

Signs & Wonders 1

The Miracles of God in the Gospel of Mark

Where we are going over the next few months

Let me start by telling you where we will be in 1 month. On August 27th we will begin a series we have been planning for some time. The name of the series is “My Problem with God” and it will focus on answering the hard questions people have with the Christian message. I will be 6 parts addressing 6 questions like “How can you believe the bible is true?” and “Why would a good God allow suffering?” and “Is there really only one way to God?” I believe this will be a great series for us to invite non-christians to. Every Sunday is a great Sunday to invite people, but this will be a unique time for us in that regard.

Beginning *this* week we are entering into a brief 4 part look into the Miracles of Jesus in the gospel of Mark. We are calling the series “Signs & Wonders” and the purpose is to confront us with the power & authority of Jesus. Here’s why: We are going to use good reasoning & logic during the next series I just mentioned. But reason & logic never saved anyone from their sin. God’s power and authority do that. And we will only use logic as a tool to serve our efforts to help people encounter the saving power of God.

So, for the next 4 weeks we will look at 4 different encounters where Mark is going to show how Jesus *disrupted* natural and supernatural order to assert his position as the king of the world. Mark’s power lies in his

simplicity. It is a newsreel. Jesus did this, Jesus did that. News isn’t written to improve your life. It is written to tell you what happened and what the implications are for your life. It’s your call on how to act on the information.

Like: Newsflash – sunburn causes skin disease & even skin cancer. You don’t have to do anything with that news. But If you believe the news, it disrupts your life as you spend 95 extra minutes suncreening your kids.

Mark is going to make the claim that Jesus is THE King of the universe and, therefore, has primary authority over your life. It is a headline that if true, will be very disruptive for your life. We are going here because there is a danger in church that we can assume we know Jesus. D.A. Carson once said that one generation preaches the gospel, the 2nd assumes the gospel, and the third forgets the gospel.

In many ways I think we may be in that 2nd generation. Where we assume a familiarity with Jesus. We like the *idea* of Jesus. One who loves us, cares for us, sacrifices for us. Who feeds the hungry and fights the man. And for some of us this idea of Jesus fits conveniently into our lives without much adjustment for us. That’s why we need Mark. Mark’s Jesus is very disruptive. Because he makes a claim on everything. Our whole life would be accountable to Jesus. If this news is true...it is incredibly disruptive..and at the same time the most important thing we will ever hear.

In these 4 encounters Mark will make the case that Jesus is King and he will do it by showing Jesus’ raw power. He actually doesn’t elaborate much about the message early

on in his gospel because he wants us to be confronted, head on, with the messenger. The Signs & Wonders of Jesus are meant to open your eyes to the king of the world who wants to disrupt your life.

Before I get into today's passage I want to let you know about a resource that is incredibly helpful to understanding the gospel of Mark. The book is called *Jesus the King* written by Tim Keller. I had the privilege a couple of years ago after the book came out to co-write the study guide to this book with Dr. Keller. If I had to recommend 1 for you to do a deep dive in Mark, even to take a non Christian through mark... this is it.

The Power of Jesus in the Reality of Pain Mark 2.1-12

Today we are going to look at a pretty well known story where Jesus encounters a crowd of people and among those in the crowd are a paralyzed man, his friends, and some religious leaders. Now remember Mark keeps it brief so this whole thing is gonna go down in just twelve verses. I want to show you the headline and how it disrupts everyone's life in this story. And I believe Mark put this story here to disrupt your life and re-order it around Jesus. Let's just get into it and then I'll explain where we are going with it ok.

1] When he entered Capernaum again after some days, it was reported that he was at home. [2] So many people gathered together that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and he was speaking the word to them. [3] They came to him bringing a paralytic, carried by four of them. [4] Since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after digging through it, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying. [5] Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Ok what a scene. Can you imagine if that happened? I'm in the middle of preaching and all of the sudden someone gets lowered down in front of me from a freshly cut skylight? Everything would stop. I preach through most distractions...even a fly landing on my face the other day...but this one would stop everything.

