

This story takes place while Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. It is also the last healing miracle recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Mark is always action oriented. He doesn't include unnecessary details. His gospel has a special fondness for verbs, it's always from one thing to the next, so it's always good to think about why he is including a story, why he's taking time out of his breakneck pace.

This story is a familiar one for many of us. Some one desperately seeks the healing of the Lord, they cry out earnestly, even beyond what others believe is reasonable, and then Jesus heals. Stories like these are often quoted to those who are also desperately seeking the Lord's healing in body, spirit or mind. But the story does not end with the healing, however. Such miracles rarely do, in the Gospels. There is always more to the story. Healing is not the ending, but the beginning.

Those with physical handicaps in Israel faced a rough life. They were dependent upon the assistance of others as they could not usually be productive on their own. Blindness in particular carried a great stigma. Not only was the blind individual completely dependent on others, but there was a great emphasis on light, especially in greek culture, and darkness and blindness carried connotations of ignorance and immorality. Greek stories contained examples of God's punishing people for their behavior or ignorance with blindness.

Often people with these disabilities were out casts even among their own people. Perhaps their family could not carry the burden, perhaps they were afraid, perhaps they were ashamed. Whatever the reason, these people were often isolated from their communities and families. This was more pronounced in situations involving diseases or disorders that could cause one to become unclean, but even in the best of situations these people were looked down upon, or seen as a burden, and someone to be pitied.

I don't what this man's life must have been like before this, but I can bet it wasn't easy. He hears that Jesus is coming and he calls out to Jesus. This is his first act of faith, to recognize the power of Jesus and appeal to him. The crowd tries to silence him, but he just calls out even louder. This is his second act of faith. He does not let his faith be silenced, he does not let anyone discourage him from reaching out to God. He knows that Jesus is the only solution to his problems and this man refuses to let the opinions of others interfere. And Jesus hears this man calling out, making a bit of a scene. Despite being on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus stops and makes time for this blind beggar. The crowd says to the blind man, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you."

This man who likely has nothing of substance in the world, throws off his cloak and starts toward Jesus. Now, you and I can go to Walmart and get a new coat any time we like. This man throws aside the fabric that served as a covering and a blanket, with no real way of getting another, no ability to run down to Walmart or money to do so with. He leaves everything behind and goes to Jesus. He follows his faith.

Jesus asks him what the man wants from Jesus, and the man replies he wants his sight. And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And of course, his eyesight is immediately restored.

Often when we talk about healing miracles this is where we cue the music, roll the credits. I am in hospitals and nursing facilities all the time, and I hear this and similar stories told often. The point seems to be that God is able and willing to heal. I do agree with that. I believe God is able, I believe God is good, and I believe when it is God's will to heal God heals. In fact I believe that God always heals God's children, it's just that sometimes that healing takes place when we have joined the cloud of witnesses in heaven.

I also hear this and similar stories in relation to other woes, such as broken relationships, times of financial hardship, when seeking a new direction, or when the future looks uncertain. Often times I do see God's incredible healing in these situations. There is no knot that God can't untie, no situation God can't navigate. When we need God's help, we should pray for it. Scripture tells us so. When God does help, however, we must not let the story end there.

After having his sight restored, this man could have gone anywhere, done anything he liked. He was whole. He could have found a productive trade and begun working his way up in life. The sky was the limit. But that's not what he did. "And immediately the man recovered his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

This man leaves the town he's been living in, the only life he has known, he leaves behind the wide open prospects before him, and follows Jesus. Healing was only the beginning of his story. Having received the much longed for restoration, the work of this man begins.

One of the coolest parts, in my opinion, of being a minister, is getting to see real life miracles first hand. And I have seen them. I ministered to a woman who was diagnosed with a grave terminal condition, complete with the fully battery of medical testing to back up the diagnosis. The nature of her condition was such that she was not expected to live more than about six months. There were no treatments possible, nothing that medical science in all its glory could offer her. Typically people ask me to pray for healing and to not take no for an answer, but she was different in that she told everyone plainly that God would heal her if God wanted to, but if not, that was okay too, it was God's perfect plan. She and I planned her funeral, and she began to get her affairs in order. Once she was so ill I was called in expectation of her death, but she stabilized and went on.

Six months turned into nine, which turned into twelve. Finally, having outlived all of the doctor's expectations, she asked to be checked out again. We were all stunned to learn her condition had completely disappeared. God had apparently decided to heal her.

For most people that might have been the end of the story. But not for her. Now she tells everyone who will listen about what God has done for her. She became a leader in her church. At one point she had to go to a rehab unit and she was placed next to a gentleman I can only describe as a lifelong curmudgeon. I visited her and she was telling me how concerned she was for this poor man (as he is literally yelling and hollering at the nurses and aides. The nurses and aides are literally afraid of this man. I am afraid of this man.).

I walked out and said to my partner, she will have this man converted by the end of the week. I visited a week later and the curmudgeon is unrecognizable. She has led this man to Christ, he breaks down in tears, and is completely a new creature in Christ.

Healing was the beginning, not the end of her story.

Now, not every healing is as dramatic as that. In fact, that's probably the most dramatic I've witnessed with my own two eyes. A lot of times God's help and healing looks a lot more like finding a great doctor that happens to be up on the latest treatment, or the other person in that broken relationship calls you, but then begins the hard work of restoration, or you hear about a new job opportunity that might help your finances out, but you still have to apply and go through an interview. Stories like that are a little too slow for the Gospel of Mark. The finding of a great doctor on Google does not have the same impact.

When the blind man saw Jesus passing by, he followed his faith. He called out to Jesus, seizing the opportunity before him. I bet he had prayed to God to heal him before. I bet this encounter with Jesus was not what he was expecting, but he responded in faith. When Jesus called to him, he went. He accepted the healing that God was offering.

There's a story that you might have heard about a man lost at sea and he prays that God will save him. After a while a fisherman's boat comes up and says hop in. The man says no, God's going to save me. Some time goes by and another boat comes by and tries to rescue the man but again he refuses, saying God would save him. Finally the coast guard arrive and try to save this man and again he refuses. Well, the inevitable happens and the man drowns and he is very unhappy with God. He demands to know why God has let him down and not saved him. Of God says I sent you three boats, what more did you want? The man needed to accept the help that God was offering.

I'm willing to bet each and every one of us has prayed for God's help and healing at some point, whether it was for a physical problem, or a sticky situation, or even just some direction. Maybe some of us are praying for God's help and healing today. That help and healing may not look like this miracle of Jesus. It may not look like God lifting us out of the sea. It may come that way, but it also may come through a faithful friend, a skilled worker, or a chance encounter. It is up to us to accept the help and healing of God, even when it doesn't look like what we thought, even when it's hard. Sometimes the path to healing is work, it may mean taking unpleasant treatments, or facing tough issues, fixing problems in our selves, or accepting a new way of being in the world. Whatever the circumstances, we do know that God's healing is always, always, for God's glory and our good. We have only to follow our faith, and to accept God's help, and to let that not be the end of the story.

When this man received his sight he got up and followed Jesus. He became a living witness to the good that God had done for him. What has God done for you? Maybe you have a story like the blind man, or like the woman I ministered to, or maybe your story is about God putting the right people in your path at the right time, or the resources to get where you needed to be, or about God simply giving you the strength to continue on. Whatever your story, don't let it end with the healing. Let that just be the beginning, the beginning of following, and of sharing your story with others.

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