

Jason Upchurch - Mark 1:40-2:12 - The Good News of Indisputable Proof

This morning we are looking at 2 healings that Jesus did that are really amazing. And on the one hand just the fact that the miracles were performed was amazing. Jesus heals a man of leprosy and makes a lame man walk. Just the power over the physical body that Jesus exerts is enough to worship him forever and ever.

I say that because we're going to dive deep into these 2 healings and I don't want to miss the forest for the trees: it's just amazing that Jesus did these things.

At the same time, something to keep in mind when we're thinking about the recorded history of Jesus is why the gospel writers chose to record the events they recorded. Obviously they are moved by the Holy Spirit to write these things down. That's the Sunday school answer. But why these 2 healings?

Of the thousands of healings that occurred, why record these ones? What is special about them? What should we take away?

What I want to submit to you is that the 2 incidents we are going to see this morning revolve around the theme of indisputable proof. That is, what Jesus is seeking to accomplish in these healings is to show with 100% certainty that there is no higher authority in the universe than him. He is the Lord of all the earth.

Last week we saw he has authority over the spiritual world - he casts out demons. Here we're going to see he has authority over the physical world - he will heal bodies.

And he has authority to determine eternal destiny: he has authority to forgive sins which only God himself has.

So, that's the big picture: these specific healings are recorded because in them Jesus gives indisputable proof of his authority over all creation.

1) He has indisputable authority over the physical world.

The first story is Jesus healing a leper. Leprosy was a rather common and devastating disease in the ancient world and continued to be devastating until just a few decades ago. According to Wikipedia in the 1980s there were somewhere around 5.2 million cases in the world. In 2020 there were only about 200k cases - about half of those cases are in India. It is essentially being eliminated by antibiotic treatment and multi drug therapy.

But for thousands of years it was a plague. In fact 2 whole chapters of the OT are dedicated to this one disease. **Look over to Lev 13:1.**

Here in the OT there are 2 full chapters - 116 verses - dedicated to leprosy. What have here are diagnostic principles that priests would follow, quarantine protocols needed to be observed, sacrifices for the person under observation, and also the means by which people were pronounced healed or exonerated of the disease.

This was all up to the priests at the time to make these pronouncements. Part of this was because depending on the type of leprosy it was contagious. Most leprosy we know in the modern era is called Hansen's disease and is a bacteria spread through respiratory transmission: through coughing or sneezing - airborne infection.

And all the way back in the OT God did not want his people to be infected with the disease. Look how detailed this gets. **Read 1-8**

So there were no dermatologists back in the day. No antibiotics or ointment. There was quarantine. The priest would look at the depth of the white skin rash, did it affect the color of the hair, was there an open wound, did it get better or worse after a week or two?

And if you read through this it is essentially a diagnostic manual for leprosy. And there are basically 4 options: (1) he doesn't have leprosy, (2) he does have leprosy, (3) he has some other type of skin disease that makes him unclean but it's not leprosy and he'll probably get better.

Or (4) there were a wide variety of skin issues that weren't a clean or unclean issue. **Read 38-39**

And of course my life verses. **Read 40-41**

Baldness is not unclean. It's just genetic. Unless... **Read 42-44**

So baldness all on its own wasn't a problem, but if there were skin issues accompanying the baldness it was a problem.

Leprosy in its various forms is essentially a neurological disorder. The bacteria affect the body's ability to detect pain. It can affect someone's eye sight, it can affect swelling. Most often what we think of is that it affects someone's ability to feel pain. Lepers often had missing fingers and toes and hands and feet because what happens is that the pain receptors in the body are unable to register pain to the brain. So lepers would be injured and wouldn't know it. They would break bones or tear ligaments or tendons, have open wounds in the hands and feet that would become infected before they knew there was even a problem and their extremities would be amputated.

Part of the blessing of pain when we are injured is that it communicates to our body we need medical attention or rest. Lepers don't have that pain sensation. So they were consigned to a life where their bodies were continually beat up and deteriorating and they couldn't know.

But here's really the devastating part of leprosy: for those who were pronounced leprous they were consigned to a life of loneliness and shame. **Read 45-46**

The disease was so devastating that if they were ever around someone they had to call out that they were unclean. They had to give advance warning. Their identity was now in their disease. And they had to live outside the camp - they could not live in the community of Israel because they might infect other people.

Now, in **Chap 14** we have laws about pronouncing someone clean from their leprosy. This is important because it's part of the situation Jesus is getting at. If someone were to be healed of leprosy there was also a process to go through. **Read 1-9**

So this is amazing. There is a precedent in the OT for establishing that someone has been healed of leprosy. I think there were actually only 3 people in all the OT who were healed of leprosy. Naaman the Syrian was healed. If you remember Moses put his hand inside his cloak and it was leprous and then it was healed - that was a sign to the Jewish leaders. And Miriam had leprosy in **Num 12:10** and it seems as though she was healed.

