

Mark: Keeping Quite About Jesus?

Mark 1:29-45

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Turn with me if you would to the gospel of Mark, to chapter 1 and verse 29. And we'll be reading through to the end of the chapter. Before we read together God's holy and inerrant word, let's look to God and ask Him for His blessing. Let's pray.

Our gracious God and ever-blessed Father, once again we bow in Your presence. We come to acknowledge that we are a needy people. We thank You for the gift of Your word that holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Now come, O Lord, we pray. Illumine these words and help us to understand them, apply them to our lives. Help us to be doers of Your word, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hear the word of God. Mark 1:29-45:

29And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her. 31 And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. 32When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. 33And the whole city had gathered at the door. 34And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. 35In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. 36Simon and his companions searched for Him; 37they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." 38He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." 39And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. 40 And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be

cleansed." 42Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. 43And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, 44and He 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, as a testimony to them." 45But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Jesus and four of His disciples, Simon (Simon Peter) and Andrew and James and John, have just been in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and now they're leaving. And they're going...Just as you go for dinner or supper at someone else's home, Jesus is going to Simon and Andrew's house. Peter lived in Capernaum. There's a healing ministry that immediately takes place; it's Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Isn't it curious, we don't hear anything of Mrs. Peter? There's a mother-in-law, but there's no mention of his wife. Isn't that a peculiar thing? She's there. No one could survive the things that Peter survived and emerge the better for it without a wife at his side. Jesus heals her, the mother-in-law, and then the beautiful, beautiful expression, "She waits on them." It's her instinct to wait on Jesus and His disciples after being healed. And then it's evening; the Sabbath is over. News has spread (Capernaum wasn't that big a place) and now they're bringing sick folk from everywhere and folk who are demon-possessed. And Jesus heals them, and He shows His authority over the demonic realm, forbidding them even to speak because they know Him; and it's not time, nor is it they who will bear witness of Jesus. And then He disappears.

Early in the morning, He gets up, like you folk in Mississippi when it's still dark, and He goes to pray. What a beautiful thing that is. We could pause there and reflect on that for the rest of the evening: Jesus the Son of God, the Lord of glory, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the One who casts out demons and heals people with a word, but He still needs to pray...and you think you don't. And Simon is hunting. What a wonderful verb. He's *hunting* for Jesus, looking for Him, and saying to Him, perhaps with some indignation, 'Everybody's looking for you!' And Jesus says, 'Well, let's go somewhere else then.' It's not the answer you're expecting, is it? Lots of unexpected things here. And they go off throughout the regions of Galilee and they visit synagogues and Jesus preaches, because that's what He's come primarily to do: to preach and to assert His authority over the kingdom of darkness. And then in verse 40 this leper appears, and I want to concentrate on that particular story.

I. The Leper's Side of the Story

Let's look, first of all, at this leper. Perhaps we should say, "He had leprosy,"

though in his day they would certainly have called him a “leper,” with all the stigma and social ostracism that that term would carry. It's a horrid disease! It's an awful disease. Perhaps it's what Job had, Hanson's disease perhaps. It comes in several forms, I understand. One form renders the nerve endings at the extremity of your body inoperative so that you'd have no feeling in your eyelids, your nose, your ears, your fingers, your foot, your toes, and bits of your body eventually would drop off. You could have boiling water poured on your hand, and you wouldn't feel it. You could step on a nail, and you wouldn't feel it. So you were prone to all kinds of other infectious diseases as a consequence. It was visibly dreadful. You can look at modern pictures if you wish of what leprosy looks like: boils, sores all over your body.

And the Old Testament had an approach to it in its primitive approach to medicine: barrier medicine. Leviticus 13 had all kinds of rules and regulations to deal with leprosy. Leprosy was a catch-all term for all kinds of diseases probably. Naman, the leper, is said to have been “as white as snow.” That probably wasn't leprosy in its technical sense. There are some dermatologists here, no doubt, and you can wax eloquently about elephantiasis, or psoriasis, or whatever. Their clothes were considered to be infectious. Walls of the house would've been considered infectious. And the easiest thing to do, of course, was to require some sort of strict quarantine procedure; so lepers were put in colonies, usually outside of the town somewhere a few miles away, in a valley perhaps, somewhere where they could be kept, where they could be secluded, so that they wouldn't come into contact much with any others. In its worst stage, family members would go and deposit parcels of food at a certain location, and they would come and collect the food. If they made their way into the town, people would shout, “Unclean! Unclean!” They would move out of their way. They would do anything not to come into contact, because coming into contact with a leper or with something that a leper had touched rendered you unclean, and you'd have to go through all kinds of ceremonial ritual to cleanse yourself again. There was nothing a leper could do, nothing. The rabbis said it was easier to raise the dead than to heal a leper. It looked terrible; it smelled worse. They became eventually increasingly immobile. They lost the extremities of their limbs. They'd be reduced to begging. They had no hope. No sacrifice could cure them. It was a long and painful, lingering death. Isn't it just like AIDS? Yes, probably. Some of the same social stigmas, same fears, same ostracism.

