Jesus the shocking Healer

Mark 1:40-2:17 Lesson 3

Key Verse: 2:17

**17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

So far in Mark’s gospel we have already learned many things about Jesus, and we’re still in chapter 1! Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through Him the kingdom of God is near. Jesus is humble. Jesus was **victorious** over every single temptation known to us. He preached repentance and the kingdom. Jesus focused his ministry on giving people God’s word, believing it to be the best way to help them spiritually. Jesus called ordinary people to be his followers. Jesus prayed. He had amazing stamina because he depended on his Father in prayer. These truths about Jesus are moving and have deep meaning for us personally.

In today’s passage we learn something **unexpected** about Jesus. We learn that Jesus is shocking! (photo 1) A few years ago, our family watched a series called “Fringe”. In this exciting science fiction series, the phrase “shocking shape-shifters” was used often. These words increased the suspense of the show, bringing us to the edge of our seats, because we knew a shocking, extraterrestrial, unexpected event was about to happen. So I want to take you to the edge of your seats right now. Get ready to learn why Jesus our Lord is shocking.

First, Jesus touched a Leper. Look at verse 40: “A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’” In Jesus’ time, lepers were considered to be like the walking dead. Leprosy is a slow growing bacterial disease that leads to skin ulcers, skin growths, severe pain, numbness and paralysis, spontaneous amputations, vision problems, etc. It was the scourge of the ancient world and evoked fear and revulsion when healthy Jews saw them. Lepers could not be touched and were forced to live away from normal society. Deep feelings of loneliness, isolation and hopelessness were norms for a leper.

Leprosy is a graphic physical picture of the spiritual defilement of sin. Sin is unseen, like bacteria is unseen. Sin leads to inner pain, eventually numbness, inner wounds and ulcers. It slowly spreads. It defiles and isolates. It causes a broken relationship with God and with others. Leprosy also characterizes the kingdom of Satan, which leaves slowly dying chronic sinners with **absolute** hopelessness.

Let’s look at verse 40 again. This leper came to Jesus and begged him on his knees: “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” He knew he didn’t deserve Jesus’ healing, so he begged on his knees. He was also somehow able to think beyond his hopeless state and believed that Jesus could make him clean. What did Jesus say and do?

This is the shocking part, ready? Let’s read verses 41 and 42: Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. In Greek, the word “indignant” here means “to snort with the nostrils like a horse.” Jesus was **so angry** about what the devil had done to this man. He wasn’t angry with the man. He was indignant with what the leprosy had done to the man! Jesus stopped everything to heal this leper.

He, the Holy Son of God did what no man would do. He did an unexpected thing: he reached out his hand and touched the man. He said: “I am willing, Be clean!” (photo 2) Jesus did not think like a man, nor behave like a man. In contrast to the heartlessly slow disease and heartless society, Jesus took **immediate action** and rescued him from his hopeless state with his touch and his most powerful words. What a beautiful shock! What an amazing truth: Jesus is willing to touch our most chronic and disfiguring sins. And his words have power to completely heal us. Is there a chronic sin that’s inwardly disfiguring you, making you feel hopeless, even self-loathing? Jesus is willing to touch it and completely free you. (photo 3) Is there anyone in your life that is hard for you to get close to because they are not spiritually well? Jesus wants us to grow in his willingness to get close to those who need His spiritual healing.

Second, Jesus told the paralytic his sins are forgiven. What is so shocking about this? Stay on the edge of your seats now! Look at 2:1and 2: A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

Jesus went back to Capernaum, his home base for his Galilean ministry. He was in a home, and many gathered to see him: the sick, the curious, the truth seekers and even the religious leaders. Back then, an open door meant “come on in” and they did, until there was no room left spilling into the front yard. Jesus preached the word to them. Jesus scattered the seeds of his word to plant living faith in his listeners’ hearts. He most likely focused on his core message: “The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news.” (1:14,15) (photo 4)

