

Jesus' Touch Brings Healing
Mark 8:22-24

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When the blind man in our passage woke up that morning, I wonder if he was consciously aware of his desperate situation. Or had his blindness been a part of his life for so long that he had simply accepted it. Sometimes in life we find ourselves keenly aware of our need for God's deliverance. Two weeks ago, my family left for a 9-day vacation up to Michigan and Indiana. We love to camp and after 14 years of pulling a pop-up camper, we had recently upgraded to a 5th wheel - which we were very eager to vacation in. We had gotten as far as Tennessee when this happened. Due to the camper's height I try to always scan for how low any overhead structure is, but when turning across two lanes of traffic into a gas station I didn't realize how perilous a dip in the street could be. In seconds, I went from a happy camper to the driver of a 9,000 pound beached-whale of a trailer with no wheels able to touch the ground. My truck couldn't pull the camper up, I couldn't back it up; my kids and I were totally stuck. Within 40 minutes I had exhausted everything in my power to fix the situation. I had let air out of the suspension and truck tires in hopes of lowering the trailer off of the back bumper, I had tried shoving scrap wood that I salvaged from the gas station under the camper tires, the camper leveling hydraulics weren't possible; nothing was working. Just as I was at my end, a rather country looking man in a large dually 1-ton truck pulled up. He said, "I have a chain, want a tug?"

Now you might think the ordinary intervention of a redneck in Tennessee with a truck named "Big Bertha" painted across his tailgate might not seem miraculous, but the circumstances were not lost on me. It turns out the man the Lord sent to me that sunny Monday afternoon was a crane operator who towed heavy equipment all across the country. He knew exactly how to hook up the chain to not damage my truck, his truck was more than equipped to tow my little rig to safety, and as we talked, it turns out he lives in Gonzales; we're neighbors. After a quick tug getting me up the incline, we both emerged from our trucks and I said, "Sir, I don't know much about what kind of guy you are, but I could hug you right now." To which he said, "Oh, I'll take a hug." There we were, two grown male strangers hugging over deliverance.

The blind man in our passage today was not simply stuck at a gas station. Being blind in the 1st century left one totally dependent upon others for the entirety of life for basic provisions such as food, water, and housing. Without medical care, he would spend his days enduring the social isolation that sunken eyes which oozed would no doubt cause. He was desperate for healing and yet his ailment had left him isolated for so long we don't even see him asking Jesus for a miracle; his friends had to do the begging. From our passage this morning we are going to ask the question: while desperate for healing and deliverance, can God be trusted even though His ways are mysterious? This man's healing took Jesus spitting on his eyes and placing his hands on him twice. In all of Mark's miraculous accounts of healing, this passage is incredibly

mysterious. Why spit? Why a 2-stage healing? Why encumber the man afterwards not to tell anyone? This passage has so many questions of “Why” when we consider God’s mysterious ways of healing.

For us, we too have questions when waiting on God to deliver and heal. I was 31 when I lost my best friend to brain cancer. Once diagnosed, hundreds of us prayed faithfully for over a year for God’s deliverance. There were little victories, but rarely was the healing as immediate as hoped for, rarely was healing as comprehensive as hoped for. And with Erik’s journey, which was far too un-rare, the healings he did experience weren’t nearly as long lasting as hoped for. Like the blind man in our passage, it is easy to succumb to the fear that we, or the ones we love, won’t be healed at all.

Can we trust God when his ways are so mysterious that healing and deliverance seem impossible? From our text today, we are going to see that God can be trusted because His methods are effective, His timing is individually tailored, and His reasons are more grand than we can perceive.

1. God’s Methods are Effective.

In many passages, all that Jesus needs to do in order to heal is to simply use words. He says to the Syrophonecian mother, “Go your way, the demon has left your daughter.” (Mark 7:29) He said to blind Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you....go your way, your faith has made you well.” (Mark 10: 52) Yet in the gospel of Mark, often the physicality of the way Jesus touches those he heals is striking. In the healing passage right before this one found in Mark 7, Jesus heals the man’s deafness by placing his fingers into the his ears and his muteness by spitting and touching the man’s tongue. Why does Jesus touch that man, or our current blind man, with spit and placing his hands on his eyes?

In the OT, laying on of hands occurs for three purposes: the dedication of sacrifices to God (its most frequent use; Exod 29:10, 15; Lev 1:4; 3:2ff.); installing of Levites to the office of priest (Num 8:10); and a means of blessing (Gen 48:17; Num 27:18, 23; Deut 34:9). Only once in the entire OT is laying on of hands associated with healing. So when Jesus takes up the practice of in the New Testament, it takes on massive meaning. Though it seems weird, using spittle was a practice known for therapeutic function in the Greco-Roman world. More profound is that by physically touching the man’s open eye wounds, Jesus is breaking through the Jewish ritual system of the ceremonial cleanliness laws and instead embracing the law of love. Instead of the Old Covenant view of transferring a profane animal to the sacred by consecrating it to God, Jesus is transferring God’s holy presence onto this ordinary man with incredible intimacy and love.

