

## **Step Into a Miracle: A Deeper look at the Miracles of Jesus**

There are 37 miracles recorded in the four Gospels of the New Testament only one of which makes it into all four accounts, which is the feeding of the 5000. The Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke bear the most commonalities where the Gospel of John contains 5 miracles recorded only in that book. Most of the miracles deal with healings, most often for an individual but occasionally a group, but there are also miraculous accounts of Jesus walking on water, withering a fig tree, catching loads of fish or finding a coin in a fish's mouth.

What do these miracles have to say to us, as there seems to be less and less of what we might recognize as "the miraculous" within the church today? When and why does Jesus heal and what part does prayer play in our healing? As with most of my studies, there will likely be more questions than answers, but the hope is that we will see the healing touch of Jesus with greater clarity in our personal lives and grow in our confidence of the Christ who brought life out of death and wholeness to the broken.

As much as possible, I will group the accounts into categories of the types of healings Jesus performed as well as some of the more unique miracles. Some of the purpose behind certain miracles was for the sake of Jesus and his message, and some were out of compassion for the broken that he encountered. There will be no deliberate effort to organize these in chronological order, or in any order of special significance nor will we necessarily touch on all of the recorded miracles. One thing we will discover is that Jesus handles each situation uniquely and so we will uncover or encounter no formula for guaranteed outcomes. Neither does each recipient respond to Jesus with the same manner or attitude. In fact, it will be almost disturbing how little the person who is healed has anything to do with the outcome. We will see over and over that healing is a gift of grace given according to the good pleasure of the Master. We will ask one another, what can we learn about Jesus to deepen our faith and learn about ourselves as we live under the grace and mercy of God.

(See the appendix (page 30) for a list of all of the miracles and their references.)

### **Outline. (Warning: Some studies will take more than one week to cover)**

1. Jesus deals with the Demons
2. Jesus rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith
3. The Touch that Heals Leprosy
4. Healing those lost in "no-man's land"
5. The Centurion and his Servant
6. Sin and Sickness
7. A Healing Within a Healing
8. Withered Hands and Withered Hearts
9. From Scarcity to Abundance: Water to Wine
10. Maybe the Blind can lead the Blind!
11. So that God's Glory might be Revealed
12. Miracles Unique to Luke
13. The Raising of Lazarus
14. The Greatest Miracle of All

## Lesson 1: Jesus deals with the Demons

The first miracle recorded in Mark is found right in the first chapter. It is also recorded in Luke and we will compare both accounts. Jesus encounters those suffering from demonic possession or oppression four other times and we will try to touch on a piece of each story.

**Read Mark 1: 21- 28 and Luke 4: 31 – 36:** Have part of the group follow from Mark and the others follow Luke so that a comparison of the accounts can be made and observations noted.

1. What is the setting? Who is present to witness the miracle? Are there any details added or missing from each account?
2. What was the purpose behind this miracle? Who most benefited from this display of Jesus' power?

Unlike our understandings today, when Jesus walked among us, evil spirits were seen hanging around every corner and under every bush and responsible for most every illness. Those who claimed to have power over these spirits would put on a great show of incantations and ingredients, demonstrating their magical powers to deal with the underworld. In contrast, Jesus simply spoke and the demons obeyed.

3. What does this say about the authority that Jesus had? What message was he sending to those in the synagogue at that time? What role did the man who was possessed play in this story?
4. Imagine a newscaster reporting on this story. What part would s/he sensationalize? How would they expect Jesus to act or speak? Jesus is teaching us a new authority, not one of self-aggrandizement or bossy authoritarianism, but offers us the first glimpse of "servant authority". What was the greater good that Jesus was serving on this day?
5. Have you encountered any area in your life where you felt oppressed, entrapped, or perhaps a spiritual enemy that is hindering your walk with God? Are there any fears or discouragements that seem to zap the life out of you? What message of encouragement or hope might you receive from this account of Jesus?
6. What other questions arise for you out of this text?

### Now Read Matthew 9: 32 – 34

This brief vignette also takes place in Capernaum or the surrounding region. Chapter 8 and 9 of Matthew contain several healing stories which we will study later, but this one little snapshot shows how not everyone will come up with the same conclusion regarding the authority of Jesus over demons. Notice the first contrast. This man is mute, where the man in Mark was shouting noisily and was very disruptive. Secondly, his community brought this man to Jesus where the other man was simply in the synagogue at the time. *What was the motivation for Jesus in the first*

*story and what seems to be his motivation in this story for enacting a miracle? What was the response of the first crowd and what is the response in this account? Would miraculous healings today bring more people to Christ? Why or why not?*

This theme is expanded in the account of Matthew 12: 22 – 28 and Luke 11: 14 – 26. Read the Matthew account.