And if you read Jesus' response and you aren't surprised, its only because you've heard it too many times before. I mean, the man who couldn't walk surely wanted relief. We can reasonably guess that his friends did not climb atop a roof, cut a hole in it, and then bear his weight as they lowered him down through it...all *against* his will. The man wanted to walk. Perhaps this is why Mark gives us stories like these. We see our own affliction in the lame man and read ourselves into the story with Jesus. Right here, only 5 verses in...we are completely immersed in this story. Why? Because there is something really personal and powerful we can all relate to. Pain.

Remember that song by R.E.M. – Everybody Hurts? My hand me down 89 honda prelude would rock that all the time in high

school. That band was weird. But that song was crazy popular because it struck a chord. Everybody hurts. Whether it is pain brought on by your own doing, by another person, or by forces beyond anyone's control, everyone experiences pain. And it's a universal human desire to want relief from the pain. The man wants to walk.

And right here I want you to see the core message of where we are going. **Jesus has great power to overcome real pain.**

And listen to me...I hope you leave here today with Joy. But it may hurt to get there. Just a warning out front...R.E.M. was right. And if I'm talking about pain, it means for some of you that pain that you've been pushing down & trying not to deal with... It means it might come back up. In fact it might come rushing up if you've just left it alone and hoped it would go away. I'm going to try and care for you as we go there. I believe God has divinely orchestrated today for you to encounter, finally, a power strong enough to handle your pain.

So I want to show the Power of Jesus in the reality of pain. And I want to do so by looking at how each character in the story is affected by the power of Jesus. So let's start in verse 5.

[5] **Seeing their faith**, Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

1. Jesus sees & responds to the faith of friends

Obviously the paralytic can't get to Jesus on his own. But these 4 guys climb up on a roof, that they then dig through...not promoting vandalism here, but definitely promoting faithful

friends who will do what it takes to get a hurting friend to the power of the one who can help him.

And listen this truly isn't the main point of Jesus' action here but it is a secondary point that is big enough to warrant mentioning. Mark didn't have to say "seeing their faith." But he did and I think it matches the character of Jesus and the message of the rest of the Bible. So let me say a couple of things:

First, This whole episode is Jesus' response to the faith not of the man on the mat, but to the faith of the 4 people lowering him down. Seeing THEIR FAITH. And real quick I want to talk to some of you who are close to the pain of a friend or family member. You are seeing it right now and I want you to hear that the best thing you can do is put them in front of Jesus. How? Obvious first one is to pray like crazy for them. Some of you have been praying for & trying to help friends who are hurting. That's called intercessory faith. Believing God on behalf of others. Praise God for you! He hears and responds to that. We are going to talk in a second about what you do when God seems like he isn't hearing you. But for many of you I gotta ask "are you desperate enough to take that person to Jesus?" That's where the power for change is. Are you praying desperately for them? And are you telling them their hope is in Jesus? They don't need your advice or your first aid. What they need is for you to do everything in your power to put them face to face with the power of Jesus. Pray over them & hold God's truth high in front of them.

Next, To those of you who are hurting, **You need people who will take you to Jesus when you are hurting too bad to go to him yourself.** I can't stress this enough. Hurting, grief,

pain...that is a burden you were never meant to carry alone. When you are in pain that seems to have no victory in sight, Sometimes you feel like you don't even want to get up. Maybe you didn't want to get out of bed this morning. When you are too hurt to walk, when you are at a place where you don't want to pray & don't want to try anymore, that right there is why God places you in a church when you become a Christ follower. I promise God desires to do some really great work through your pain but you need some people to help carry your mat for a while. I remember a good friend of mine whose wife admitted an affair she was having. These were two good people who love Jesus. He was hurt to say the least. And that anger comes like waves. You feel like you are ok and then out of nowhere pain & anger & grief just sort of knock you off your feet. You need some friends to remind you of God's love for you. To remind you he cares for you and he hurts for you and he's close to you and he's not leaving you. You need friends to take you back to the power of Jesus when you feel like you can't get there. Do you have those friends? If your answer is anything other than YES & here are their names, you have some conversations to have with some brothers & sisters in the church.

Now let's go back to verse 5 for the second half of it. For the part we really need to sit down in.