And what does this leper do? He comes to Jesus. That's what he does. Mark describes it as only Mark could do: he comes, “Beseeching Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’” He has heard of the healings that had taken place in Capernaum: Simon Peter's mother-in-law, others, all kinds of diseases. There was a healer in town. He'd heard something about Jesus. People had told him of the One who had been in the region who had the power to cure leprosy. You'd go as far as you could go to find that man. So he goes to Jesus; he goes in broad daylight. He doesn't care what people may be saying. People would part the way as he walked into the

city, and he goes into the synagogue. And you can imagine the scene. The synagogue, full of men especially, and they're moving outwards away from him, lest they come into contact with him. He doesn't care. Whatever embarrassment, he's heard there's someone in town who can *cure him*. He must go to Jesus and he must beg for mercy. "You can make me clean," he says. He believed in Jesus' power. It was not Jesus' ability that was in question; it was His willingness. "If you are willing," he says, "You can make me clean." He had no doubts about His power. He had no doubts about His ability. The rumors were there aplenty. His case was probably no different than others that Jesus had cured. It wasn't His ability; it was His willingness.

Why did he say that, "If you are willing"? Why would Jesus not be willing? What had caused him to express that, perhaps in the form of a doubt? Perhaps he'd heard about what had happened in the last few days. Jesus had healed Simon Peter's mother. Then, you remember, he disappears. Early in the morning He goes somewhere to pray, and they can't find Him. And Simon Peter is looking for Him and finds Him, and he says, 'Everybody's looking for you.' And Jesus says, 'Let's go somewhere else then.' He didn't go back into Capernaum. He didn't heal everybody in Capernaum, do you see? He didn't heal everybody. He didn't go knocking on people's doors and say, 'Bring out the sick.' He could've done that. He had the ability to do that. He could've spoken a word and done it. It could all have happened in an instant, but He didn't heal everybody. It wasn't part of His will to heal everybody.

Does Jesus want everybody to be well? It's a question we wrestle with, isn't it? It's a question many of us wrestle with in a very particular way. Does Jesus want me to be well? Do I have the right to good health? It tickles me and then it annoys me, preachers who believe that healing is part of the promise of the atonement and of the gospel. And they'll stand there and they'll preach, and say, "Jesus doesn't want you to be sick," and they're wearing glasses and they've got fillings in their teeth and wrinkles in their skin and their hair is falling out, and they're aging and they're dying before you, because we're all dying. It's a silly doctrine. It's an altogether silly doctrine, because if there was healing in the atonement, we'd never die!

It's interesting, in the life of the apostles, Paul who had the gift of healing, spoke to Timothy, that young, sensitive, anxious preacher who had a delicate stomach—'Take a little wine for your stomach,' Paul says, doesn't he? He could've healed him. He doesn't do that. He leaves Trophimus behind sick at Miletus; he doesn't heal him.

You see, the Bible doesn't teach that it's sub-Christian to be sick, that it's sub-Christian to take medicine, prescriptive drugs for physical illness, for depression even. With all of the controls that that statement needs to be hedged in by, you understand, but the principle is the point: it's not sub-Christian. It's not that you're a second-class Christian if you carry a bottle of Ibuprofen around with you for

your headaches.

No, this is a perfectly good question, and it's a perfectly good question to put to Jesus. "If you are willing, You can make me well." That's the issue. You know, it's not sub-Christian to preface your prayer with a statement that says, "Lord, if You are willing, if it be Thy will."

Now there are theologies out there. They were very popular in the early part of the 20th Century. It was very popular especially in Keswick circles to suggest that the mature Christian never says, "If it be Your will." You just demand it, and you demand it in faith, and you claim the promise.

