

Week 4: Mark 1:29-2:12: Miracles and Power

Hook



Main Point: Jesus has the power not only to perform miracles but to forgive sin.

Have you ever witnessed a sports upset so incredible, so shocking, that the win was dubbed a *miracle*? Our own Neal Jeffrey, Associate Pastor of Pastoral & Preaching Ministries, lived one of those unforgettable upsets firsthand.

As quarterback of the Baylor University Bears, Neal led his team to an unforgettable win over their longtime rivals, the Texas Longhorns. It was a cold, rainy, fog-drenched day in November, 1974. At halftime, Baylor trailed 24–7. Spirits were low – except for Neal’s. His smile pierced the gloom in the locker room. When the coach asked why he was smiling, Neal responded, “Coach, we got ’em right where we want ’em.”

And he meant it. In the second half, Baylor stormed back, scoring 27 unanswered points to defeat Texas 34–24—snapping a 16-year losing streak against the Longhorns and paving the way to their first Southwest Conference Championship in 50 years. The upset was so improbable, so electric, it became known as *The Miracle on the Brazos*.¹

Q: What impact does a longshot victory have on a team or a community?

Q: Have you ever been in the stands or watching on television when a “miracle” took place on the field/court?

Q: Apart from sports, what events have you seen or heard of in your own circles that you would describe as a miracle?

Transition: In today’s passage, we will witness Jesus perform many miracles – healing people physically but, even more impressive, forgiving sins!

Recap: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies, or history books; they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark was written by a coworker of both Peter and Paul to encourage Roman Christians who were enduring persecution for their faith. Because many original disciples who knew Jesus personally were dying off, the Holy Spirit led Mark to write down the Gospel for the future generations. Mark's focus on Jesus' action more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lesson 2, we looked at Jesus' preparation for ministry and how every part of it pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but a different kind of kingdom than they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world. In lesson 3, we saw Jesus begin to proclaim this kingdom to the world, show His authority as king, and call people to follow Him.

In this lesson, Jesus shows His power even more – not only power to heal, cast out demons, and perform miracles but even power to forgive sin.

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Mark 1:29–31 [Read]

Talking Point 1: When Jesus heals you and gives you new life, you want to serve Him.

Q: What details of this story make it very personal and intimate?

Q: What was Peter's mother-in-law's response when Jesus healed her?

Again, Jesus moved immediately. They left the synagogue and went directly to Peter's house. Mark tells us this was the house of Simon and Andrew. In New Testament times, extended families lived together in multi-generational homes. The father was the head of the household, and when his sons grew old enough to marry, they added on to their father's house and brought their wives to live there. When daughters grew up, they went to live with their husband's families. Peter and Andrew both lived in the home of their father, Jonah, so it's strange that Peter's mother-in-law lived with him. In a typical situation, she would have lived with her husband and their sons, not her grown daughter. This likely meant she was a widow who didn't have any grown sons. Peter's family took her in, which was not their responsibility but that of her husband's family. The fact that she lived with Peter's family showed that theirs was a family of compassion, care, empathy and support.

Peter's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever. Luke, who was a physician, added that it was a "high" fever, and she was "suffering." This was not just a simple fever but a serious illness. Immediately (again), they told Jesus about her, showing their compassionate care. In an honor/shame culture, sickness was something that brought shame. Sickness indicated you had done something wrong to deserve it. But they met her with concern and empathy, not shame, and asked Jesus to help. And Jesus didn't hesitate. He took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her.

It's significant that Jesus touched her; He didn't have to. He could have healed her with just His words, as He had rebuked the spirit. In Old Testament law, touching a dead body or someone with a skin disease made you ritually unclean (Leviticus 5:3; 11:28). Touching a person sick with fever was not explicitly prohibited, but people would have been wary of touching her in case what she had was contagious. Yet Jesus often touched people when healing, even when it would make Him ritually unclean. Touch is

an act of love and intimacy. It brings comfort. It shows that you value the person. She was more than a project to Him; she was a person He deeply loved and cared about.

This touch was unique. He took her by the hand and *lifted her up*. The word can mean “awaken,” “arise” or “raise up.” It’s the word used in the New Testament for God’s raising the dead. This was the first physical healing Jesus performed in Mark’s Gospel, and it was a foreshadowing of the Resurrection. She was lying down as if dead, and Jesus raised her up. Her healing was immediate and complete; she began serving them right away, as many well-mannered Jewish people would do for their guests. She didn’t need time to recover. She didn’t need to rest. She was made new. He *lifted her up*, and she was ready to go.

