cities whose lives on earth were cut short violently because of their sin. Truly, with greater revelation *from* God comes great responsibility *to* God.

And what does this mean for us in these British Isles? This is no boast, to recognise:

- That God has placed our nation in one of the most central roles in the furtherance of his kingdom on earth
- That he has raised up men in this land to evangelize the four corners of the globe

- That he has graciously donated to the people of these isles great revelation of truth
- That he has overflowed our country with Bibles in our own language
- That he has planted thousands of Christian congregations on our tiny island
- And that he has raised up evangelists to go out week in week out throughout our towns and cities to proclaim forgiveness of sins and eternal life

And how do the people in this country thank God for this multitude of blessings? They respond with hate. They respond with adultery. They respond with violence. For most in this country, the expansion of their wickedness is only hindered by the mercy of God and the limits of their imagination.

I was chatting with Karen the other day about a street that we both know. And we mentally worked our way up and down the street going from door-to-door to think about whether they were any households that have been at least stable, never mind containing believers. Now every street has its dysfunctional families. But even we were surprised. House after house told the story of marital affairs. Lies. Domestic violence. Hypocrisy. Youth rebellion. Divorce. Hatred. Bullying. Drug abuse. Child neglect. And more.

This was not an exercise in self-righteousness. We freely admit that the only reason this does not describe our own lifestyle is because of God's mercy. You know the most sobering thought of all? *This was the new norm for our country.* Most Bibles today sit unused on shelves. Most pulpits are filled with compromisers and unbelievers. And dare I say it, most evangelism that is conducted promotes a gospel that is so no weakened as to be useless. Thank God that he is willing to use preachers of error in the reeling in of his chosen ones, eventually guiding them to faithful preachers of the gospel.

Verse 39. Jesus preached throughout Galilee and performed miracles. Do you see how much he used synagogues? This was a time of transition, and Jesus was happy to make use of these religious places, even though he knew that the teaching that went on in them was without a true understanding. The synagogues then were a major means for the propagation of the gospel.

A leper came to Jesus. Anyone who has read the New Testament of the Bible will be familiar with the occurrence of leprosy among the people of those lands. It was, and still is of course, a disease that knows no boundaries. It

affects people around the world, even today. But this man was blessed to have a healer in his midst!

We don't know much about this man. But he did have faith that the one who he pleaded with was able to heal him. And more than this, HE OPENLY CONFESSED THAT HE COULD BE HEALED IF AND ONLY IF IT WAS THE WILL OF JESUS. The belief that Jesus could solve his problem is made more significant because of how rare it was for leprosy to be miraculously healed in this way. Even if this man was aware of the stories in the Old Testament, he will only have found Miriam and Naaman being healed from leprosy in this way. I'm not aware of any others. But as far as I can tell there were more people *raised from the dead* than were healed of leprosy! We should not be surprised then to find the saying amongst the Jews that the healing of leprosy was as difficult **as** raising the dead! Faith then. And we can maybe see in this man's words the very expression used by Jesus himself when he said to his father, "Nevertheless, not *my* will but *thine* be done." Let us humble ourselves and learn from this poor man. If you pray for healing for yourself or someone you know, let this be your attitude whether spoken or not. ***If you want to, Lord, you can heal me.***

Jesus did desire to heal this man and healed him. It's said that this was done out of compassion. There has been a lot of said about the compassion of Jesus. Depending on your theological position, you might have trouble with this concept.

1. You might believe that Jesus only ever has compassion for his elect. Since Jesus is God in the flesh, compassion shown by Jesus equals compassion shown by God. So if you take that black and white view that God loves only the elect and hates the reprobate, you might end up having to argue that everyone to whom Jesus shows any compassion must have been members of God's elect race.
2. On the other hand, your position might be that God has compassion on every member of the human race. You may think that God loves everyone. Your difficulty will be to explain how God's universal love allows him to send people to eternal punishment. After all, he has the power to save everyone. He chooses **not** to save everyone. Incredibly, it's clear that God will damn many of those who Jesus had compassion on. It's absurd to suggest that it was not the same compassion of Jesus which moved him to heal all those people in Capernaum too. And yet

this same Jesus said that the people of Capernaum will suffer dreadfully at the judgement!

