

March 9-13

March 9 — Reading 49 — Matt. 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39 — **Better Than Well**

Matthew 8

¹⁴ *And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. ¹⁵ He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.*

Mark 1

²⁹ *And immediately he^[fn] left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. ³¹ And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

ESV Footnote

(1:29) Some manuscripts *they*

Luke 4

³⁸ *And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. ³⁹ And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.*

Comment: As I mentioned earlier (Reading 12), here also, it strikes me that when Jesus healed, it was complete. Peter's mother-in-law was not weak after being in bed with a "*high fever*" (Luke 4:38), needing time to recover her strength. No, she "*immediately ... rose and began to serve them*" (:39). Later, when Jesus healed a deaf man that could not speak properly, the on-lookers were "*astonished beyond measure*" and said "*He has done all things well*" (Mark 7:37). That is the way God works—"well." Actually, better than "*well*"—perfect! Both of these miracles dramatically show the goodness and completeness of God and the way He works. But God also works "*well*" for us every day in less spectacular ways. He opens up a parking place with someone backing out just as we arrive in our circling a crowded parking structure. A week later you forget about that cut on your finger that He restored to its previous condition. He brings just the right person along for you to talk to when your heart is heavy. Whenever you see evidence of God's perfect ways as you walk through this day, thank Him.

Matthew 8

¹⁶ *That evening*

they brought to him many who

were oppressed by demons,

*and he cast out the spirits with
a word and healed all who
were sick.*

Mark 1

³² *That evening at sundown*

*they brought to him all who
were sick*

or oppressed by demons.

³³ *And the whole city was
gathered together at the door.*

³⁴ *And he healed many who
were sick with various
diseases, and cast out many
demons.*

*And he would not permit the
demons to speak,
because they knew him.*

Luke 4

⁴⁰ *Now when the sun was
setting,
all those who had any who
were sick with various diseases
brought them to him,*

*and he laid his hands on every
one of them and healed them.*

⁴¹ *And demons also came out
of many, crying,
"You are the Son of God!"
But he rebuked them
and would not allow them to
speak,
because they knew that he was
the Christ.*

¹⁷ *This was to fulfill what was
spoken by the prophet Isaiah:
"He took our illnesses and bore
our diseases."*

Comment: I saw two examples of caring for others in this story. First, there were caring people who brought those afflicted by sickness and demons. There were plenty of them: "*many*" (Matt.), "*all*" (Mark), and "*any*" (Luke). The large crowd, described by Mark as encompassing "*the whole city*," came right after sunset on this work-restricted Sabbath day, many of the sick being carried by others. As the healed and freed people ran back into the city to tell others, more people were brought to be made well. The second evidence of caring is seen in the actions of Jesus. With a mass of people needing His attention, He could have performed wholesale healing by waving His hand over the crowd but instead, "*he laid his hands on every one of them*" (Luke 4:40). It was a personal, individual touch of caring that took a considerable time. That reminds me of the prayer occasionally heard when someone asks God to "bless everyone" rather than praying specifically for individuals who are known to have specific needs. Jesus cares for us, not as a crowd, but individually and personally. As the old gospel song concludes, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me."

Meditation: Let's think about those demons Jesus encountered. First of all, the ESV translates the condition as, "*oppressed by demons*" here, whereas in a few other places it translates the same Greek word as "demon-possessed." What difference do you see between these two expressions? The word "oppressed" speaks of an outside influence but "possessed" describes an internal control. There is only one Greek word for them and it may not be wise to try to make a distinction between different levels of demonic influence. The fact that Jesus "*cast out*" the demons (Mark 1:34), suggests that those people were controlled by demons that dwelt within them. One thing that is surprising is how common that condition was. Both Mark and Luke say that there were "*many*" of them in this one city. Was Capernaum unusual in that way? Was demon-possession much more common in those days than in ours? Why? Perhaps there is more of that in our own culture than we like to admit? The demon controlled the person but Jesus controlled the demon. He had absolute authority and power over them. Even though these fallen angels had rebelled against God, they had

to do what Jesus said. He told them to be silent and they shut up. He told them to come out and they fled. It is comforting to know that God is in control of this unseen world that exists around us and He will have the ultimate victory.

March 11 — Reading 51 — Mark 1:35-38; Luke 4:42-43 — **Jesus' Priorities**

Mark 1

³⁵ *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

³⁶ *And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,*
³⁷ *and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."*

³⁸ *And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."*

Luke 4

⁴² *And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place.*

And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them,

⁴³ *but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."*

Comment: Jesus had gone to bed after a very strenuous day and evening. The crowd of people hadn't started coming to Him for healing until after sunset, so Jesus probably retired later than normal. In spite of that, He got up "*very early in the morning, while it was still dark*" (Mark 1:35) and went to a private place to be alone for prayer. His prayer time was priority time. Is it yours? Many of us would use having a late night as an excuse for sleeping in, making it too late for our normal devotional time with God or even too late for attending church the next day. Jesus had priorities and one of them was spending time in fellowship with His Father. It was perhaps during that early private time that Jesus received specific instructions about moving out to other towns in Galilee. This introduces a second priority we find in this story, that of obedience to what the Father had ordered. When part of the crowd found Him later that morning, they revealed their agenda because they "*would have kept him from leaving them*" (Luke 4:42). But Jesus had His orders and said emphatically, "*I must preach ... to the other towns*" (:43). "Must" is a word of priority. Jesus had been given a job and He had to do it. In our trek through the Gospels this year, we will encounter many commands that apply directly to us—things we "*must*" do. Will we make it a priority? Jesus operated by a set of priorities. The two mentioned here, the priorities of time and task, are the same priorities we must apply to our own daily lives, whether we are tired or not.