Look at verses 3-5. Despite the obstacles of the crowd, the four men found a way to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus on a mat. Paralysis, like leprosy, can be a metaphor for sin. Paralysis makes one dependent on others, but often critical of those helping them. While in college, I worked for a woman who was paralyzed from the neck down. Though she was completely dependent on those helping her day in and day out for the most basic things, like using the bathroom and getting dressed, she easily complained about her care and drove her helpers away. She should have been the most happy person in the world, her every need was cared for! But she was quite miserable. Paralysis leads to helplessness and the inability to do the things we know are the right things to do, the sins of omission. These four friends truly loved their paralyzed friend. Making a hole in the roof of the crowded home was not too much for them. They were determined to bring him to Jesus for healing. This is true friendship.

Let’s read verse 5 together: “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” (photo 5) Jesus saw the faith of the friends and the faith of the paralyzed man and he responded. Here is the shock, the most unexpected response of Jesus: **He didn’t heal the paralysis first, instead he said: “son, your sins are forgiven.”**  He could have first done the easier, less controversial action, heal his paralysis. But instead he risked the criticism of the religious leaders in the audience and gave this man the forgiveness of sins first. (photo 6)

The conflict was immediate! Look at verses 6 and 7. The teachers of the law in the audience were thinking to themselves: “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” The penalty for blasphemy was stoning. Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, unless He was God. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus was telling them that He is God, the Messiah who had authority to forgive this man’s sins. He also loved the man and wanted to heal him from the inside out, despite setting off a chain reaction with the religious leaders.

Look at verses 8-12: Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” (photo 7)

Just as the inner forgiveness was **complete and instantaneous**, so the outer healing was complete and instantaneous. Everyone witnessed it including the religious leaders. They were amazed, literally out of their minds with amazement. It was a strong testimony to Jesus’ authority to forgive sins. And it was the beginning of the opposition of the religious leaders that only intensifies throughout Mark’s gospel.

We need to learn from the courage of Jesus who dealt with the real inner problem of this man, before trying to fix him up on the outside. Jesus had courage and discernment to do what was best for the man, even though he was misunderstood. Jesus wants us to grow in his courage to see people with spiritual discernment, and lead them to Jesus who can bring complete forgiveness and healing.

Third, Jesus called a tax collector. We are heading into the climax of the passage. Look at verse 13. The scene changes to the seaside. (photo 8) A large crowd came to him and he began to teach them. Let’s read verse 14: “As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.” (photo 9)

This is the third shock of Jesus in this passage. Jesus suddenly calls a tax collector to follow him. The Jews despised tax collectors just about as much as they ostracized lepers. Tax collectors worked for Rome and extorted money for Rome from their fellow Jews. Levi lived in Capernaum, but he was an outcast from society, excommunicated from the synagogue and his disgrace extended to his family. Though the partnership made him rich, he was despised by the Romans as well. The paralytic who couldn’t move, had friends. Levi was a mover and a shaker, but he was probably friendless. He felt as though he had gone too far to ever change his life path and reputation. He felt intensely lonely and washed up.

Levi’s life changed forever when Jesus told him “Follow me.” The Holy Son of God called the most public of sinners to be his follower. It was like Pope Francis asking Donald Trump to be his close assistant, times a thousand. It was a shock and unbelievable. Levi must have heard Jesus’ teaching. He was ready to turn from his sins and believe the good news. It was amazing grace, a completely undeserved calling. Jesus was willing to be with this man Levi for the long haul, until he was transformed into Matthew who wrote the beautiful Matthew’s gospel.

Who are the tax collectors of today? Maybe those who blatantly take advantage of others? Those trying to climb the ladder of success, destroying relationships along the way. Those we don’t want to get too close to because we know our wallet is going to get smaller. Those who recklessly live by the flesh, or who live far away from moral expectations that the Bible describes. Jesus wants us to see such people with his hope, share in his willingness to be with them, to lead them to his forgiveness and spiritual healing.