[5] Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "**Son, your sins are forgiven.**"

How many times have you prayed for God to ease your pain? Few years ago When I walked with a friend completely addicted to pain killers and tried to help him find freedom I was without power and I said GOD help him. When my son

Zeke was a year old and in the hospital fighting some infection I remember screaming God HEAL HIM! Right now as 2 of our members battle cancer I find myself praying over and over and over God COME ON! HEAL! Like the lame man, on that day I don't come to Jesus to hear 'Your sins are forgiven.' I come hoping for the miracle of 'Rise up!' In the moment of pain we all share the same cry: God help me.

I know. I know some of you just want relief from your pain. God just let us get pregnant. God just let me get out of this marriage. God just let me be free from this illness. God just give me a job. God just change my situation. We want relief. GOD HELP ME!

But Jesus doesn't heal his body. Faithful friends sacrificing themselves and their own dignity & maybe even getting put in jail for vandalism...extreme & urgent faith...and Jesus doesn't give them what they want.

2. Jesus sees the paralytic's deepest wish and goes deeper

"In his heart this paralytic is almost surely saying "If I could only walk...then all would be well." And Jesus is saying my son you are mistaken. That may sound harsh, but its profoundly true. Jesus says "when I heal your body, if that's all I do, you'll feel you'll never be unhappy again. But wait two months, four months – the euphoria won't last. The roots of the discontent of the human heart go deep."¹

Keller references an article by Cynthia Hemel where she's commenting on how miserable celebrities are because their

¹ Keller, Tim. *Jesus the King* (Dutton NY,NY 2011) 28.

fame they worked so hard to get didn't deliver the happiness it promised. And commented "I think when God wants to play a really rotten joke on you, he grants your deepest wishes." You have to understand this truth to understand Jesus right here:

Our deepest wishes will never satisfy our deepest need.

Jesus sees the suffering of the paralytic and doesn't give him his deepest wish, he goes deeper than that. And we must sit in this long enough to see the compassion & power of Jesus. The bible says every single one of us has a deepest wish. And we build our identity on it. We believe that if we can just get that thing, whatever it is, then we will be content or secure or we will matter to the world. We'd never use the phrase, but we've basically turned that thing into our savior. So if we *don't* get it we are unhappy & bitter. But if we *do* actually get that thing we've wanted...we discover it doesn't deliver like it said it would and we end up MORE unhappy and more empty because our savior has, in effect, not only let us down but has turned on us entirely.

Some of us come to church or pray hoping God will help us out of our suffering or help us get over the hump or get back on track so that we can get back to tracking down our deepest wish. But every time we come to Jesus saying "please help me with my deepest wish" he says...you must go deeper.²

² "Going Deeper" is from Keller's chapter on this passage in his book *Jesus the King*. Page 30. I leaned on him here for this idea and am indebted to him for how this helped me root out idols in my own life.

Jesus says that **HE** is the only one that will actually satisfy your soul when you have him. And if you fail him, he will forgive you. See there's nothing wrong with looking to God to give us our deepest wish. He loves to give us good things. it's the fact that we are looking to other things to be our savior...that's our problem. And we are so often unaware of just how deep this problem is. I'm not trying to minimize your pain in any way. **The deeper problem that must be healed in order to have victory over our pain is a savior problem. We need a savior. And that's why Jesus responds the way he does.**

Let's keep reading because this will all start to make sense in the second half of the story.

[6] But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts: [7] "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

They bring up an important point. He's just said your sins are forgiven. But sin, these scribes know, is something every person is guilty of and sin is against God. Well if sin is against God, it is logical that only God can forgive sin. If you punch Charlie in the face...and I look at you and say hey man, I forgive you. Well that's a nice sentiment, the problem is forgiveness isn't mine to give. You didn't wrong me, you wronged Charlie. Well, the reason these guys are so upset is Jesus is saying...your sin was against me. Which means he's claiming to be God. And that is blasphemy. Either he's crazy, or he's a fraud, or he's God. Those are the options. And the scribes think its one of the first two. But before they can even say it...

[8] Right away Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? [9] Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat, and walk’?”

