

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?

Key Text: *Mark 1:41*

Teachers Aims:

1. To understand the world in which Jesus lived.
2. To demonstrate how Jesus related to people.
3. To draw parallels between Jesus' role in the world and our role as Christians.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jesus: Your Personal Savior (*Mark 2:17*).

- A. Jesus wants to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
- B. Receiving Jesus' goodness should motivate us to serve God and others.
- C. Even though we experience God's goodness, human weakness often negates any effect it might have on our lives.

II. Sin As a Disease (*Mark 2:5*).

- A. Sin affects even those who are not obvious victims of it.
- B. As demonstrated by His reaction to the lepers, Jesus was not bound by cultural propriety.
- C. Jesus calls us to show the same compassion, even when it may be uncomfortable.

III. Our Biggest Problem (*Mark 2:10*).

- A. Many of the difficulties in our lives have spiritual roots.
- B. While Jesus healed physical ailments, His primary goal was to heal the rift between humankind and God.
- C. Many of those most in need of such healing are unaware of it and take refuge in religiosity.

Summary: Although the challenges of Jesus' day were often unique, they were the same in principle as the ones we face. We also struggle with alienation from God and a failure to recognize Him as the answer to life's difficulties. Jesus still offers His grace and salvation.

COMMENTARY

Capernaum was Jesus' Galilean headquarters. His ministry there was revolutionary, because He introduced a transformation designed to create a new community. This week's study shows three characteristics of His transforming ministry: authority, love, and power.

I. The Authority of Jesus: In Word and Deed.

Jesus' public ministry began in a synagogue on a Sabbath (*Mark 1:21*). The audience was astonished at His preaching, "for He

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.*)

taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (vs. 22, *NKJV*). Personal conviction of one’s calling, prayerful communion with God, a living experience with the Word, a passionate commitment to reach the listeners for God, and a walk consistent with the talk are the marks of authoritative preaching. Such preaching may not show intellectual mastery, but it confronts the listeners with the truth of God’s Word in such a way that even devils tremble.

So trembled a devil in the Capernaum synagogue. There the Torah may have been read a thousand times, but the preaching of Jesus immediately disturbed the unclean spirit. Preaching that does not disturb Satan and sinner is no preaching at all. Authentic preaching is a call to search the inner depths of one’s soul. Jesus’ preaching forced the evil spirits to publicly acknowledge who the Preacher was (*Mark 1:24*). By so saying, the devil admitted to three truths. First, Jesus was a real Person. Second, He is the Holy One of God—coeternal, coexistent, and coequal with the Father. Third, Jesus came to destroy Satan and his followers (*1 John 3:8*) at the end of time and now by delivering individuals one by one from Satan’s clutches. Hence, Jesus ordered, “ ‘Come out of him’ ” (*Mark 1:25*), and instantly the man was freed. Lucifer, who questioned Jesus’ authority in heaven, now had to admit Jesus had authority over all creation, including evil angels.

II. The Love of Jesus: Inclusive and Limitless.

Three incidents in this week’s study exemplify the limitless, inclusive love of Jesus.

Peter’s mother-in-law (*Mark 1:29-31*). In many cultures today, the societal norms are no better than they were in Jesus’ day. A woman is not accepted as equal to a man. To a Roman, a Greek, or a thousand other males today, a woman is just a tool to meet his need, cook his food, bear his children, and keep his house. But not so with Jesus. As soon as He heard Peter’s mother-in-law was sick, Jesus’ love and compassion crossed the gender frontier. “He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her” (vs. 31, *NKJV*). Gender was not an issue here to the One who created “male and female” (*Gen. 1:27*). He saw a need and ministered to it.

The leper (*Mark 1:40-45*). The prejudice and isolation regarding lepers continue to thrive in our time—in the shadows of cathedrals, temples, and symbols of opulence. Lepers (or AIDS victims) still wait for Jesus or someone who has taken His name seriously. The faith of the leper in this week’s study enabled him to hope, believe, and dare: “ ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean’ ” (vs. 40, *NKJV*). The love and care of Jesus know no boundaries. “I am willing; be cleansed,” says Jesus.

The calling of Matthew (*Mark 2:14-17*). Jesus’ call to the tax

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?

collector shows His love transcends barriers erected by hatred. The Jews considered tax collectors to be stool pigeons of the Roman oppressors, who deserved to be stoned to death just as adulterers were. Yet, Jesus called Matthew. Christian discipleship is based not on who we are or what we do but on our willingness to follow Christ. Discipleship calls for a listening ear, a believing mind, a loving heart, and a commitment to carry the cross.