The result of these mysterious methods of spit and touch was that the man began to see. At first his sight was fuzzy. He says, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” So Jesus places his hands upon the still impaired eyes once again. This time his sight is restored; he says, “I see everything clearly.”

Can you imagine? Had he had sight before? He knows what people look like, he knows what trees look like. How long had it been since he could see? Unlike Bartimeus, who when he heard that a Rabbi would be coming by with the power to heal began crying out, “Son of David have mercy on me!” We don’t see this blind man exerting any faith or effort at all. He’s portrayed as only passively willing to go along with his friend’s outlandish plan to beg for Jesus’ touch. Had he been blind so long that he had given up? Did he have so little faith in Christ that it did not seem worth uttering a request?

What we do see is that it was the gracious will of Jesus that this man was healed. His methods may be mysterious, but his methods are effective.

Many of us are waiting for God’s healing in our lives. We wonder if we’ll ever live without chronic pain. We wonder why God would allow us to undergo so much chemo and radiation treatments. One of our members is a fire fighter. While carrying an elderly lady out of a fire he hurt his back. After 6 months of seemingly ineffective treatments, he was just told 2 weeks ago he can never lift anything over 15 pounds again. He’s a young dad who wants to be able to lift his 5-month-old son. We question whether God can be trusted with our need for healing when his mysterious methods aren’t the immediate deliverance that we want. This passage shows us that God is trustworthy because His methods are effective. The blind man in this gospel account was healed; He can still heal blind men today, we just don’t always understand the method in which he is doing so.

Praise God, with a new treatment that fireman got relief. He was finally cleared to carry normal weight again and returned to work on Friday. However, sometimes God’s will and methods are leading to an outcome that we wouldn’t chose. When Dr. Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis, all of the 25,000 staff began praying and trusting God for a miracle. Surely the man who faithfully shared the gospel with so many countless people over his 50-year ministry would not be overcome by a disease that day after day steadily decreases your ability to breathe. But that is exactly what God did. God’s methods for healing are effective, but we must remember they are effective for accomplishing God’s will. For Dr. Bright, it was God’s will that for 50 years he taught us how to live, and for his last 5 years he taught us how to die - faithfully trusting God who loves us, even if his methods only healed him in glory. God’s methods are effective to accomplish His will - we can trust Him. He loves us.

2. God’s Timing Is Individually Tailored.

As we trust God with his methods, the second way we need to trust while waiting for healing is to understand that God’s timing is individually tailored. Why did Jesus have to place his hands on the blind man two different times? Was he not powerful enough to heal him the first time? Certainly, this is not the case for Jesus had restored sight to others in one action before. In terms of difficulty, he had restored life to the dead in one motion which would easily be more difficult than simply restoring sight. When we look at the text, who was present at this miracle?

“And they came to Bethsaida” - the “they” in this opening verse shows us that the disciples are with Jesus as he’s spitting and laying hands on this man. In the short seven verses right before our passage, Jesus uses nine different words about sight to question their ability to see. Bickering about having no bread to eat, Jesus had to tell them who he is. “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full did you take up?Do you not understand?”

In the story right before feeding the masses in Mark 7, I mentioned that Jesus previously healed a deaf man who couldn’t speak. When Jesus is asking the disciples “Do you understand,” he is asking them to see who he is. In Isaiah 35 to prophet told God’s people, “Behold, your God will come....He will come and save you.” Then Isaiah says this, “The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped....the tongue of the mute will sing for joy!” The reason for the two-stage healing of this blind man is because Jesus is trying to help the disciples see who he is. In the first 8 chapters of the gospel of Mark, the disciples are trying to determine is Jesus the long awaited messiah. Right after Jesus restores the blind man’s sight, he asks the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter realizing that he has just watched a deaf man hear, a mute man sing, and a blind man see proclaims, “You are the Christ!” The timing of delayed miracle came in two stages so that the disciples could finally see! Jesus is the Christ - the long awaited Messiah. Before this healing miracle, they really didn’t get it.

When people come into my office and tell me of some incredibly difficult circumstance that they are waiting on a miracle for, we grieve together over the hardship of living in a fallen world. We pray together that God would move mightily and bring the deliverance they desperately need. But when the time is right, I try to ask not only questions about their circumstance, but questions about their perception of Jesus. In their waiting on God’s timing, is God trying to show them something more of who he is? When my best friend Erik was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 29, I began praying and fasting for his healing. Over the course of that next year, God tailored the timing of Erik’s healing such that I had to do business with God. I had to wrestle with is God really good. I had to wrestle with what do I want more - my will be done, or God’s will be done? I praise God that his timing is individually tailored such that I got a clearer vision of who God is.

