

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her.³¹ So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.³³ The whole town gathered at the door,³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him,³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (Mark 1:29-39)

Jesus has Power to Heal

How much do we spend on healing in this country? I read this week that Americans spend 2 ½ trillion dollars on healthcare every year. That's almost \$8000 per person in your family every year. I had to take one of my kids to get a hearing test from a specialist a few months ago, and by the time all was said and done, we spent \$400 to find out that there's nothing wrong. Imagine how much we would've spent if they would've found something that needed to be treated. We Americans spend an enormous amount of money on healing. And it isn't just medical issues. We spend billions in this country on counseling for emotional and psychological and family problems. How much success do we have at finding healing? Whether you're talking medical issues or family problems, healing can be hard to come by. How many of us have wrestled with medical problems for months or even years? How many different drugs and therapies have we tried and we still don't feel better? How many of us have spent years in counseling trying to find healing for problems that rotted in our lives for years? All of that makes the gospel lesson for today that much more dramatic, because in this lesson, Jesus simply wipes problems away. **Jesus has power to heal.**

I.

Mark gives us two views of that power. He starts by zooming in on one particular situation in one particular family, that of Simon and his brother Andrew. We know Simon better as Peter. And when Jesus heals his mother-in-law, God shows us that **Jesus has the power to heal the hurts we suffer personally.**

The events in our gospel lesson began on the very same day as the events we heard about last week. Jesus drove a demon out of a possessed man right in the synagogue in Capernaum. After the service, he went to the home of Simon Peter. Peter was married and his mother-in-law lived with him. When they reached the house, they learned that his mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever. We don't always appreciate today how terrifying the word "fever" was in the past. Before all the medical science that you and I take for granted, when family members started to burn with fever the only way to bring the temperature down was to bathe their body with cool liquids. They didn't have refrigerators, so they couldn't use ice except in the winter. More times than we can count, healthy people came down with fevers and died within a day or two.

So they told Jesus about the situation. He had already established his reputation as a healer and miracle worker. Mark says that he took her hand, helped her up, and the fever left her. In fact, she got up and began to wait on them. Understand, it was the Sabbath. Don't think of a big Sunday dinner at grandma's house. The Jews weren't allowed to do any regular work on the Sabbath, and that included cooking. So a Sabbath dinner was probably cold, with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables and things that could be prepared the day before. But even so, someone once commented to me about how unfair she thought this was. This woman who had been knocking on death's door had to serve them lunch. But the Bible never says she had to wait on them. It says she did. The point is that she felt that much better. Usually, when we're recovering from a serious illness, we need at least a day or two to get our strength back. But again and again, when Jesus heals, the person is 100% from the moment he does the miracle. That's how great his power is!

This woman, whose name we don't even know, was a model of Christian service. Whether she understood it or not, she actually began to serve Peter and Andrew and her daughter and the other disciples even before she got up and set the table. How? By giving them a chance to show their Christian love. The way God

designed his Church on earth is unique. We all serve each other. That means that sometimes, it's my job to be the person who helps someone in trouble. Sometimes, it's my job to be the person who needs help, the person that gives another Christian the opportunity to exercise their faith.

Most of the time, wouldn't we rather be the person who comes to rescue rather than the person who needs help? I would. It gives you a good feeling to help out someone who's in trouble. It can even stroke your ego a little bit. But that's exactly why sometimes we need to be the one in trouble: it reminds us that we need God and we need the people that he puts here to share the hardships of this life. We need to be comforted and often, that's more important for our faith than being the hero. But we do also need the opportunities to help, to sacrifice, to take our time and our effort and even our money and spend it on someone else. Peter's mother-in-law gave the other members of her family that opportunity.

Of course, she also served them by showing them their Savior. In a world without aspirin or other fever drugs, the Son of God came and showed that he was indeed the one God had promised. He lifted her up and suddenly, she was 100%. For the people standing there, who had felt her burning with fever and bit back their tears at the possibility that she might die, this was a dramatic illustration of who Jesus is and what he does for us. That illustration has continued to serve the people of God for two thousand years. God sent a fever onto this woman so that we can learn about our Savior.

God uses every hardship and every illness that we suffer for our good and for the good of the people around us. Jesus still has the power to do for us what he did for Peter's mother-in-law. At any moment, he can cure whatever illnesses torment us. More than once in my ministry, I've prayed in hospitals with sick people and God has done miracles. He granted healing and life and the doctors couldn't explain why or how. But even when God works through the normal processes of medical science, he is still the one who grants healing and life. No matter what medicine you take, no matter what procedure you have done, none of them work every time. When God does grant healing, he's demonstrating the exact same power that Jesus demonstrated when he lifted that woman off her bed and she was ready to serve lunch. Jesus has power to heal us and the people we love, no matter what we suffer.

