

“Jesus’s Mercy Through Miracles”

Mark 1:29-45; Mark 2:1-22

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Opening Prayer

Miracles by definition are supernatural. What makes a miracle a miracle is the fact that it doesn’t follow the normal laws of nature. It makes sense that the Creator of everything can perform any miracle He wishes at any time, yet with only a few exceptions even in scripture miracles are very rare. In Moses’s ministry there are many miracles, Elijah and Elisha perform quite a few, and then here with Christ and the very early church there are a significant number of signs and wonders performed. The Lord, it seems, isn’t in the habit of doing these things without a reason or purpose. I bring this up, because in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is doing miracles constantly. Just about everywhere He goes He is performing some sign or wonder. Beloved, the miracles of Jesus are done out of mercy, as an extra sign of just who He is. The Pharisees, the Romans, the disciples, whoever cannot argue against the miracles of Jesus. They are massive in scale, they are public, and thus when Jesus starts to then tell everyone what He has come to do and who He is, they are forced to reckon with the fact that His words might just be true. Today we pick up where we left off on Wednesday, with Jesus in Galilee preaching and teaching and performing astounding miracles that prove He is God.

After all of the consternation that had taken place where Jesus had cast a demon out of a man in Capernaum’s synagogue, He goes to stay with Simon (Peter) and Andrew in their house. They share with Jesus that Simon’s mother-in-law (Peter was clearly married for the record) has a fever, and Jesus heals her. As He stays at the house, the crowds figure out that He is there. The news about what He has been doing has spread, and they bring all in the city who were sick and demon possessed. Jesus heals many, in the full sight and presence of everyone. There is no denying His power. Early in the morning, Jesus gets up to pray alone (something He does over and over... and something we should do too) and then He and His disciples depart the city. They go around Galilee preaching and casting out demons. Jesus heals a leper whose plea strikes a chord with us still today. “If You are willing, You can make me clean” he cries from his knees. Jesus, filled with compassion, heals the man by doing the one thing nobody else would do for fear of the man’s disease. Jesus mercifully touches the leper and says “I am

willing, be cleansed.” The man, overcome with joy, does not heed Jesus’s words to keep silent but instead shares with everyone he meets about what Jesus has done. This news about His miracles pushes Jesus over the top, and His fame got to the point where Jesus can no longer enter cities, but had to teach in unpopulated areas where there was enough room for people to come and see Him. After several days, when the excitement surround Him had subsided, Jesus returns to Capernaum again. Once more He will do miracles... with one standing out in particular.

Jesus is in a home, likely Peter’s, when four men come bearing a paralyzed man on a mat. Since the crowds are immense, they have no way to get their paralyzed friend into the home to have the man healed by Jesus, so they go to the roof. They dig through the clay roof, and they lower the man on the mat down at Jesus’s feet. Seeing the faith of the men, Jesus tells the paralyzed man “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Truthfully, this almost certainly isn’t what the paralyzed man and his friends wanted to hear. They were expecting Jesus to heal him, not absolve his sins. Jesus does heal the man, as many of you may recall, but not before addressing the Pharisees in the room.

“But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’” In some ways, they are right. The Lord alone can forgive sins. Jesus, being fully God and fully man, has that ability. To prove it, Jesus heals the paralyzed man. “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?” Beloved, everyone knows the answer. It is easy for someone to physically speak and say that sins are forgiven. Everyone knows that the Lord alone can actually forgive. But to physically heal a man of such an ailment, while less eternally impactful than forgiving sins, proves that He has the power to do the spiritually hard thing too. “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet, and go home.’” There is mercy in the miracles Beloved. Jesus does not need to reveal who He is through them, but does so that these folks (and us!) might believe.

Let’s take a step back really quick and apply this thought process to the most important miracle that Jesus ever did. He rises from the dead on Easter morning, showing the world that He has indeed taken our sins to the grave on His back, and that those who trust in Him shall receive His everlasting life with Him. If we were

to take away the resurrection, a few things that are really not good happen. The first and most important issue is that we would die in our sins. If there is no death and resurrection, then we cannot receive that free gift of salvation that He has given us because it wouldn't have been given. That is plain and simple, and scripture confirms it over and over again, that there is no way to eternal except through Christ's salvation alone, and that salvation is predicated upon His death and resurrection. No one is good enough, no other faith holds muster in God's eyes, it is Jesus or bust, and that salvation pivots on His rising from the dead. Secondarily, the resurrection is the proof we need to know our faith is real. Spiritually it is paramount, but intellectually it is for us too. We don't blindly trust in Jesus's resurrection, or His divinity, or His salvation that we enjoy, because there is actual proof. For you Methodists, one of the core understandings that came from our denomination's founder, John Wesley, is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Simplified, it breaks down discernment into four parts. Scripture, tradition, experiences (group experience), and reason. All work together, with scripture being the most important, to give us understanding. You are encouraged, therefore, to use your brains to understand as best you mortally can, the Lord's will. (Remember, always these four work in conjunction!) The empty tomb, the historical accounts from the time period (we know more about Jesus from this period than we do about the Ides of March and the murder of Caesar, just for the record), the historical fact that Jesus and those important figures like Pilate and Caiaphas actually existed, the fact that all of the disciples except John go to their graves proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, the historical account of 1st Corinthians 15 that is written in the time period of the early church stating that many had seen Christ risen, the list is long Beloved. To believe that Jesus rose from the dead, to believe that He has saved us from our sins, to believe that we were created with a purpose and a plan to spread that glorious news and live in eternity with Him... you are no fool to believe this, for there is a mountain of evidence to show it is real. It all starts and ends with the miracle of the resurrection, that merciful action of Christ. Speaking of the merciful actions of Christ, in Mark 2:14-17 Jesus graciously and mercifully calls a sinner into the kingdom.

