

# They Met Jesus: A Woman Who Was Ill

## Mark 1:29-39

### Introduction

Today we wrap up our four-part sermon series “They Met Jesus.” Next week we will celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord, which then launches us out into the season of Lent. The theme for that series will be “For This,” as in “Jesus came for this.” We will talk more about that later.

This current series, as you know by now, follows Jesus in the earliest days of His ministry. His goal during that time? To meet people. And so He has. According to the Gospel texts we have already considered, Jesus met Nathanael, Peter, James, John, Andrew, and a demon-possessed man. Today he will meet the only woman in this series, a woman who is seriously ill.

He has met these people, yes, but He has met them each in a different way:

- Nathanael met Jesus by invitation. He was invited to the meeting by his friend Philip.
- Peter, Andrew, James and John were hard at work on their fishing boats when Jesus walked along the shore where those boats were moored. They met Him in the course of their everyday lives.
- The demon-possessed man met Jesus in church, but only when He cried out for mercy and help. His cry prompted the meeting.
- And today ... well, before I say more about that I need to re-introduce you to a word. The word is:

### INTERCESSION

If you have been around a church for any length of time, you probably already know something this word. It gets used a lot when Christian people talk about prayer. “Intercessory prayer.”

Intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others.

In just a couple of minutes, you will hear me lead you in the “Prayer of the Church.” I will be praying on your behalf, but more specifically within my prayer I will be praying for certain people whose needs and situations have been brought to my attention to be included in that prayer. Whenever we are talking to God about somebody else – someone other than ourselves – we are engaging in “intercessory prayer.”

Here's the interesting dynamic about intercession that you might not have known. The Hebrew word for “intercession” literally means “to meet.” Intercessory prayer creates a “meeting” with God. Actually two meetings. As we pray for others, we meet with God and we ask God to meet with someone else: *Heavenly Father, I come to You today (meeting #1) asking You to heal my friend Tom (meeting #2).*

When we pray for others, we are arranging a meeting between them and Jesus.

Now, with that thought in mind, return to today's text. Our person of interest is nameless, but nonetheless identified. She is the mother-in-law of Simon, and she was not feeling well on this day.

Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her ... (Mark 1:30-31a)

Two things to note. First, Simon is also known as Peter. At this point in Peter's life, only Jesus calls him Peter. Because "Peter" means "the rock" and this Peter was anything but a rock at this point in his life. So this is Peter's mother-in-law ... the same Peter Jesus met while he was fishing.

Second, this fever was more than the kind of fever you get when you have a cold. Some of your translations describe a "very high fever" or a "burning fever."

- It was serious stuff. Your family would be incredibly worried about you if you had a fever like this. She could die from the fever she had.
- This kind of fever wasn't the kind you let run its course. It needed to be treated.
- The normal home remedy treatment for a fever like this involved hot iron knives and a series of incantations.

What did her loved ones do? They interceded for her. They met with Jesus, and Jesus then met with her. So ...

- Nathanael met Jesus by invitation.
- Peter, Andrew, James and John met Jesus in the course of everyday life.
- The demon-possessed cried out and met Jesus.
- And this sick woman met Jesus because the people who loved her told Jesus about her and her situation.

I make three observations:

### **OBSERVATION #1: INTERCESSION IS CRITICAL**

Verse 31:

So (Jesus) went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. (Mark 1:31)

This woman may well have been dying. Because of the intercession of the people around her, she met Jesus. And in the grace and mercy of Jesus, He healed her instantaneously.

Several of you were here (or watching the livestream) on Sunday, September 13<sup>th</sup>. You didn't hear me preach morning, but you did hear a very powerful message delivered from this chancel that morning. Together we listened as Jeff Butterfield, a long-time

member of this congregation, shared his incredible story about being at the brink of death, only to be restored to health by God.

- You heard Jeff thank you for praying for him.
- You heard Jeff say with total confidence "Prayer works."

