

Amazing Miracle Worker



SABBATH AFTERNOON

MAN OF ACTION. After his abbreviated introduction, Mark plunges into Jesus' ministry in Galilee. He presents a series of short, action-packed vignettes, like a fast-paced television report.

Again it is instructive to compare and contrast Mark's approach with the other Gospel writers. In Matthew's Gospel, the first major event emphasized in Jesus' ministry is the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*), but Mark doesn't even mention it. Luke focuses on Jesus' sermon at Nazareth (*Luke 4:14-30*), but Mark bypasses that too. For John, the miracle at the wedding in Cana highlights the opening of Jesus' ministry, but Mark makes no mention of it. Each Gospel writer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, creates an individual account of the life and work of this incredible Man, our Savior and Lord.

The Week at a Glance: What proof did Jesus start giving of His power? In what ways did the healing of Peter's mother-in-law reveal the principles of a Christian life? How did Jesus show the link between the spiritual and the physical life? In what ways did Christ break down some of the longstanding religious traditions of His day?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 1:21-2:17.*

Memory Text: "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" (*Mark 1:41, NIV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 9.*

The Demon-Possessed Man *(Mark 1:21-28)*.

Jesus came at a time when the forces of evil were in the ascendancy, when men and women were held tightly in their grasp. Ellen White paints a graphic picture of the times: “The deception of sin had reached its height. All the agencies for depraving the souls of men had been put in operation. The Son of God, looking upon the world, beheld suffering and misery. With pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. . . . The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 36.

In Mark 1:21-28, what’s the first thing that Jesus did that impressed His audience that He was someone special? At the same time, why wasn’t that enough to prove who He really was?

Jesus came as the great Deliverer of humanity. He came, not to be served but to serve; not to be exalted but to bring hope and healing. Thus, we find Him in constant conflict with the forces of evil who fought hard to retain their hold over the human beings they possessed. The demons were strong, but Jesus was stronger.

Read carefully the healing of the demon-possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum *(Mark 1:21-28)*. How should this miracle help prove His identity?

Jesus eventually would be rejected by many of the people He came to deliver because they would refuse to acknowledge who He truly was, *despite the powerful evidence given them*. In contrast, the devils recognized Him and bowed before His authority. Talk about irony!

Christian author C. S. Lewis told how, when he was an atheist, another atheist, talking to him about Jesus, said something to the effect of, Well, you know, C. S., there’s a lot of historical information backing up the Gospel accounts of the life and death of Christ. The friend then went on his merry way, seemingly unaffected by the implications of his own statement. The implications, however, profoundly impacted Lewis, who eventually became a Christian. How does this account fit in with today’s lesson? In what ways are we, even as Christians, in danger of assuming a similar attitude as Lewis’s atheist friend; that is, of ignoring powerful evidence given to us about the working and power of God?

Peter's Mother-in-law *(Mark 1:29-39).*

How does Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law demonstrate His personal interest and care? *(Mark 1:29-34).*

The New International Version translates Mark 1:30, 31 like this: "Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them." As soon as Jesus heard about her sickness, He went to her bedside. No putting off the visit until He had eaten Sabbath lunch, no time given to instructing the disciples. Instead, she came first. And at the bedside He didn't simply speak to make her well: He took her hand and helped her up. What a tender, thoughtful Healer He was! Notice also that the healing was not only immediate but complete. A bout with fever frequently leaves a person weak and debilitated. Not so with Peter's mother-in-law: She got up and immediately ministered to them.

Jesus does something for Peter's mother-in-law that she couldn't do for herself, and then she responds. **How does this reflect the whole idea of the Christian life?** *(See Matt. 10:8; John 15:12; 1 John 5:2, 3).*

When was the last time someone did something really special for you for which you were exceedingly grateful? **How did you respond, and why? How did your response also reflect what the Christian life of grace is all about?**

By doing all these wonderful things, Jesus gets a great following. "All men," said the disciples, "seek for Thee." But did they really? When you read the whole story of Jesus, it's possible that some of these same people were among those who, in the end, turned away from Him. Thus, seeking after Jesus, in and of itself, isn't always enough. There needs to be something else. **How does the response of Peter's mother-in-law hold the key to solving this potential problem, and how does that apply to our own spiritual life?** *(See also James 2:22.)*

The Leper *(Mark 1:40-45)*.

Study Jesus' cleansing of the leper in Mark 1:40-45. What shows Jesus' compassion? Why did He give the healed man a strong warning? What was the result of this miracle?