First off I love that he knows their internal dialogue right? He knows every thought we have. And it had to mess with them because when he says “I know what you are thinking” he actually does. And he asks a Fascinating question. Is it easier to forgive sins or to make a lame man walk? Jesus is separating himself from being just some miracle worker. Any healer could make a lame man walk. Jesus is saying oh that’s just the kiddie pool. But only the savior of the world can go into the deep end and say “your sins are forgiven.” So here’s what he says next:

[10] **But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”** — he told the paralytic —
[11] “I tell you: get up, take your mat, and go home.”

[12] Immediately he got up, took the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Ok this part is the part maybe you remember if you’ve heard this story before. Jesus heals the guy! He gets up and walks out! MIRACLE! And we log it in our memory banks as an example of the loving Jesus who heals the sick. But Why did he heal this guy? It wasn’t in response to the faith of the paralytic or his friends. It’s actually a form of rebuke to the LACK of faith of the scribes. Does that mess with you at all? Cause it messes with me. JESUS DOESN’T RESPOND TO ANYBODY LIKE THEY THINK HE SHOULD

The people who want Jesus to make the lame man walk...Jesus responds with forgiveness of sins. The ones who want to brand him as a fraud...he responds by showing his power to heal with just his words. What is he doing? Here’s what he’s doing:

3. Jesus shows the skeptics that he is God.

Healing the lame man was an act of power and a show of mercy. For sure. But healing a physical ailment most certainly requires less power, Jesus is saying, than offering forgiveness of sins.

We need more than a miracle worker. Because a miracle worker cannot heal our deepest pain. We need a savior. We need God. And that’s why Mark puts this story in there. His power to heal...Jesus is using it as a laser pointer to direct your eyes and hearts to where his real power lies.

[10] **But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (put it up even if I don’t reference it)**

See, if Jesus wanted OF COURSE he could change your circumstance. Answer that prayer. IN A SECOND. But Jesus goes deeper! He loves us too much to just grant wishes because he knows we need more than a genie, we need a savior. Someone who will go down and set us free from sin itself so that we might begin to have a way to find victory in all of our pain...

Yet after hearing Jesus, after understanding that the healing was just a sign to something greater, we still want the sign. In moments of pain, we want relief. Thankfully, Mark doesn’t end

the story here. **The man claiming to be God will suffer great pain so that our pain here will be eclipsed by a hope so great it swallows up the pain entirely.**

See this is, in a way, his first step to the cross in the Gospel of Mark. He knows what he's saying & what it means & who is listening when he says "your sins are forgiven." He already knows he's headed to a cross.

And when you begin to understand what happened on the cross, you begin to understand the magnitude of what he said to this paralytic. And that healing his legs was NOTHING in comparison to forgiving his sins.

The night he was betrayed by Judas he went to the Garden of Gethsemane. That night in that garden is a holy place. Mark talks about it in chapter 14. And I just want you to consider it.

Mark is going to say Jesus, in the garden, was greatly troubled & distressed. The original words used in Mark's writing means overcome with shocking horror. So overcome he starts sweating blood. His capillaries are bursting. This isn't just sadness. It's horror. This is Jesus...and he's terrified? So terrified that he says "abba" which is the most intimate way he can talk to God. "Take this cup from me." The cup is the Old Testament metaphor for God's wrath & judgment against sin. But Mark says God had already begun to turn his face away. And in that moment Jesus was utterly alone and God had abandoned him.

There are two first steps you can do to unlock Jesus' power to overcome your real pain.

1. Stand amazed at his love for you in *his* darkest hour.

Twice Jesus sought the solace of His Father, twice he called him "Abba." Twice God turned His face away (*God so loved the world*). Jesus, knowing there was no other way, took the cup. For me... and He drank it. If I could have been there and tried to stop Jesus He would have said, "This cup is your cup." Your sin and your selfishness... The British theologian John Stott says, "*Before we can see the cross as something done for us, we must see it as something done by us.*"³ On the cross...He drank every last drop of God's wrath so that I could drink the cup of salvation. He didn't shy away from it. It wasn't just death...it was abandonment by God.