Levi, also known as Matthew (the same writer of the Gospel bearing his name), was a tax collector. Tax collectors today are often looked down upon. In Jesus's time, they were viewed as outright traitors by the Jews. They collected taxes for the Roman government, and they were usually chosen from their own people.

They would often get rich because their personal wages were taken from what they taxed beyond what Rome required. It was a profession that marked one as a Roman stooge to be hated, someone who despised Mosaic Law because those taxes were used in Roman idolatry, and they got rich at the expense of their own countrymen. Tax collectors in scripture are almost always spoken of in direct connection with the generic “sinners,” those who did not follow God. Levi, of all the disciples, therefore comes from the most hated background. Levi, or Matthew, is the last person on earth who would be expected to follow the Lord. For sure fishermen and average joes were not highly regarded, but tax collectors were exceptionally hated. Yet, Jesus calls to this one to “Follow Me!” To Levi’s credit, he does, leaving behind his tax collecting booth and business to follow Jesus. It is an act of repentance Beloved, and it shows that God’s mercy can extend to even the most lost. This, Beloved, is itself mercifully miraculous. All of the other miracles that Jesus does lead up to this... the salvation of those who would follow Him. In fact, while the healing of a fever or a paralyzed man or a leper is fantastic, it pales in comparison to the amazing miracle of the forgiveness of sins for this tax collector.

At the beginning of the message it was mentioned that the Lord is not in the habit of doing miracles without a purpose. The purpose is to reveal to those who listen the way of eternal life. Beloved, He loves each and every one of His creations. From the Billy Grahams of the world down to sinful tax collectors like Matthew, He loves each and every one of His children who are made in His image. He desires that each and every one of His children would know Him, know His name, know His saving grace that comes through Christ alone. The miracles are special, and Jesus performs them knowing very well that they are special, but they are not the end goal. The real miracle is that people like Levi might obtain mercy. Lest we think we are much better, we should remember that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We need that mercy, we crave it in our souls to be absolved of the sins we have committed. Jesus is the answer. The miracles He does in this time showcase that He is able to forgive us of our sins, and that is highlighted on His resurrection out of the ground. If you hear nothing else this morning out of the Gospel of Mark, please hear this: Jesus has given you mercy if you will but receive it. Beloved, let us repent of our sins, following as Matthew did in Jesus’s footsteps and leaving behind that which is sinful. Let us receive that free gift of mercy, the real miracle, the miracle of salvation, that Jesus has provided to us and proven to be ours by His death and resurrection.

To end this morning's message, I want us to take note of Jesus's words to the Pharisees in verses 16-17. When the religious leaders, who thought themselves holy, saw the repentance of Matthew and his friends as they ate with Jesus, they scoffed. "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus's words in response strike true to this day. "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Beloved, the unrepentant and sinful heart doesn't belong to the tax collectors here, but to the Pharisees who didn't realize that they needed Jesus's mercy too.

There is a sadness that extends throughout the entire Gospel of Mark regarding the Pharisees. The most trained and learned men, who had studied and revered God's Old Testament word more than anyone else, were so often led astray from God's plans for mercy and salvation. What should have been joyful in seeing these miracles done by Jesus for those in need was instead looked at with scorn by them. When a sinner like Matthew came to repentance and left behind his tax collecting booth, it should have been relished by these religious leaders as a triumph of a man returning home to God. As we will see next week, when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, it should have been a time of great joy for the glory of God's miraculous works through the Messiah were revealed... yet the Pharisees are more concerned with their own traditions and man-made laws. Unrepentant in their own hearts, they see Jesus doing all of these miraculous things, calling sinners out of their lives of sin, healing and saving the lost, and they instead of following Him seek to kill Him. Jesus has come to call the sinners, not those who think they are righteous. We must be cautious Beloved, to examine our hearts and minds and souls through the lens of scripture and in persistent prayer to make sure we don't fall into this same trap. You and I have been given the wonderful gift of mercy, extended to us through Jesus. We shouldn't think ourselves great, for we are not, but by Him we have been made clean. We shouldn't scoff when He calls others who are sinners into the fold, but rejoice with them. We should seek to be repentant, as He commands, and we should seek to show mercy to those who are repentant around us as He first showed us mercy. In all things, we should recognize that He has miraculously given us salvation like He did Levi, through His body and blood upon the cross. Thanks be to Jesus, that we are saved from our sins by His mercy. Go forth and rejoice this week Beloved, be encouraged, for that mercy has made you clean. Let us pray. **Closing Prayer**