The English term *leprosy* comes from the Greek *lepra*, which is used in the New Testament. It seems evident, however, that the word was used for various diseases affecting the skin. The *SDA Bible Dictionary*, in discussing the description of leprosy in Leviticus 13, notes: "An analysis of the various symptoms . . . disclose[s] that the term leprosy was evidently used in a more general sense than it is today. Some have suggested that Leviticus 13 comprehends 7 different diseases under the general term 'leprosy.' Some of the symptoms described resemble . . . psoriasis, . . . rather than leprosy, also called Hansen's disease, although leprosy is certainly included."—Page 667.

The Old Testament gave explicit instructions for those diagnosed by the priest as having leprosy. They were sent away from home and society (*Num. 5:1-4, 12:9-15, 2 Kings 15:5*) and forbidden to enter any city (*2 Kings 7:3*). The leper was to wear torn clothes, let his hair hang loose, and cry out "Unclean, unclean!" if anyone approached him (*Lev. 13:45, 46*). Apparently these conventions were still in force at the time of Jesus. The ten men with leprosy who met Jesus outside a certain village stood at a distance and shouted out to Him (*see Luke 17:12*). However, the leper in Mark 1:40 came right up to Jesus and begged Him on his knees for cleansing.

As humans, we all have a disease worse than leprosy, and that's sin. How, though, did a holy, sinless God respond and treat us anyway?

The fact that Jesus not only permitted the leper to approach Him but reached out His hand and touched him—breaking the conventions of the day—vividly shows the Savior's compassion. We, too, must not underestimate the healing power of touch. Employed with appropriate discretion, the touch of love—whether the outstretched hand or an embrace—for many wounded people goes far beyond what words may accomplish.

And though (in most cases) none of us have the power of supernatural healing in our touch, we should all as Christians have the power of love, of compassion, of mercy and unselfish care for others. What is your attitude toward modern-day "lepers"? What do you need to change about yourself in order to show them the same compassion as did Christ? Why is that so often hard to do?

The Paralytic *(Mark 2:1-12)*.

The story of the paralytic lowered through the roof is one of determination and ingenuity. We can't but admire the four men who, finding no way to get to Jesus through a crowded house, made a hole in the roof through which they lowered the man on the mat. The story even has a humorous touch. The teachers of the law, out of their element in the crowded, sweaty room, couldn't believe it when bits of ceiling began to rain down on them and someone was coming in through the roof!

Read Mark 2:1-12. **Imagine that you are sitting on the floor in the crowded room. You have come out to see this Jesus of Nazareth, whose miracles have people talking. But what happens is more amazing than anything you have heard. Imagine the reaction of the participants to Jesus' words and actions:**

The men who lowered the paralytic—their first reactions? Later reactions? The reaction of the paralytic? The reaction of the scribes? The reaction of the people who saw and heard Jesus?

Jesus honored the faith of the men who brought the paralytic, but not in the way they expected. He knew that the paralytic's most pressing burden was spiritual. As much as the sick man wanted to be made physically whole, he sought peace with God even more.

"Like the leper, this paralytic had lost all hope of recovery. His disease was the result of a life of sin, and his sufferings were embittered by remorse. He had long before appealed to the Pharisees and doctors, hoping for relief from mental suffering and physical pain. But they coldly pronounced him incurable, and abandoned Him to the wrath of God. . . .

"Yet it was not physical restoration He desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die according to God's will."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

Stress, guilt, fear, loneliness, anger, resentment, and jealousy all can have a debilitating effect on health. What promises do we have through Jesus that, if claimed by faith, could help bring healing both to body and soul? How have you experienced this power?

Levi Matthew *(Mark 2:13-21)*

Levi also is known as Matthew (*see Matt. 10:31*). As a tax collector, he was a member of a despised group. People hated tax collectors for two reasons: (1) They worked on behalf of Rome, a foreign occupying power. The tax collectors were collaborators with the enemy, and (2) tax collectors were often unscrupulous. The Romans followed a system of “tax farming.” Instead of taxing each person directly, they relied on tax agents who were held responsible for bringing into the treasury a stipulated sum. But so long as the tax collector paid in the designated amount, he could raise as much as he was able and keep the remainder for himself. Thus, the system lent itself to abuses. Tax collectors became wealthy by preying on their fellow citizens.

Jesus’ call to Levi Matthew must have shocked many people, including His followers. Further, Jesus went to the dinner that Matthew, in gratitude, put on for Him. Matthew invited his friends—other tax collectors—and “sinners,” meaning ordinary people on whom the Pharisees, who prided themselves in their superior standing with God, looked down upon. Their attitude toward them was: “‘This mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them’” (*John 7:49, NIV*).