But other than those 3 I'm not aware of any other healings. When people got leprosy they were never healed. I don't believe there was any history of priests actually using **Lev. 14**.

Now, with all that in mind, **turn** back to **Mark 1**. And let's walk through this.

First of all, notice how this exchange even comes about. **Read 40-41**

We know nothing about this guy. Sadly, we don't even know his name. As I mentioned in Leviticus his identity is his disease, he's just "the leper." And he's not even holding to the commandment that Jesus himself laid down in the OT: he is approaching Jesus. Not supposed to approach anyone, and if you do end up near them what are you supposed to say? "Unclean! Unclean!" He doesn't do any of that.

In desperation he violates the Law and approaches Jesus. And the way the language is used here it's desperation: he's coming, imploring - over and over begging Jesus - and falling down on his knees, "Please, please, please if you will make me clean!"

His life is completely defined and determined by this disease. And Jesus responds. He doesn't rebuke him. Doesn't command him to depart - even though he's violated the Law. Jesus is compassionate so much that he touches the man and he heals him. And again the language pretty graphic: it's almost as though you can see the leprosy vanish as Jesus is talking to him. The whiteness and swelling and spots and oozing is all gone in a moment.

See in the OT uncleanness could spread. It was like a disease or infection. But because of the power of Jesus the disease doesn't spread to him: cleanness radiates from him. The leper doesn't affect Jesus, Jesus affects the leper and he is made clean.

Now, remember I said just a minute ago that in the OT there were only a few cases of a leper being healed. None of them actually used Lev. 14 to make that determination. Priests had never actually used this passage. What does Jesus say? **Read 43-44**

So don't tell anyone how this happened. But go and see the priests. By the way, this probably happened up in Galilee. So the leper would have had to travel a few days south to Jerusalem. Then go through the cleansing ritual for 8 days total.

And Jesus tells him sternly to do this. Tell no one what happened, go to the priests. Jesus isn't playing. The word here means to scold someone. The NIV says a strong warning. Why?

Because imagine the leper goes to the priests in Jerusalem. Says "Hey, my leprosy is gone can you check me?" They're surprised so they dig out Leviticus, blow the dust off the pages of chapter 14 because they've never ever been used, and go through the motions. The former leper is in quarantine for a week not seeing anyone or talking to anyone. He reemerges and they look him over and over and shaves his whole body to make sure there's nothing remaining and they pronounce him clean!

What do you suppose they might ask him? How were you made clean? Everyone knew he was a leper. The religious leaders pounced that his leprosy was no more. How were you made clean? Answer: Jesus made me clean.

This would be indisputable proof that Jesus has the power to heal. This would have been amazing. Except our leper has a history of not doing what he is told. **Read 45**

Three times in this little story the leper is painted as someone who is disobedient. First, he violates the law to ask Jesus to heal him. Then he violates Jesus's specific command to not tell anyone. And he didn't go to the temple to get checked. He went to all the surrounding area and told everyone he could.

Now on the one hand, can you blame the guy? This was amazing! No one - no one! - had ever been healed of leprosy like this. And this guy had. He got his life back. And people must have known him because they believed him so much so that Jesus had to go all the way out into desolate places just to accommodate the crowds that were pressing around him.

Now, let me make an observation here. He completely disobeys Jesus at every turn. From start to finish. But Jesus still shows mercy on him. If it were me and I gave someone their life back and they didn't do the 2 simple commands I told them to do I'd probably go: you can have your leprosy back. There were times when God punished people with leprosy. Naaman got healed, but Elisha's greedy servant Gehazi was punished with leprosy because he took stuff from Naaman. Miriam was punished with temporary leprosy for trying to overthrow Moses.

Jesus has given people leprosy in the past, he could do it now. But he doesn't. He's merciful and gracious. I don't know how many times I've asked God to do something or give me something and like 2 seconds after he graciously answers my prayer I turn around and sin against him. And yet in his mercy he doesn't take away what he's blessed me with.

Even in this man's testimony - although he wasn't supposed to do this - Jesus was glorified and people came to him. It may not have been indisputable proof to the priests, but it was indisputable proof to the masses who came to Jesus from all over.

So Jesus has indisputable authority over the physical world.

2) Jesus has authority only God has.

Now, most of us are familiar with this story. And I contend that it is set in the context of showing Jesus's authority. It's not just a healing. It's a healing that shows Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. **Read 1-5**

So Jesus is back in Capernaum. Capernaum is at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and is basically Jesus's hometown during his ministry. And the crowd here crashes Jesus's own home. He's not at Simon's house or out in the wilderness. He's at home when the masses show up.

And the place is packed inside and outside. There's no way to even get inside anymore because there are so many people around. They've heard the power of Jesus to heal the leper. And now Jesus home so they're coming to him to hear him preach.