Mark doesn’t mince words. After receiving great grace, a joyful celebration happened! Look at verse 15. Jesus and his disciples were having dinner at Levi’s house with many tax collectors and sinners. (photo 10) In those times, to accept an invitation to dinner showed a willingness to become a close friend of the host. Jesus’ acceptance of table fellowship with sinners showed his forgiveness in action. Levi now had peace with God through his Lord Jesus Christ. He had forgiveness. He had joy. CS Lewis said: “Joy is the business of heaven.” Levi was experiencing the joy of the kingdom of heaven through repenting and believing in Jesus, and through following Him.

Look at verse 16. The “sinners” here at the dinner table, refers to the those who didn’t follow the Pharisees’ expectations and traditions: an assortment of public sinners. So Jesus’ joyful meal with them stirred up even more criticism. The self-righteous Pharisees saw no need for forgiveness and healing from within because they viewed themselves as already righteous. But those Jesus was eating with represented real sinners who knew their need for inner forgiveness and healing.

Then Jesus said a most unexpected and amazing thing. Let’s read the key verse, verse 17:  On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (photo 11) Jesus declared that he didn’t come to call the religious leader-types, but sinners. This is shocking indeed. On the outside the religious leaders looked useful to Jesus: they were knowledgeable and disciplined in the traditions and the law. But they didn’t need Jesus. They could achieve their own righteousness without Him. Jesus came for those who know their need for him. (photo 12) Jesus came to call the leprous sinners, the paralytic sinners, the sinners with reputations. Not those who think they are already healthy. The church should resemble a hospital full of the needy and sick. (photo 13) When a patient checks in to a hospital, he or she doesn’t start to tidy themselves up, start their own injections, start their own surgery before the Doctor walks in the door. No, he or she becomes totally dependent on the care of the Doctor! In the same way, there is no way we can heal ourselves or make ourselves righteous before God. It is only through the merciful help of our Doctor Jesus.

The image of Jesus as our spiritual Doctor forshadows the reality of the kingdom of heaven. (photo 14) Those in eternal fellowship with Jesus in His Kingdom, are forgiven sinners, not those who claimed righteousness. At the wedding supper of the Lamb, there will be the healed lepers, the healed paralytics, the most impure who became pure because of his shed blood. It is the great hope of all those who have been forgiven and healed by our Doctor Jesus. It is the great hope of us who continue to limp along, following Jesus during our lifetime, clinging to his grace every day.

Hebrews 4:6 says: “Let us therefore approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” I try to cling to this verse every day. I have no righteousness of my own. I need to come to God’s throne of grace daily. I need Doctor Jesus’ mercy and grace moment by moment. I can easily be a leprous sinner, paralytic sinner, Levi-like sinner, even a self-righteous sinner in my heart at any given moment. I am especially prone to the sins of omission and wanting to indulge the flesh. It is said that (photo 15) “grace is the unearnable, inexhaustible fountain of God’s forgiving, transforming and delivering mercy, **renewed each day** for every one of us.” (Paul David Tripp). Knowing our daily need for Jesus keeps us in dependent fellowship with Him. And that grace enables us to grow in his image so we can be a blessing to those who need his healing. We become willing to be with and get close to the leper-like, paralytic-like, Levi-like. They are those that our Lord Jesus still seeks out today. (photo 16) Even though we are also his patients, through the help of the Holy Spirit, he wants us to partner with him to bring them to Him for his care.

In this passage Jesus behaves in an unexpected, shocking way. He behaves as we wouldn’t expect. We find that he came not to call the healthy and the righteous, but the sick and the sinners. (photo 17) He is our Savior, Healer, Leader. Close your eyes and imagine those being healed by Him and following Him right now. Are you one of them? Pray about this: How can you be more like Jesus to make relationships with fellow sinners to bring them to Jesus? He is actively seeking to save and heal. Will you partner with Him? This week let’s meditate on Jesus, our graceful forgiving Healer, cling to his grace for our own healing, and find practical ways to bring leper, paralytic and Levi-like people to Him in our practical lives.