Jesus, however, saw every person, no matter how society or the Pharisees regarded them, as a candidate for the kingdom of heaven. “‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick,’” He said. “‘I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’” (*Mark 2:17, NIV*).

Explain Jesus’ parable of the new cloth and new wine (*Mark 2:21, 22*) in the context of the day’s lesson.

Jesus wasn’t one more in the line of Israel’s prophets. He was a prophet, but much more. He was God in the flesh, bringing the kingdom of heaven. This newness would burst old patterns of religious traditions and conventions of society, such as those that looked down upon certain classes of people, even in violation of the basic principles of true faith. It would eventually burst outside the wineskins of traditional religion itself, as the gospel would go to the Gentiles.

Some longstanding human traditions, by virtue of nothing but their age, can become such a part of a faith that their violation seems sinful. What human traditions (if any) in Adventism have taken on the aura of something divine and inviolable? What’s the danger when this happens? How can we help people discern between what’s divine and what’s only human? (*See also Mark 7:7.*)

Further Study: Luke covers all the material in this week’s lesson and Matthew some of it. Compare their accounts with Mark’s: Matthew 8:14-17, Luke 4:31-44, 5:12-38. Read “At Capernaum,” “‘Thou Canst Make Me Clean,’” and “Levi-Matthew,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 252–280.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Are miracles the ultimate test that a particular religion or religious leader is genuine? What part will miracles play in the closing events of this world’s history? Why must we be very careful about how much faith we put in miracles?
- 2** In your class, discuss in more detail the idea of the danger of taking what are only human traditions and turning them into religious obligations.
- 3** All the stories we have studied this week involve people considered as second-class by society—the demon-possessed man, Peter’s mother-in-law (women were viewed as inferior to men), the leper, the paralytic, Levi Matthew. The first four stories involve physical healing, the last one spiritual healing. But the irony is that the teachers of the religion, who thought they were “the righteous” and had no need of a doctor, missed out on Jesus’ healing. And though it’s easy for us to look down upon the “the righteous” here, in what ways can we by our attitudes toward others reveal the same kind of spiritual disease as did these leaders in Israel?

Summary: The material of this week’s lesson gives us a magnificent picture of Jesus as the Son of God. By expressions like “immediately” and “as soon as,” Mark creates a fast-moving account of a dynamic Savior who brings hope and deliverance to all, even though society rejects Him. Jesus the Son of God casts out devils and heals both body and soul.

Heal My Son

Svetlana Chikurova

Svetlana held her tiny baby close as tears streamed down her cheeks. All she wanted was a healthy baby, but the doctor had confirmed her worst fears. Little Vladimir had suffered trauma to his central nervous system during birth; he probably would never walk. His muscles were weak and only would grow weaker.

Svetlana cried out to God for help, for there was no one else to hear her. “God,” she prayed, “my son needs Your healing. My neighbors ask me, ‘Where is your God?’ What can I tell them, God?”

After one doctor’s appointment, Svetlana laid her baby on the couch. Beside him she laid the pile of prescriptions the doctor had given her. “Lord, you have created my child,” she said quietly. “You know his body, and You heard what the doctor said. You see the prescriptions the doctor wrote. I will not buy a single pill, but I lean on You to heal this child.”

After several weeks in which Svetlana saw no improvement, she prayed a prayer of surrender. “Lord, I accept that my child will be sick. Give me strength and love to care for him.” While still kneeling, she saw a vision of how she could massage the baby’s muscles to make them stronger. She began massaging his arms and legs from the extremities to the trunk, and she massaged his back. Every day she massaged his body. By six months Vladimir could sit up.

The doctor was pleased with the boy’s progress and credited the improvement to the medicines she had prescribed. Svetlana did not tell her that she had not given the boy the medicines. “He may walk,” the doctor said thoughtfully, “but he will limp. He will not run, and one side of his body will be weaker than the other.

Svetlana continued massaging him, especially on his weaker side. Vladimir walked at one year, and by the time he was 3 years old, he could walk without a limp. He showed no sign of the weakness that the doctor predicted. Today Vladimir loves to play soccer and volleyball; he won second place in a ping pong tournament in his region.

Svetlana says, “When someone says there is no God, I tell them, ‘Look at my child. He is evidence that God exists.’”

Svetlana Chikurova lives near Zaoksky, Russia.