Matthew 4

²³ *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.* ²⁴ *So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.*

Mark 1

³⁹ *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues*

and casting out demons.

Luke 4

⁴⁴ *And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.^[fn]*

ESV Footnote

(4:44) Some manuscripts *Galilee*

Comment: Three verbs of continuous action are used in Matthew (4:23) to describe Jesus' ministry. The first is "*teaching*," which happened regularly in the synagogues "*throughout all Galilee*." The population of the large region of Galilee was scattered among about 200 towns and villages. Jesus' object was to visit all of these places Himself or later, by His sent disciples. Jesus' second constant activity was "*proclaiming*," which might have been done largely in open spaces where people gathered to Him. The subject of that proclamation was "*the gospel of the kingdom*," the good-news message of salvation that began with repentance and resulted in eternal life. The third unceasing emphasis of Jesus' ministry was "*healing*." Jesus wasn't a medical specialist but a general practitioner; He healed every one of everything: "*every disease and every affliction*."

Which of these three continuing ministry activities of Jesus attracted the most attention? In this passage, it is obvious that the miraculous healing of people was the big news that spread. In fact, it extended into the large Gentile area of Syria to the north, with cities like Damascus and Antioch. Did they come for His teaching or His message? In this passage, it appears that it was the miracles that attracted them because as a result, "*they brought him all the sick*." That is so much like human nature, isn't it? Attracted by the spectacular. Your side of the freeway slows to a crawl because of the flashing emergency lights handling an accident on the other side of the freeway! But Jesus didn't rebuke these hurting people; He helped them. I am sure that He was teaching and proclaiming the gospel as He was healing. We can do that, too. Let's help people who are in need and tell them about the Christ-centered motives behind our loving actions.

Motivation: Sickness and disease are not God's desire for us and it was not His original plan for us. These physical difficulties we struggle with are results of the fall of Adam and Eve. Jesus' ministry demonstrated the divine will for mankind by healing all the sick people who came to Him. That was part of His introduction of the kingdom of heaven. God's ultimate ideal for us will be realized completely when we get to heaven. What is the contrast between the *permanency* of our earthly bodies vs. our heavenly bodies described by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:42-43? What is the difference of the *quality* of our current and future bodies in Phil. 3:20-21? What does Jesus say in Rev. 21:4 will be *missing* in our heavenly bodies?

Matthew 8

² *And behold, a leper^[fn] came to him and knelt before him, saying,*

“Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

³ *And Jesus^[fn] stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

⁴ *And Jesus said to him,*

“See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

ESV Footnotes

(8:2) *Leprosy* was a term for several skin diseases; see Leviticus 13
(8:3) Greek *he*

Mark 1

⁴⁰ *And a leper^[fn] came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him,*

“If you will, you can make me clean.”

⁴¹ *Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” ⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.*

⁴³ *And Jesus^[fn] sternly charged him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”*

⁴⁵ *But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news,*

so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places,

and people were coming to him from every quarter.

ESV Footnotes

(1:40) *Leprosy* was a term for several skin diseases; see Leviticus 13
(1:43) Greek *he*; also verse 45

Luke 5

¹² *While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy.^[fn] And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him,*

“Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

¹³ *And Jesus^[fn] stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him.*

¹⁴ *And he charged him*

to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”

¹⁵ *But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.*

¹⁶ *But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.*

ESV Footnotes

(5:12) *Leprosy* was a term for several skin diseases; see Lev. 13
(5:13) Greek *he*

Comment: Luke described this leper as being “*full of leprosy*” (5:12), which suggests an advanced stage. If this disease was the same as our Hansen’s disease, some of his fingers and toes had probably already dropped off. Lepers were required to separate themselves from society to live in desolate places. Whenever a situation brought other people into their vicinity, they had to cry out, “Unclean, unclean” (Lev. 13:45). No wonder that at the beginning of Matthew’s account, he wrote, “*And behold, a leper came to him*” (8:2). Coming toward the crowd, he was probably shouting, “Unclean, unclean!” There would be no problem in getting to Jesus because the crowd would willingly scatter apart to avoid him. Why was he coming? Someone had told him about Jesus. This leper heard that Jesus had been healing people. His coming to Jesus showed faith, and it was a bold faith that violated the Law that prevented him from getting close to other people. His first word spoken to Jesus may also have showed his faith: “*Lord*” (Matt. and Luke). This Greek word can mean “sir” but it can also mean “master.” Here, it seems to involve more than politeness—he was

acknowledging that Jesus was a divine Master. His next words also show his faith: “*If you will, you can make me clean.*” To him, it wasn’t a matter of *ability* but of *willingness*. He believed that Jesus *could* heal him and he was begging that He *would*. He was bold, breaking cultural taboos, but he was humble as he fell at Jesus’ feet. That is also how we should approach the Master: “*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb. 4:16). We know that He *can*, so let us come boldly to Him to ask.

Meditation: What was involved in Jesus’ instruction when he said to the leper, “*go and show yourself to the priest*”? (Luke 5:14). Was that referring to the local priest in Nazareth? Since Jesus also told him to “*make an offering ... as Moses commanded,*” we should find out what Moses commanded, which is given in Leviticus 14:1-32. Read it to see the detailed requirements. There were actually two animal sacrifices involved, given eight days apart—birds and lambs. Where could sacrifices be made? Could that be done in Galilee? In Jesus’ day, the only God-authorized place for sacrifice was at God’s chosen place in Jerusalem. Jesus was sending him on a three-day trip—another sacrifice! Could you have been silent for three days about something that dramatic that had happened to you? He wasn’t, which caused subsequent problems for Jesus to be able to minister within the towns of Galilee. He didn’t understand the reason for Jesus’ command, so he disregarded it, thus hindering God’s larger plan of reaching Galilee. It is important to be obedient even when we don’t understand the reason why.