Talk about silver lining: the paralytic whose sins are forgiven and legs are healed is healed because of the sinful response of the leper in not going to the priests. God turns our sinful things into glorious things. In any case, these 4 friends bring their paralytic friend to be healed.

Paralytics, like lepers, were really the lowest of the low in society. They had to rely on others to feed them and take care of them and carry them anywhere. There were no wheel chairs, no ADA access. There was your buddies who carried you around on poles. You begged for food and clothing and any money because you had no ability to work.

And they hear Jesus is back in town and take their buddy to Jesus's house but the place is packed and they're not getting in. But these guys are not taking no for an answer so they climb on the roof.

Now, houses in Jesus's day were usually one or two stories. The roof was usually flat with a small wall all around the edge so that people could sleep on the roof at night during the summers to stay cool. So these guys haul their friend up the ladder to the roof and begin pulling off the tiles that would have acted as the ceiling.

I mean, imagine this room were so packed no one could get in and all of a sudden where I'm preaching the drywall starts falling down and guys are smashing their way through to get to the front. And then they lower their friend down from the roof Mission: Impossible style so that he gets past all the crowd and is right in front of Jesus.

What if the guy falls, what is Jesus going to think about them destroying his house? They don't care - they just need to get their man in front of Jesus so he get his life back.

So he's dangling there literally in front of God and everyone and Jesus is amazed at their faith. They are doing everything they can to help their friend. And here's Jesus's response. **Read 5**

Now, imagine you're the paralytic. Are you excited about what Jesus just said? This is not why you're dangling from the ceiling in front of hundreds of people. You didn't come to hear your sins are forgiven. You came so that you could walk again. Jesus is healing everyone - the masses are going to him and he has no problem. And here you are still dangling with legs that don't work and then he pronounces your sins are forgiven.

Now, again, I just want to remind you: we know who Jesus is and why this is significant. But this guy and the crowd don't know this. And to them this is a double failure. First, he doesn't heal the man and second, he claims to forgive his sins which only God can do and quite frankly no one can see or verify. Jesus can say the sins are forgiven but how would anyone verify this to be true? Who does Jesus think he is? **Read 6-7**

See, not only does it appear that Jesus doesn't heal the man which is why he really came. It also appears that now Jesus is blaspheming. Blasphemy is defaming God in some way. In this case, Jesus is elevating himself to be God and therefore - in the mind of the crowd - bringing God down to his level.

Because their rhetorical question is accurate: who can forgive sins but God alone? How would we answer that?

Answer? No one. No one but God can forgive sins. It seems to the crowd that Jesus has gone too far. He's just overstepped his authority. He has authority over demons, he has authority over physical well being, but this is a bridge too far. Or is it? Here's the first indication he's God. **Read 8**

Oh. Jesus is omniscient. Jesus knows exactly what they're thinking in their hearts. This was all by design to lead them to a particular conclusion.

Remember the theme in these 2 stories is indisputable proof? That was the goal of the leper: to give indisputable proof to the religious authorities that Jesus is legit. And here he's teeing up a situation where there is indisputable proof that he's God, that he really does have the authority to forgive sins. **Read 8-12**

Think about this: on the surface which is the harder claim to prove? That Jesus forgives sins or that Jesus can heal? It's actually harder to prove he can heal because healing is easy to verify. It's pretty hard to verify if someone's sins are forgiven. And so Jesus tees this up to slam dunk both questions:

He heals the man, proving he has the ability to forgive sins. And answers the question: Why does this fellow talk like that? Why does Jesus talk like that? Because he is God who can forgive sins.

Jesus set up this whole situation, the teachers of the Law laid out the terms of deity, Jesus reads their minds and then he absolutely crushes their expectations.

It's like the Messianic trifecta: man healed, sins forgiven, divine nature established and praised.

I want to mention a couple of things.

1) In both of these situations Jesus uses peoples' tragedies and even sin for his glory. Who knows how long the leper had suffered and who knows how long the lame man had been lame. And yet Jesus uses their tragedy for his glory and their good. The leper is healed and the lame man is healed and we are edified by their suffering and the mercy of Jesus.

We don't always know how God is going to use our suffering and our tragedy for his glory.

2) Jesus is not offended by continual imperfection. The leper sinned twice after his healing. And this guy and his friends just destroyed Jesus house. But you know what? Jesus healed him. And forgave him.

God's mercy toward us keeps going even when we're disobedient after we've experienced his mercy. That's not an excuse to keep sinning. But it is a reminder that God's mercy doesn't hinge on our perfection. God is merciful just because he's merciful.

3) Jesus does have the power to forgive sins. That's the real need. Whether people know it or not or care or not. Physical healing in this world, while nice, is not the real healing people need.

What we really need is for God to forgive our sins. And only in Christ will he do that. And Jesus offers that forgiveness freely and even when we don't realize we need it.

He is amazing and deserving of our praise. **Pray**