In the garden, on the cross, Jesus was completely abandoned. Why? So you never would be. He got up there and drank your cup! In other words your sin and my sin nailed him to the cross. By dying, he paid for our sin. And because he died in our place God looks at us, lame & helpless to do anything about our sin...stuck on the mat with no hope of getting up...and he says son, daughter, your sins are forgiven. We are forgiven! We don't deserve it. That's why you have to stand amazed. He loved you anyway.

Old Hymn: I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazerene and wonder how he could love me a sinner, condemned, unclean. He took my sins and my sorrows and he made them his very own. He bore the burden to calvary and

³ The commentary on Gethsemane & the wording for the two action steps are borrowed from a sermon by J.D. Greear on Mark 14 titled "The Silence of God" in the 'Scarred' Series.

suffered and died ALONE. Chorus: Oh how marvelous oh how wonderful and my song shall ever be oh how marvelous oh how wonderful is my saviors love for me!

2. Believe in His love for you in *your* darkest hour

I know many in this room have gone through, and maybe are going through, some terrible things. And maybe it seems like God has abandoned right now in it. And the promise of God to you is that Jesus got up there, on that cross, and was abandoned by God so that you would never, ever be. If God didn't abandon you here on the cross...why would he ever abandon you now? If you feel guilty and weighed down by sin, like God has rejected or given up on you... ask, if God didn't reject you when hell was literally squeezing the life out of Him, has He given up on you now? Do you feel alone? If He didn't leave me alone here... when would He leave me alone? My old pastor used to say he loved being able to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," b/c helps me to know that God is all powerful. But I also loving praying, "Our Father, who has been through hell for me" because it helps me know he'll never leave me.

Do you feel distant from God, like He's not close or working in your life? The question is not how close you feel to Him, but how close has He made Himself to you... I am not loved or accepted by Christ because of how I feel, how much victory I have over temptation, or how well I'm doing. **I put my faith not in how close I feel to Him, but in how close He has made Himself to me.**

And listen to me...when you realize God is there with you. That instead of being distant he's actually walking with you. And not only that, he's secured your salvation...then your pain

loses its power over you. MAYBE he'll take it away entirely. But that's the kiddie pool. Because he has gone so much deeper than that in my life and met a much greater need I can say with the apostle Paul "I have learned what it means to be content in times of plenty and times of want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I don't strengthen myself, He is my strength. He is my power. I'm weak, he is strong.

The last verse in Mark 2...verse 12...the story ends with "[12] Immediately he got up, took the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

The last character in the story is the crowd. And as a result of Jesus intervening...they gave glory to God. Jesus disrupted their lives so that they might worship him. That's the reason he does what he does. In all 4 stories of this series the point is to call everyone to worship him. Even people, especially people, who have never seen anything like him before.

Maybe that's you today. Maybe you finally see God's love for you and maybe you've never seen it before. Or maybe you are hearing it again but it just makes sense this time. There's a reason. God is calling you to himself. He's made a claim on your life. You need the deeper healing he offers. Forgiveness. And you can finally have it today.

Maybe you need to know he hasn't left you. You can know that today too. Maybe you need some friends to take you to him. We can do that. **Come to Jesus.** Worship him. Don't hold back. He didn't hold anything back on the cross. Give your whole self to him.

I saw a speech this week that Jim Carrey, one of my all time favorite actors up there with greats like Paul Giamatti. His speech caught my attention because the headline was “Suffering leads to salvation.” And Carrey looks at these guys who are at a rehab center and he says “Suffering is the only way to salvation.” Christ got up on the cross and he had a choice...revenge or forgiveness. And he painted a beautiful picture of the cross. And then he said...You guys have that same choice. And that’s where he left it. And I thought man...you got so close. The giant problem is that if I have to look inside myself to find the power to forgive...I WILL NEVER FIND IT! The power to forgive, the power to suffer through pain...that isn’t within me. I may pretend & try for a little while but it will ultimately exhaust me. Jesus carried that burden FOR ME. Now when I’m wronged...the first thing I do is go back inside of his love for me. God give me the power to STAND AMAZED at your love again today. And again today help me believe that love is still right here with me. Now let me love others as I have been greatly loved.

Do you know that love!?! Receive the love of God today.