II.

Mark zooms in on Peter's family so that we can see ourselves in the work that Jesus did for them. But then Mark zooms out. He tells us, "**That evening after sunset**" – they had to wait until the Sabbath ended at sundown – "**the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.**" Capernaum was a fairly important town on a major highway. It's possible that several hundred people gathered at Jesus' door that evening. **Jesus has power to heal the hurts we suffer with the gospel.**

He healed people who had all kinds of diseases and even people who were demon possessed. Illness isn't the only thing we suffer from. There are many more things that hurt us. Where do all those problems come from? You've heard me say it before: from sin. All the evil of this life is here because of sin. Now, don't misunderstand me. That does not mean that every time you experience something bad that God is punishing you. It doesn't even mean that every time you sin, you're going to suffer in some way. God often bears with our sin and refrains from punishing us. God often lets bad things happen that have a greater purpose than punishing us. But sometimes, God does let us suffer the consequences of our own sinful decisions because he is disciplining us – he's teaching us to know better than to sin. Sadly, we deserve more than discipline, more than God teaching us to live right. God should punish us because we do sin every day of our lives. All the hardships of this life don't come close to what we owe: hell itself. That's what every sinner deserves. That includes us. But God sent Jesus to die and rise to pay for our sin. God made him suffer hell itself and now, we won't have to suffer hell and death will only last a moment. And God sent Jesus to free us from all that sin does to us here. There is no pain or sorrow that is beyond his power to heal.

But there is another part to the lesson here. Jesus healed all those people who came on that Sabbath day. So what happened the next day? More people came! But Jesus got up very early that morning and went out to a quiet place to pray. When his disciples found him and tried to bring him back. Jesus said, "**Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.**" He didn't heal the people who came on the second day. Was that fair? Of course it was. God never promised us that we won't suffer in this life. But I bet many people in that crowd outside Peter's house were upset that they weren't going to be healed that day. They had to wrestle with the fact that Jesus chose not to make them better.

The same thing could happen to us. Someone that you've known for years may get sick and then recover. They may have no financial problems. You may envy their family life or their success, because you struggle with those things. You might think that God isn't being fair. But you would be wrong. God loves every one of us the same. Because Jesus knows each of us personally, because he cares about us and our faith, he carefully and deliberately decides when we get sick and when we will be well, when things go well and when we face disaster. It's never an accident. When we hurt, it's because that hardship works for our good. He works through that hardship. He will listen to our prayers and if it's what's best for us, he will bring healing and life to us. And if he does not, it's because he has a greater good in mind for us. What is that greater good? You know the answer: eternal life. There is nothing more important in this life than reaching heaven. If you don't get to heaven, but you had a great life here, do you think that will be much comfort in hell?

So Jesus decides what we have to face in order to get us to heaven. If pain is what we need to get there, then pain is what we'll have. How could pain do that? God uses hurt to purify our faith. He uses hurt to teach us that this life isn't the most important thing and to turn our eyes to heaven. He uses hurt to give us practice in trusting him. Faith is trusting God's promises even when can't see how they could be true. He teaches to trust his promise to love and care for us when life hurts so that we trust his promise that our sins are forgiven and that we have a better life coming.

Like Peter's mother-in-law, sometimes God uses our hurt to show another person his love and grace, either by rescuing us from the danger, or by using our faith as a testimony to the love of Christ. If our hurt makes it easier for someone else to know Jesus, then we may have to suffer for the good of that brother or sister in Christ. But always, Jesus is there. Always, what he does is for our good. How can be true? Well, who's making the choice? Jesus who loved us so much that he left heaven itself to live here as one of us, to muck around in the mud and sewer of life in this sinful world so that we can be set free. Jesus who loves us so much that he went to the cross and suffered hell itself and then death because that's what we deserve. Jesus who lived and died and rose again so that we will live with him in heaven. That's who's in charge of your life right now. That's who's deciding if your hurt will get better or worse today. He will only work for your good, even if you have to hurt. Trust his promise.

Jesus said that his real purpose in coming was to preach the gospel. That's because the gospel is what actually gives us faith and what actually strengthens faith, even when God purifies our faith through suffering. The truth is, the gospel is an even greater miracle than the physical healings that Jesus did. The gospel gives life in a dying world. The gospel comforts us when we have to fight our way through the pains and sorrows of this life. That's where our true healing lies. The miracle and the beauty of it is that it doesn't cost anything. It's not like the costs we pay for health care and counseling and all the healing we seek in this life. The gospel is free and it's yours. Jesus is working for you. Trust him. Amen.