3. Another viewpoint is that God has a general love for all mankind, being made in his image, but that he has also determined to display his great justice in rightly condemning sinners. These will suffer the penalty of sin in themselves. This is perhaps the most common view in Reformed circles. Nevertheless, some find this unpalatable. They say that it presents God as simultaneously having both love and hatred towards the same people. They claim it leaves us with a God who has two contradictory wills.
4. And there is one more view I'd like to mention. We might explain Jesus having compassion on a person, who as judge he is going to damn, by pointing to his *humanity* rather than his *divinity*. We could say that, just as Jesus experienced emotions like fear and anxiety that his father didn't, as a man he felt compassion, even if by his deity he saw the rottenness of the hearts of many of the people he healed.

It is not a requirement for us to work out these mysteries, although I wouldn't dissuade anyone from studying them. But at the very least we believe what the Bible tells us. Jesus did have compassion on this man. He did heal him. And he is also the God who hates all workers of iniquity. We hold these truths regardless of our ability to fully explain them.

Jesus instructed the healed man to not go and broadcast his healing to everyone, but instead to go and present himself to the priest. We can see in the Old Testament that there were strict instructions for those who had leprosy and for those who had become free of the disease. The individual would go to Jerusalem and arrange to see one of the priests. The priest would examine the person. And if he was genuinely clean, they would move onto the next phase in the process. In the rituals that followed, several creatures would be sacrificed, and the man or woman would have to shave themselves from head to toe. The ritual would take over a week, but then the individual would be declared healed.

This man, like many before and after him, ignored Jesus's instructions and went and told everyone. But I want to take this miracle, and with what mean ability I have, draw out some of the richness in the miracle of *salvation*.

Lepers are a little like the drug addicts and alcoholics we see begging on the streets of our city today. People give them money, food and drink. And for

those whose only thought is their next score or their next drink, they are satisfied. There are others, though, who above all else would like to be loved. To feel the embrace of another human being. But of course their low standard of personal hygiene means that this is very unlikely to happen.

Much more was this the case with lepers. They had to practice social distancing by law. And there would be no lifting of restrictions for them. Unless God in his mercy took the disease from them, they were separated from their people. They were prevented from worshipping with others. They were true outcasts.

It's important that we note that Jesus did not merely heal the man, but healed him *by touch*. The law of Moses, which Jesus himself gave, declared that anyone who touched a leper would become ritually unclean. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. HE USED THIS BRIEF PHYSICAL CONTACT TO PICTURE FOR US THE GREAT TRANSACTION THAT THAT TOOK PLACE WHEN JESUS TOOK THE SINS OF HIS IS ELECT UPON HIMSELF. From Jesus to the man went miraculous healing virtue by which the man would be set free from the bonds of his suffering. And we might say that from the man to Jesus went ritual uncleanness.

And so it is with us. Read Galatians 3:13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.'" If Jesus has healed you of the leprosy of sin, then make no mistake: **he became unclean for you**. He became a **curse** for you. Cursed. *For you*. Who can comprehend the depths of the abyss that is the love of God? Who can even *see* the top of the mountain of his great mercy in Christ?

- We were *cut off from the congregation* of God, but JESUS gave us access
- We were *excluded from the acceptable worship* of God, but JESUS brought us in!
- We were *prohibited from the fellowship of God*, but JESUS made us fit to join him and the saints
- And we were destined to spend **eternity** outside the city of God, but Jesus, by his own blood, purchased our permanent citizenship

Thank God right now for his unsurpassed love for you and all his elect. In your prayers this week **thank** him. As much as you are able, give him thanks, for he is worthy of all thanksgiving, and praise, and honour, both now and forever.

Amen.