Her immediate serving also points us to our response to being healed, restored and made new by Jesus – serving Him. Not because we feel we owe Him our life, though we do, but because we *want* to serve Him. This life as a new creation in Christ, with His Spirit dwelling in us, it is a life of service because the heart of Jesus is the heart of a servant. Jesus Himself lived a life of service (Matthew 20:28), so His people are defined by a life of service. Not just individual acts of kindness or generosity, but a daily lifestyle of humility, giving and serving others.

Q: Describe how you have been healed, changed, and touched by Jesus.

Q: How has God grown a heart of service in you? How can others see that heart in your life?

Mark 1:32–39 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Even in the busyness, Jesus took time to go away alone to pray.

Q: How does the language of this passage show us just how busy Jesus’ ministry was?

Q: Why did Jesus take the time to go out alone to pray? When did He do it? What does this say about our time of prayer?

That very same evening, people started bringing people to Jesus to be healed. Again, this story happened fast, pointing us to the urgency of people’s response to Jesus. He cast out a demon in the synagogue that morning and at sundown the whole city was gathered at the door. They waited until sundown only because that was when Sabbath ended.

A sentence in verse 34 shares what may seem to be an odd detail, but it is significant to the story. After that first demon recognized Him in the synagogue, Jesus didn’t let the

demons speak so they wouldn't reveal His identity. This is the beginning of what scholars call "the Messianic Secret" in Mark. But it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. Why would He perform miracles publicly but also try to keep His identity a secret at the same time? Jesus wasn't hiding who He was; He was being strategic about how and when He revealed Himself; timing was crucial. But it is significant to note that the demons knew who He was. This points us again to His divine power and authority. He was not just a human king come to save Israel; He is God-made-flesh come to save the world.

This section has a bookend structure, a "miracle-prayer-miracle" sandwich. The first section (vv. 32–34) describes an intense evening in which Jesus, bombarded by "the whole city" bringing Him "all" who were sick or oppressed by demons, healed "many" and cast out "many" demons. Intense language to describe an intense situation. The sheer quantity of healings shows Jesus' incredible power. But it also shows His compassion and care for all of humanity. He healed everyone who came to Him, just as He saves all who come to Him in faith, no matter their background, social status, or anything else. Just as God promised in the Old Testament that all who are thirsty can come and drink (Isaiah 55:1), Jesus said all who are weary can come to Him and rest (Matthew 11:28).

In the last verse of this section, Mark again showed Jesus performing many miracles through "all" of Galilee. The line is shorter, but it reinforces this feeling of non-stop healing power. In vv. 35-39, the people weren't coming to Jesus; He was going out to them. Jesus was on the move, going to meet people where they were, taking His preaching and healing power to them.

But sandwiched between these two sections is a significant thing Jesus did. He went away from all the crowds and attention and work of the ministry and took the time to pray, v.35. The story doesn't give us the impression that He was tired and needed to take a break. Jesus handled all those healings. He took a break not because He needed rest but because He needed to pray. He actually sacrificed rest (sleep) to do so. He got up while it was still dark.

Jesus regularly took the time to pray. Even in this busy ministry season, when things were going so fast, from one thing to the next to the next, He stopped and took time to pray. Not just as a model for us, but because He needed to pray. We see that in the way He prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane. It was a necessary time for Him to commune with the Father, share His feelings with Him, and submit to the Father's will.

It may seem like this time of prayer reenergized Jesus so He could go back out and do more ministry, and maybe it did, but Mark didn't say Jesus needed reenergizing. Regular prayer was just part of the rhythm of His life. A habit, a discipline. Jesus was one with the Father and communed with Him all day long, but He also had specific times of prayer, times He carved out to get away and be alone with God. He made the time for it, regardless of how busy His life was. And if Jesus, a member of the Trinity, took the time to pray regularly with how busy He was, we should take the time, too. As crazy as our lives can get, we must *make* the time to do it. We don't have to get up early as Jesus did, but that's often the best time to get alone and quiet with God. Communing with God all day throughout your day, along with regular special times of prayer, meditating on God's Word and other spiritual disciplines, is needed to walk in fellowship with Him.

Q: How have you experienced God through prayer and other spiritual disciplines?

Q: Reflect on your prayer life. Are there ways you need to change your habits or make specific concentrated prayer a part of your daily rhythm?

Mark 1:40–2:12 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus has divine authority not only to heal but to forgive sins. He *is* God.

Q: How does this story show us why Jesus was trying to keep His identity a secret?

Q: What does it tell us about Jesus that He has the authority to forgive sins?