Let me share another similar story. In late December, I received an urgent prayer request that I circulated through the Grace email prayer chain. The email painted this picture of a young man:

What started out as another bout of pneumonia has turned quite serious. He was life-flighted to (a major medical) on Christmas Day and is currently on a ventilator and in a medically-induced coma. He has a severe case of pneumonia along with fungal meningitis (very rare combination) and also suffered two mini strokes (likely caused by the fungal meningitis putting pressure on his brain). They had put in a lumbar tap to help drain fluid, and also surgery to put a stint in his skull to try to reduce pressure on his brain. Recovery is uncertain.

So we as a church, along with Christian people all across the country, interceded on his behalf. To use the words of our text, we told Jesus about him.

A few days ago, I received this follow up email:

Good evening, Pastor. A couple weeks ago, I sent a request to you for prayers for a young man who was suffering from fungal meningitis, pneumonia, and who was in a medically induced coma to help reduce the seizures and mini strokes he was experiencing. That man is now at home with his wife. He has no impairment of his speech, his mental acuity is impressive (some minor recollection issues), and there's no paralysis. He is undergoing physical therapy, as he is extremely weak. He has to use a walker, and can't lift a gallon of water singlehandedly. Of the four doctors he is seeing, each one of them told him that there's no medical explanation for his recovery. By all accounts, he should not have survived. The doctors said it was only a miracle that he was still alive. Moreover, they now expect he will make a complete, full recovery. He fully gives praise and thanks to God, and knows that without Him he would not be here today. This experience is changing his life and how he will serve the Lord. Thank you, and thank you to the prayer chain for lifting him up in prayer!

Through the prayers of godly people, this man met Jesus. And his life has been forever changed.

## **OBSERVATION #2: INTERCESSION IS CONTAGIOUS**

Verse 32-33:

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door... (Mark 1:32-33)

The whole town gathered at the door. I love it. You think the COVID virus is contagious, just watch what happens when people begin to experience answered prayers! Revival might break out!

For the rest of His ministry, the crowds followed Jesus. Some wanted to hear His teaching. Some wanted to see the miracles. But many brought their sick to the attention of Jesus.

In this text it is clear that the sick people were physically brought to Jesus. The front lawn of Peter's house was packed with sick people waiting their turn to meet Jesus, each eager to be eyeball to eyeball with Him. Every one of those instances was another example of intercession. In each story Person A is telling Jesus about Person B.

### **OBSERVATION #3: INTERCESSION IS CONFUSING**

Here's what I mean. In verse 32, we saw these words ...

The people brought to Jesus **all** the sick and demon-possessed... (Mark 1:32)

And in verse 34 we read:

... and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. (Mark 1:34)

They brought all. He healed many. That's troubling to me. Is it to you? Wouldn't you rather have the passage read "the people brought and Jesus healed all?" But He didn't do that. He only healed "many."

Selfishly, we are OK with that as long as ours are in the "many" category. I just imagine some of those townspeople going home that night with their loved ones still sick. They did the right thing. They interceded. Some were healed. Some were not. That's tough to take.

I don't know why God chooses to answer some prayers and not answer others. There have been thousands of people in our nation that have died from the coronavirus. I would think that nearly every one of them had someone interceding on their behalf. I don't understand the criteria God uses.

But I do understand this. If God answered every one of my prayers ...

- That would put me in charge. I would be the one who decided who got what. God is going to remain sovereign. He is never going to hear a prayer request and check with me to see what He should do.
- That my ego would swell pretty big. That wouldn't be good either.

Yes, it is confusing. But the confusion should only drive us deeper into our intercession. Because the deeper I go, the more clarity I gain. Just because nothing happens,

doesn't mean you've done something wrong. Keep praying. Be persistent. When God wants to you stop, He will tell you. Until then, pray on.

## **APPLICATION**

All of the people in today's text met Jesus because another person cared enough about their situation to bring the matter to the attention of Jesus.

You might be thinking, "Pastor Tom, I'm not very good at praying. I don't know what to say. I don't know how to put it into the right words."

When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Church in Rome, he addressed that very issue:

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. (The Holy Spirit) does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves ... and keeps us present before God. (Romans 8:26-27)

There are many times in my prayers that I have no idea what to say, so I just say the person's name. The Holy Spirit takes it from there.

There are people you know who need to meet Jesus. The needs in their lives are immense. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Amen.