

“I’ve Got a Fever and the Only Prescription…”

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹ *And immediately he 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. 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. 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.” ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. (ESV)*

Starting in January, if you’ve been around, I’ve been going through the Book of Mark. I’m following the church calendar loosely. As we’ve gone through the Book of Mark you’ve seen a few things that are distinctive about the Book of Mark that are different from the other Gospels. Namely that Mark is probably at some level recording the story that Peter is telling (his accounts with Jesus) and you hear the word “immediately” over and over again. Mark uses the word “immediately” more than the rest of the New Testament combined. I’ve told you that Mark is the Gospel for the ADHD because he seems to bounce from one place to another very quickly. And yet, if you’ve been paying attention, what we’ve been talking about for the past three or four weeks really doesn’t bounce around that much. In other words, what we’re going to look at today is the culmination of one day in the life of Jesus. Think about what His life must be like because it seems like they’re bouncing around everywhere, immediately here, immediately there, immediately a demon, immediately someone’s sick, immediately. . . And twenty-four hours have not even passed.

Those of you who are working mothers or single dads or homeschool moms or if you’ve got kids, think about a day in the life of Jesus. The first thing He does call Simon and Andrew and James and John. So he’s got four kids in tow, let us say. Then He goes to teach at the synagogue for most of the day. Those of you who teach or preach know that after two or three services you can be pretty beat. He finishes teaching and right as He’s finishing teaching, typical of any pastor’s day, someone in the congregation decides they’re going to reveal that they have a demon. So, Jesus now, after having a long day of teaching and preaching has to deal with this demon that has shown its face in His congregation, and that’s not fun, and yet He casts out the demon. He next goes to Simon Peter’s house, and you’d think now he can at least sit back and maybe watch the news or something, and they get to Simon Peter’s house and the first thing he finds that Simon Peter’s mother-in-law is deathly ill, which is not that big a deal, because He can heal her and get back to the news. But as soon as He turns on the television He hears a knock at the door. Peter opens it, and the whole city is in the yard because they want Jesus to heal people and cast out demons, and he does it, it seems through the night. Then the very next thing you see is Jesus waking up early in the morning while it’s still dark to go pray. That’s a long day.

Today we’re going to look at is the end of that long day. Really we’re going to look at just two things in today’s text. The points are these if you’re a note taker. The first point is “where grace goes.” The second point is “where grace flows.”

Where does grace go? Let’s look at the first verse that I read to you today.

²⁹ *And immediately he 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)*

Remember, I told you my speculation that if Peter is normal (which we know he is), that when Jesus first called him and said, “I’m going to make you fishers of men,” that had to be at some level exciting. All of us get excited

when we say, “Who wants to go on a mission trip to Mexico or to Yakima or some other place?” You realize you can go and preach the Gospel and then you go home. You don’t have to live with those people. So Peter (I’m speculating, if he’s normal) felt a little uncomfortable when the first thing Jesus said was, “I’m going to make you fishers of men – now let’s go back to your hometown.” Peter had to be even more uncomfortable after this day in the synagogue when Jesus said, “Peter, let’s go to your house.” I’m making that assumption because I don’t think Peter would have invited Jesus to his house. The reason is because the text indicates that the mother-in-law was grievously ill with a fever and she would have been responsible for serving food and entertaining. In the Ancient Near East if you didn’t entertain someone well, especially a rabbi, you would have lost face. It would have been a horrible situation. So, I imagine it was Jesus who said, “Peter, let’s go to your house.” Peter sort of looked at his brother Andrew and rolling his eyes like, “Oh boy, what are we going to do now?” Yet they went to Peter’s house. That’s part of the first point, where grace goes.

Where does grace go? Grace always seeks the unworthy and the unprepared. Grace always seeks the people who don’t think they have what it takes. Everything Jesus does when you look at His life closely has purpose to it, so there has to be some purpose for Jesus to go to this place where He knows there is a sick woman who can’t feed them. In other words, unless He does the work nothing there is going to happen. Grace always goes to the weakest and most helpless. The question you have to ask yourself is, “Why don’t I experience grace?” Is that because you’re spending so much time trying to be strong or maybe (even better yet) showing yourself to be strong or showing yourself without weakness and showing yourself you can gut it out? Your house is always clean and all these things, but you always feel like, “Why don’t I have any joy?” The answer is, I think, because most people, most Christians (and I think especially in our congregation frankly) are afraid to admit we have flaws. We’re afraid to admit there’s weakness. We’re afraid to admit we’ve got troubles in our house. Because we’re afraid to admit that, we basically go through life and everything looks good but it really never feels that good. But the hope of the Gospel is that Jesus won’t let that happen. Jesus will invade. Jesus decides, “I’m coming to your house today.” He goes to Peter’s house, and what choice does Peter have? Did you notice what Peter did when Jesus arrived immediately? It’s easy to miss. He prayed. Peter prays. Notice what it says.