So far we have seen that while waiting for healing we can trust that God’s methods are effective, His timing is individually tailored for our good, and now we will close by looking at how His reasons are more grand than we can perceive.

III. God’s Reason Are Often More Grand Than We Can Perceive.

Why does Jesus send the now seeing man to his home and not to the village? The hiding of this miracle of sight seems counterintuitive to Jesus’ proclamation that he is the light of the world. Why not have the man shout it on the rooftops that Jesus is the one that allows all to see that God has come into their midst?

Our answer to why send the blind man back to his home is once again tied to Jesus' question of "Who do you say that I am?" In the first 8 chapters of Mark the people are trying to see if Jesus is the true Messiah, the last 8 chapters are going to focus on what kind of Messiah is he. Prior to Peter's declaration, the disciples are fairly blind. They watch Jesus command the raging waters of the sea to be still and with one word the wind ceases and there is calmness on the waters. Yet Jesus has to ask them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" The next sentence says, they were filled with great fear and had to ask, "Who is this man?" (Mark 4:40) Now Jesus heals this blind man and Peter is able to proclaim "You are the Christ," but read what the next verse 31 says...."And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected." After Peter's declaration, the rest of the gospel is about Jerusalem and Jesus' battle with death. Prior to Peter's confession, the disciples are blind. With this healing miracle and Peter's confession they can see, but they can only see partially. Their sight is still fuzzy; they don't yet understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is. They were expecting a deliverer to rescue them from the circumstances of the occupying Roman forces, but Jesus is trying to show them that he is a suffering messiah. His kingdom is not of this world. He sends the blind man now restored back to his home because Jesus knows, "His hour has not yet come." (John 2:4; 7:6) God's reason for sending the man home was more grand than his village being enthralled and coming out to marvel at the miracle worker. Jesus' reason is grander; He has his face set on Jerusalem. Jesus is ultimately about saving the whole world from the pain of sin and death.

Many of you have heard of the 20th century missionary Jim Elliot. He and his wife Elizabeth attended Wheaton College in Chicago and were enthralled with a vision for missions. They graduated and soon left for Ecuador to minister to the Auca Indians. Many of us know his story: how he was martyred by the very Indians that he was trying to reach. Later, when his wife went back to the village in an amazing feat of forgiveness, the whole tribe came to faith in Christ. You might remember from his story that before his death he had finished the painstaking process of translating the Bible into the Auca language only to have a mudslide destroy all of his work.

Why would God send a young man in his 20's all the way to Ecuador to have his Bible translation and ultimately his life be lost? God's reasons are often more grand than we can perceive. Jim Elliot's story has been told to the effect that countless missionaries have gone out into the world; all championing one of his quotes, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." What setbacks and ailments are you dealing with today? Trust God that His reasons are grand, even if at this moment you cannot fully perceive them.

In closing, when we are waiting on God for healing of our physical bodies or waiting on God to heal and deliver us from some terrible circumstance we can trust Him. His methods are effective for accomplishing His will and we are reminded in Romans 8:32 that his will is for our good. We can trust Him that his timing is individually tailored such as to give us the opportunity to see who he really is. We can trust God that his reasons are grand; He is working throughout

history to the culmination that He will be glorified and faithfully bring His people into glory that we might feast with Him forever.

What I didn't tell you from my opening story is how God opened my eyes to see. While stuck at gas station at the end of my abilities God sent a deliverer in a truck named Big Bertha. But the fuller story is what God was doing in my heart. Stuck in my own doing I began the destructive self-talk that can easily plague me, "Why do I get myself into these situations again and again? Why didn't I just buy a bigger truck to pull our camper? Why do I have to be so cheap? Can I really trust God to provide for me?" God answered dramatically with 1-ton truck. I hugged the driver and then quickly went on about my way marveling at God's graciousness to me. But then I realized I needed to still put air back in my suspension and refill the back tires that I had emptied. As I pulled my truck and camper over to the gas station's air station, a somewhat disheveled homeless man asked me, "How are you doing today?" I thought of all that had just happened and I replied, "I think I'm doing pretty well." He became intensified. "You think you're doing pretty well....what do you mean you think?" It was at that moment that God pierced my heart. I was praising him for his gracious circumstantial deliverance - I was no longer stuck. But with his question, God revealed to me He is not just watching over that moment, but my entire life. I replied to the homeless man, "I am doing well today!" I can trust God with my entire life, and so can you. He is trustworthy even if he's mysterious!