This section includes two stories of healings, but beyond the testimony of Jesus' power, they both have something important to teach us about Jesus and the Gospel. In the first story, Jesus touched the leper, even though it made Him ritually unclean. The story also shows the leper kneeling before Jesus, which was an act of worship, pointing again to Jesus as king. The way the leper phrased his request showed great faith in Jesus' power – "You can make me clean." But it also showed deference to His will – "If you will." This is a foreshadowing of how Jesus would later pray to the Father in the garden, "If it's your will...." Both are a model for us – trusting He can do whatever we ask, realizing He may have reasons for saying no, and deferring to His will.

Jesus was moved with compassion for the leper. This is a unique word used only 12 times in the New Testament, always of Jesus (or the God-figure in a parable). The Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament is most often used of God's compassion and mercy on His people. It literally means to be "moved to the bowels," which they considered their deepest inmost being and the seat of their emotions. It's a deep visceral compassion that leads to merciful action. It shows us God's deep love for His children and His great mercy.

When Jesus healed the leper, He told him not to tell anyone. But he went out and told everyone. And we see in the result why Jesus had been trying to keep His identity secret. Jesus was no longer able to go freely from town to town; He had to stay in desolate places, and even then, people came to Him. When He returned to Capernaum a few days later, so many people had gathered that there was no room even to get in the door. This leads to the story of the second healing.

Four men lowered their friend through the roof. Many people teach this story as the faith of the friends who carried the man to see Jesus (v. 5) and how important it is to surround yourself with friends of faith. This is absolutely true, but it's not the main theological point of this story in the context of Mark's account. We know this because Jesus didn't initially heal the paralytic physically. First, He said, "Your sins are forgiven."

At this point, Jesus' fame had grown so much, He needed to make a public statement about who He really was. Many people expected a Messiah who would start a revolution and take over the throne of Israel. Many were just excited there was a miracle worker who could heal them. No one realized Messiah would be God-made-flesh. This exchange with the scribes was crucial to shift their understanding. Jesus knew their thoughts, that this was blasphemy because only God has the power to forgive sin. Jesus said the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins, then used the miracle to prove His power.

Referring to Himself as the Son of Man was an intentional choice. The Son of Man was a divine being who looked like a human but came to God's throne on the clouds of heaven. God the Father gave Him all authority over the earth (Daniel 7:13). This was a Messianic prophecy that showed the theological truth of Jesus as God-made-flesh. And it answered their question about authority. The Son of Man was given all authority, glory and sovereign power. Jesus had the authority to forgive sins because He *is* God.

Jesus was telling them who Messiah really was – not just a human political leader but God made flesh. He didn't just come to heal their bodies; He came to forgive their sin. To destroy sin and death forever. We can't come to Jesus just looking for physical healing, new leadership or other material things. He didn't come just to make our lives here on earth better. He came to rescue us from this world and bring us to the kingdom of heaven.

Q: Why is the power to forgive sin more important than the power to heal? What part does forgiveness play in our prayers?

Q: How do people today look to Jesus to be something He is not? How do we mischaracterize or misrepresent Him?

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Took

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We live in a world that moves fast – and our attention moves even faster. At work, the average American moves on to a new task after only three minutes.² Facebook reported that people scroll at a pace of 1.7 seconds on their mobile phones.³ A London survey found that 49 percent of respondents believe their attention spans have shortened, and 50 percent of them cited their attention span to be 8 seconds.⁴ Our focus tends to shift often.

Slow down this week, allocate time in your prayers to look back and focus on gratitude for God's miracles in your life, namely, the wondrous salvation that Jesus has afforded you. Pray that the Lord would keep this posture of humility and wonder at the forefront of your mind as you interact with others and move through the paces of your day. Seek opportunities to move conversations to the miracle of salvation in your life and extend the invitation to a life with Jesus to others as well.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the ways you have seen the power of Jesus in your life. How has He healed you? Changed your life? Changed your heart? How have you seen Him working in the world around you? How have you experienced miracles? Supernatural wisdom? Supernatural joy, peace, love, etc.? How has He made you a new creation in Him? How is your life different now than before you knew Him? How are you different now?

PRAY for the world to understand who Jesus is. Not a caricature or misrepresentation of Him, but who He really is, the real Jesus. Pray for the Church to reflect Him to the world as He truly is. Pray for your own understanding of who He really is and get to know Him more and more fully every day.

ACT: Take time out to pray. Every day this week, make intentional time in your schedule to get alone, away from the distractions of the world, and pray. It doesn't have to be early in the morning, just whenever it works for you. Just make the time this week to pray. Make it a regular habit.

¹ <https://baylorbears.com/news/2024/9/4/football-was-it-a-miracle.aspx>

² https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/cant-pay-attention-youre-not-alone?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³ https://www.careerarc.com/blog/attention-span-on-social-media//?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ https://www.thetimes.com/uk/media/article/ted-talks-trimmed-attention-spans-st55856wq?utm_source=chatgpt.com®ion=global