And the problem with that is that *Jesus prefaced His prayer* with a statement that says, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done." He subjects Himself to the will of His heavenly Father.

So here's this man, and he's a leper. And he has no hope, and he lives a life of social ostracism. People shunned him, didn't want to be come anywhere near him. He probably hadn't been in the presence, near presence of his family...perhaps a wife or children, who knows?...in years, and he was going to die a long and painful death. And he comes to Jesus, and he says, "If You are willing, You can make me well."

II. Jesus' Side of the Story Jesus has compassion on him.

There are several things about Jesus that this text points up for us. The first thing is that Jesus has compassion on him. "Jesus has compassion on him," the text says. Actually, there's a problem here in the text. In some versions in verse 41, He's "moved with pity." The problem is that we don't have the original documents of the Bible. We don't have any of the original letters or any of the original gospels, and there's an annoying habit, it happens not very often, but every now and then, in some manuscripts, because all we have are copies of copies of copies of copies. And sometimes it's a verse that an early church father will cite, or sometimes it's a longer piece of text. And just here there's a problem because in some manuscripts it doesn't say "compassion," but Jesus was "angry."

And there's a sort of rule of thumb—I've never been happy with it, but it's the rule of thumb so I go along with it—and the rule of thumb says, "The harder reading is the right one." I don't know who pulled that out of the air, but somebody did. Bruce Metzger, I think. The harder reading is, of course, that Jesus was angry. Why would Jesus be angry? Angry with Satan, angry with sin, angry what a fallen world has done to this poor, degraded, disheveled man who's standing before Him filled Him with anger, righteous indignation.

Well, but that's not what you have in your Bibles. You've got compassion, so let's

go with compassion. He's moved with compassion; He's moved with pity. What a wonderful, wonderful statement that is! This Jesus whom we love and adore, who's died for our sins and risen for our justification, this Jesus who by the call of God we have been drawn into union and fellowship with, this Jesus has compassion on the sight of this wretched man without any hope. He's moved to pity. "We do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He's moved with pity. It wells up from within Him, deep. "Jesus, Thou art all compassion." Wesley's hymn, "Love Divine all loves excelling, Joy of heaven to earth come down. Fix in us Thy humble dwelling; all Thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus Thou art all compassion; Pure unbounded love, Thou art. Visit us with Thy salvation; Enter every trembling heart."

And look at what He did. I was reading yesterday as I was trying to prepare for this sermon, and I was thinking of the comparison of leprosy and AIDS, and there's an enormous comparison. I was reading a story of a missionary in Malawi, and there are folks here who know Malawi better than I do. I've never been to Malawi, but something like a million and some more in Malawi are infected with HIV and AIDS. Some 50,000 and more die every year. It's a horrendous statistic, and the next few years will reap dire consequences for that region of Africa. AIDS has all the social ostracism that leprosy had, and you don't want to touch someone with AIDS. That's the fear. This missionary said, "I was afraid to touch him."

And do you notice what Jesus does here, with all of the consequences that flow? He touched him. He didn't have to touch him. Jesus healed often with just a word, but this time He touched him. And do you understand what happens when He touches him? He becomes himself now subject to all of the ceremonial regulations of barrier medicine that Leviticus 13 had inflicted upon the people of God. He identifies with this man's condition. That's the kind of Savior you have, my friend. He reached out and touched this leper. I was deeply moved when I heard, several years ago now, that James Montgomery Boice had begun the AIDS Bible Study at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PCA church in Philadelphia, a ministry to modern day lepers.

Jesus' willingness

And notice also, not just His compassion, but notice also His willingness, those beautiful words at the end of verse 41, "I am willing. I am willing." And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured." There was instant healing, in the flicker of an eye. One second this man was full of leprosy, sores all over his body, perhaps even bits of his body, of his fingers had broken off, just stubs left, sores and rashes and ulcerated stubs, and perhaps just a hole where his nose had been. A horrid, horrid spectacle, and the next...he's restored. He's restored. What an incredible thing. And Mark says, "It was immediate. It was immediate."

Jesus' power

No mysticism, no mantras, no handkerchiefs for five dollars blessed with the kiss of Jesus, no recitation of prayers ten times—just a word of command that sickness leave this man's body. And he is cleansed, and he is made whole just like that. It's a demonstration of the power, the sheer power of Jesus.