III. The Power of Jesus: To Forgive Sins.

Our study thus far has shown the authority and the love of Jesus in His teaching, healing, and the overcoming of devils. Our lesson

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Mark 1:21–2:17*

- ① The difference between Jesus' teaching and that of the synagogue rulers was that Jesus "taught them as one who had authority" (*Mark 1:22, NIV*). Today, on cable television, the Internet, through books and videos, dozens of voices teach *with authority*. They can't all be right. What criteria can we use when deciding whom to believe? See *Isa. 8:20, Matt. 7:17*.
- ② In Jesus' day leprosy was often viewed as an act of judgment, God's way of punishing someone. It became a symbol of sin. By healing those with leprosy, Jesus showed that no one is beyond hope of physical and spiritual healing. To whom, specifically, would this be especially good news today? In what practical ways can this news be communicated? Outline a "ministry" that would benefit those you identified.
- ③ There are at least four types of people represented at the healing of the paralytic (*Mark 2:1-12*): (1) the paralytic, (2) the friends, (3) the scribes, and (4) the crowd. The owner of the house might also be included in this list. Each had a different perspective or a unique way of viewing the situation. If you were type-cast in a drama about this incident, which character(s) would you play? Would you play different characters at different times in your Christian experience? Explain.
- ④ The secondary characters in this week's study (Jesus is the primary character) were the marginalized, the bottom dwellers of society. Yet, Jesus treated them all with respect and went to extraordinary lengths to minister to them. If we wanted to emulate the way Jesus treated people, what forms would it take, and to whom would we minister?

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?

also has shown that Jesus has power to forgive sins (*Mark 2:1-12*). Healing the paralytic in response to his faith would have been conclusive proof that Jesus is no ordinary man. But He saw in the healing of the paralytic not only an occasion to reveal His power over disease but also His power to forgive sins. To a Jew, sickness was a

Witnessing

The world loves action heroes: characters (real or imaginary) who are “larger than life.” The “knight in shining armor” who will rescue someone in distress just in the nick of time. The “superhero” who will save the situation at the very last possible moment.

Champions represent the “little guy,” the person who is often overlooked, those who seem to be the least deserving, the rejects of society. A real-life champion of the overlooked in society was a tiny woman who was simply called Mother Teresa and whose ministry took place in the heart of India. She and her followers lived among the neediest of the needy. They ministered daily by providing food, shelter, and love. Most important, they dispensed hope.

The following story captures how hope transformed the life of a man who was overlooked by many but not by God. It was shared at a General Conference morning worship by Elder Barry Black, newly appointed chaplain to the U. S. Senate and the first Seventh-day Adventist to hold that position. A young man, filthy and drunk, showed up one night at an evangelistic series. He sat down and promptly went to sleep. Several deacons acted to remove him from the meetings, but the evangelist asked them to leave the young man in peace. The next night the young man came back and the next night after that and the following one. Soon he was making an attempt to sit up during the service. At the end of the series, the young man disappeared. No one knew what became of him.

One day the evangelist was greeted by a young pastor who said to him, “You don’t remember me, but I once sat in evangelistic meetings where you were preaching. You wouldn’t allow others to throw me out. Over time I began to listen to what you said. After the meetings I stopped drinking, and I gave my heart to God. I went to college, and I’m a preacher today because of you. Thank God for your witness!”

These are only two powerful examples of how ordinary people witness to the overlooked about the Superhero of all ages—Jesus Christ. What the world overlooks, God sees. Those who are invisible to society and those the world turns a blind eye toward are the very ones God is watching over. God invites us to be His eyes on this earth and to keep searching for all whose hearts are ready to receive Him. Our Savior has proven He can and will change lives and hearts. He’s exactly what the world needs, and He asks that we share Him with the world!

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.*)

result of sinfulness (*see Job 4:7, NKJV*). The theology that links sickness to sin may not be fully correct, but who would deny that it is the entrance of sin that marred God's original design of perfection? In saying, “ “Your sins are forgiven” ’ ” (*Mark 2:9, NKJV*), Jesus was affirming the wholistic nature of His redemptive plan—a plan that includes the healing of a person's body, mind, and soul.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Even as a child, Oscar Cervantes was trouble—to family, friends, and the neighborhood. The older he got, the more trouble he got into. As an adult he was imprisoned 17 times before the prison psychiatrists totally gave up on him. They said he was beyond the point of return. There was no hope for Oscar. However, during one of his brief periods of freedom outside prison, he met someone in love with Jesus. The power of Jesus turned Oscar around, and Oscar became a disciple.

Thought Questions:

- 1 What do you think is the relationship between faith and divine power? What kinds of statements of faith should a church make in today's world? In what ways can divine power be manifested within the church?
- 2 Jesus demonstrates His awesome power by reaching those thought to be beyond the point of return, those such as Oscar Cervantes. Is there ever a point when our heart becomes so hardened it cannot respond to the divine power of Christ? Explain.
- 3 During Jesus' time many followed Him just to see His miracles. Many joined Him because of the miracles. Why do you think Jesus used miracles? Compared to the people of Jesus' time, are we at an advantage or disadvantage?

Application Questions:

- 1 List biblical characters who accomplished great things because of their intimate connection with God. Assess your personal spiritual life to see how you can become more like them. Imagine the difference you could make in your home, church, and neighborhood if you had a stronger relationship with God.
- 2 Someone has said that the only people without problems are those in the cemetery! Sometimes our personal problems get in the way of our good intentions to respond to opportunities to serve our God. What practical things can we do to keep our focus off our problems?

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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ 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.
- ❸ 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.