³⁰ *Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. (ESV)*

If you’re talking to God, that’s prayer. But that’s also instructive. When you think, “Okay, I’ve got all these issues in my house, and I don’t even know how to pray for them.” Or you think, “I’ve got all these troubles in my life, and I don’t even know how to pray about them.” We get cards every week from people who want us to pray for their children who have yet to believe in Jesus, or children who want us to pray for their parents who have yet to believe in Jesus or people who have lost jobs. We have struggled with praying, but at the end of the day, just tell Him. You don’t know what to do with your children? Tell Jesus. You don’t know what to do because your marriage is on the rocks? Tell Jesus because inherent in the telling is the request. The question is, “Are you willing to ’fess up to Jesus that, “You know what? Here it is.”

“Rabbi, I know you came to my house and every expectation is that we would serve you and we would take care of you and make you feel like a king, but the fact is I got nothing. We didn’t expect you and my mother-in-law who does all the work is out. Sorry.” Implicit in the statement is the request. Jesus knows what needs to be done. The question is, “Are you going to trust Him enough to tell Him? Are you just going to fess up?” They go to Jesus and immediately they tell Him. What does Jesus do? They complain, but does He say, “Well, we’ll just go to someone else’s house who has a mother-in-law who is not sick or who is a better cook anyway”? Make the best out of it? No. What does Jesus do? Verse 31 says,

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)*

You know, it doesn’t always happen that way. You tell Jesus you have a problem and He immediately comes and solves it, fixes it, it’s over. That’s not always what happens. But you know it won’t happen if you never tell Him. It just won’t.

As a pastor, one of the benefits I have (if you like that sort of thing, I guess) is that anytime I'm studying for a sermon I'll do all my own work and then I'll read as many different commentators that I can. Some liberal, some conservative. I see what they make of things because most people don't know what to do with this portion of the Bible. It's so brief. Jesus heals her, she gets up, and she serves them. The language there has to do with serving a meal, so she immediately begins to serve Jesus. Some people spiritualize the text and say, "She is the model of the Christian life. Jesus heals you and you immediately get up and begin to serve Him." I don't think that's what it means. It has a bigger meaning because it's part of bigger picture. The bigger meaning here and the bigger picture I think Mark is pointing out to us is the folly. The folly of the Gospel and the foolishness of the way God do things. Follow me here.

Peter's mother-in-law is the first person that Jesus heals. She's a woman, and if you look at the Book of Mark as a whole, every interaction that Jesus has with a woman, every one acts appropriately. The woman not only acts appropriately, but she either serves Jesus or worships Jesus or recognizes Him for who He is. On the other hand, if you look at the Book of Mark in context, in every interaction Jesus has with a man, particularly the disciples, they respond inappropriately, almost every one. They respond inappropriately or they don't understand, or they don't get it, or they don't act in faith, or they don't worship. So what's the point here? I think the point in the bigger picture is the folly of the Gospel. Because if women are the ones who respond appropriately, typically speaking, and tend to do it right, why would He not pick women to do the work of the ministry that He chose the disciples to do? The answer is, "Because God chooses foolish men to display the folly of the Gospel." I mean that.

Some of you have asked the story of this stole before. If you are listening on iTunes now, I'm wearing a robe and a stole, that some might describe as flamboyant (certainly colorful), was given to me by an assistant pastor's mother who made it by hand about ten years ago. In the church I was serving in we never wore robes so I never knew what happened to it, frankly (sorry, Mrs. Sellers). Then I was crushed. Events happened and I left the ministry and in my mind I thought I would never be back. I thought I wasn't worthy. I thought maybe I wasn't fit for it. Then about five or six years later when I came on staff at this church and I was installed again into the Gospel ministry, I went home and my wife Judy had a package for me. I asked, "What is this?" I opened it up, and it was this stole. I asked, "Where did you get that thing?" She said, "I always kept it." I asked, "Why?" She said, "Because I knew you would be preaching again." Woman: gracious, faithful, hopeful. Tommy: idiot.