But what is this? Mark isn't just telling us a story about a healing, you understand. There's a reason why these healings are here. Why do these miracles occur here? You know, miracles only occur now and then in the history of redemption. They're great spans of history when there weren't miracles. What's happening? It's a sign that John will take up and run with: this is a sign that the King of the New Creation is walking the sands of Galilee and the streets of Capernaum and the shore of the Lake of Tiberius—the One who will make a new heavens and a new earth in which there will be no more pain and no suffering and no disease and no leprosy and no AIDS. It's a demonstration of Jesus' compassion and willingness and power.

And then a strange thing, a very strange thing. In verse 43, He sternly charges him, speaks strongly—the verb is extremely strong. It's the same verb that's used of Jesus casting out the money changers from the temple. He tells him not to speak of what's happened. Isn't that an incredible thing? You've had the worst disease that can befall a man in the 1st Century and you've just been healed. And you look at your body, and there's not a pimple, a boil or a sore anywhere. And you can feel at the end of your fingers, at the end of your nose, and perhaps a nose that wasn't there before, and ears that have come back, and what's the first thing you want to do? You want to go out and tell everybody what's happened to you. And Jesus says to him, 'Don't do it.' You can understand; you can be sympathetic. I'll let you be sympathetic for just a second or two that this man wants to go out and tell the whole world, especially his family, especially the people in Capernaum what's happened to him. I understand that, but Jesus had said to him, 'Don't do it.' There are rules and regulations now that you must obey, because he was a man under social ostracism.

It was a legal matter. And he must go to the priests, and he must get their approval before he started walking freely in the streets again. It wasn't time for Jesus to be publicly placarded and incur the wrath of the Jews and especially the priests. It wasn't time yet. That'll come, and it'll come in about three years from now, but not yet. Too soon for Jesus' ministry to be challenged by the leadership of the day, that somehow His claim to be the Messiah would be seen as a threat. Too soon yet. 'So do this one thing for Me,' He says. He says it more strongly than that, but, 'Do this one thing. Don't tell anyone, but go straight to the priests and go through all that ritual first.'

But he didn't obey. He didn't obey his Savior. He didn't obey his Lord. He didn't obey his Healer. And instead he goes and talks to everyone about it, so that Jesus could no longer go out into the streets anymore because He'd be thronged

by people who were bringing their sick folk. You understand that? It made it difficult for Jesus to do His Galilean ministry now. He has to disappear for awhile. This man didn't obey. Jesus had spoken to him with the authority of God. The power of God had miraculously come upon him and transformed him, and yet this man did not do what the Lord had commanded him to do.

Was he converted? I have no idea. There's no evidence in the text that he was. That's alarming. That's frightening. That he came that close to Jesus and felt the power of the Holy Spirit and knew His miraculous healing power, but there is no evidence of a heart that's willing to submit to the authority of Jesus here. There's no evidence of the heart of a disciple here.

You can come here, my friend, on Sunday mornings, on Sunday evening, and you can come to Youth Groups. And you can come to Men's Bible Studies, and you can come to a whole variety of meetings in this place. And you can hear Jesus speak to you out of His word with the voice of a sovereign God, and you can be enlightened, and you can share in the Holy Spirit and you can taste of the powers of the word of God and the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the world to come. And you can go out and defy Him and just do what you want to do, and do what's best in *your* estimation and in *your* wisdom and *your* mind, and disobey Jesus...and disobey Jesus. And you can be a hindrance to Him. He was cured of leprosy, but there is little or no evidence here that his sins are forgiven and that he had a new heart.

Do you remember what Mary said of her son at the wedding of Cana in Galilee? Mary spoke to some servants. Do you remember what she said? "Whatever He says to you, do it." "Whatever He says to you, do it." Let's pray together.

Our God and Father, we thank You for Your word. Thank You for this extraordinary story. We thank You for the glimpse of Jesus in all of His beauty, compassion, power, and tenderness and gentleness and sternness. Give us, we pray, softened hearts that want to do whatever Jesus asks us to do. We pray for anyone here tonight who may not be a Christian, that by Your Spirit You would convict of sin and righteousness and judgment to come and bring that one in humble obedience to the foot of the cross and say, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" "To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and that one will be saved." So do it, Lord, we pray, and hear us and forgive us our sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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