I see that all the time. So, if women in general are more faithful and more hopeful and more spiritual, why does God choose people like me? The answer is really simple. The answer is, "If anything good happens in this church, it's not my fault." God gets every bit of the glory for anything good that happens. What is the good that happens? When grace goes somewhere it can't stay there because grace goes but grace also flows. Notice what happens next. Jesus heals the mother-in-law; she gets up and serves them. Then the very next text says,

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. (ESV)

Jesus has healed the mother-in-law. We assumed she served them because they ate. "Now, finally, I can catch the news." As soon as the clock strikes six-o'clock, let's say, sundown, the knock comes at the door and the city is outside. Why did the people come? It says, "They came – they were all there at sundown." Why did they come at sundown may be the first question to ask. The answer to that is pretty simple. We're still in one twenty-four hour period. When the day began, we found out it was the Sabbath, and so the people that are coming are from the city in Galilee (remember it's "Galilee of the Gentiles"), which is predominately made of Jews who would be considered less than religious, Gentiles, pagans, all these things. So the fact that the whole city came out means it wasn't just Jewish people if it was the whole city. Either they were really super-religious people—they didn't want to break the Sabbath by walking to Peter's house on the Sabbath or by carrying sick people. They waited until the Sabbath was over at sundown because they were afraid of hyper-religious people seeing

them. They were afraid of bearing the brunt of hyper-religious people keeping them from Jesus by telling them how bad they were and how they had sinned and broken the law, because what it was about to the religious was doing the right thing. Yet, at sundown they were all there. Do you get the sense that they might have not broken the Sabbath to get there, but as soon as the sun went down (remember like my last day of high-school [Tommy's hands imitating a clock signifying the last minute of school and the start of summer vacation]) they were standing there ready to go. What you see there is that grace always flows. Grace never comes to a home and just stays there. Grace always extends itself.

Charles Spurgeon wrote a sermon on this passage, and he said that he thinks this whole passage is about us reaching our neighborhoods because if Jesus comes and dwells in a house, how could the rest of the neighborhood not know? How could the rest of the neighborhood not be excited? In other words, the whole neighborhood is going, "Man, we've got these people down the street, the Allens, they are about as messed up as anyone I've ever seen, but Jesus is there and He is constantly getting them out of jams. Jesus has saved them. When bad stuff happens somehow they're still joyful. When good stuff happens they're even more joyful." Then grace can't help but expand. The question is, "If Jesus has really come to your house, if Jesus is really the head of your household, is your household a place where people are banging down the door to come find out about Him?" Or is it not? And if they're not, maybe you need to think through to what extent Jesus really rules there.

It says that all came out to see Jesus, and He healed many, and He cast the demons out of many. The grace that they're seeing here isn't necessarily saving grace. In Matthew, Jesus says, "The rain falls on the just and the unjust." Jesus is simply showing these people common grace. We're going to find out tonight that they probably don't even believe in what He says when He talks about being the Messiah, but nonetheless Jesus still heals them. Jesus' call is unqualified, but so is the grace of Jesus, so is the mercy of Jesus. As a church, is that where we are? That no matter who comes through the door, they're welcome and acceptable no matter what they believe when they walk through? Because how are they going to believe anything else unless they hear it? That's what Jesus is going to talk about tonight.

There's another aspect to this text. The last part is often confusing to people. Jesus casts out demons but He would not let them speak because they knew Who He was. There's a lot in that. Biblical scholars and theologians refer to that oftentimes as the "Messianic secret." Why would Jesus tell people to keep things secret? Especially, why would demons reveal Who He is? It's almost as if the demons are doing evangelism. And yet Jesus tells them to be quiet. In fact Jesus tells them very bluntly over and over again, "Shut up." Why does Jesus not want them revealing Who He is? The answer is pretty simple. It's because Jesus came not to be crowned as an earthly king at that time, not take over the Romans by a bunch of people who are excited by what He could do for them. Right? We're no different today. Everyone cast their vote this past election time primarily based on what you thought this candidate or that candidate would do for you. Jesus says, "That is not why I came." Why would the demons try and call Him out by name? The answer is simple. Jesus' plan was not to be crowned by a golden crown and set Himself up over the Roman Empire, but Jesus' plan was to wear a crown of thorns. It wasn't to wear kingly robes, but in fact it was to wear garments stained with His own blood. What the demons are doing every time they call out, "We know Who You are, the Holy One of God. You are the Messiah," the demons are actually trying to thwart Him because the people hear that, and when the people hear that it makes the people want to crown Him, so Jesus has to tell the demons, "Be quiet" because the plan is not earthly glory. The plan is the cross. Jesus is willing to do anything it takes to make sure His mission is accomplished, and His mission is not accomplished by gaining more glory to Himself, by gaining more applause of the crowds. The mission of Jesus is accomplished by Him making sure that He overcomes every obstacle in order to make it to the cross because at the cross of Christ is where His work would be done. By the way, when I say "done" I mean done, finished. When He would die on the cross He would take away our sins, and if you would just trust Him, He would take them away for good. It happened at the cross. Think through that.