1. This man is not only mute but blind as well, and so the manifestation of the infliction is not what matters but the source, which the passage tells us is demonic. However, we do not encounter the demons as in the first story. Here, the man is simply healed so that he can now see and speak. We see in verse 15 that Jesus has had many people following him and “he cured all of them” and so this is simply another man brought to be healed. The story is centered on the reaction, not the healing. We have the irony of the request in verse 38 – “Show us a sign”. What would an atheist need to see or experience to believe in God and Jesus today? What questions do they bring about the existence of God and his interaction with the day to day, and what could possibly change their mind?

Our fourth story is found in Matthew 15: 21 – 28 and Luke 7: 24 – 30. Once again, the person with the demon seems secondary to the account. This story centers on the faith of the mother and not the daughter who needs healing. The purpose behind this healing is to send a message regarding the ministry of Jesus.

1. What is the significance of the miracle to those who were present at the time? What might be the significance to the first audience or readers of the gospels? What is the significance to you personally?
2. How is faith involved in this healing?
3. In all of our accounts so far, the person who experiences the healing seems almost insignificant. We take the need for healing so personally and we long for the compassion of Jesus to bring healing. From these stories, however, what are the reasons that seem to be the motivation behind the healing Jesus brings?
4. How significant is the power of the demons? In what ways do we give too much credit to the sensational evil or foster fear, when the power of Christ to overcome evil is so much stronger and not sensational at all?

If you were to describe Jesus from the portrait that has been painted so far, what is the greatest encouragement to your personal faith and walk with the Lord?

## Lesson 2: Jesus Rebukes the Disciples for their lack of Faith

We have two more accounts of Jesus healing demonic possession. Both stories include a context or side-story where the disciples are seemingly rebuked for their lack of faith. This can be troubling for us today as we wonder how to “get” that kind of faith to bring healing or do the miraculous and we wonder if Jesus is disappointed in us for the lack of miracles witnessed. Let’s take a closer look at the two stories to see why Jesus scolded his disciples for their reactions.

### The Healing in Geresenes – Matthew 8: 28 – 34, Mark 5: 1 – 20, Luke 8: 26 – 39

1. Read all three accounts and again look for any different details in the accounts and also note the Biblical context of the story from the text previous.
  - a. Dealing with textual differences: First is which name of the city – Gadarenes or Gerasenes or Gergesenes. Commentaries have defined the city as Gergesa, an ancient city on the sea of Tiberias, part of the ten cities known as the Decapolis. The spiritual point is that Jesus leads his disciples across the lake to a Gentile region marked by its unclean places (tombs), unclean practices (herding pigs) and unclean spirits. (demons) *Why on earth would Jesus go into this unclean setting and what does it tell you about him and his mission?*
  - b. Two demoniacs or one? Matthew is known for doubling his numbers – two blind men; two demoniacs, two animals during the triumphal entry, etc. Matthew can also have two accounts of the same story but with a slightly different context or emphasis. The concept of “doublets” can be viewed as a writer’s tool for emphasis to ensure the reader understands the importance of the event. Other scholars dispute whether this is a device of the author and instead view it as historically accurate. Their argument is that the other gospel writers only refer to the one demoniac but do not say specifically that there was only one as two may have been present. The importance of that discussion is primarily about Biblical authority, rather than what meaning the story holds for the reader. *Is there any significance to you whether there were two or one?*
2. “Have you come to torment us before our time?” What is the *time* to which the demons refer? By this statement they are already acknowledging Jesus’ power over them. They do not challenge his authority or try to put up a fight. They know they have encountered a power greater than their own. *How might we apply this knowledge when we are faced with evil or darker forces?*
3. The final victory over sin, death and the evil one will not take place until the end times. At this point in time, Jesus seems to be able to displace the demons, but not totally expel them from the earth. Evil is subject to God and also permitted by God. It cannot seem to stand against God, and yet it never seems to actually disappear. *What are the implications of this for us as believers and followers of Christ?*

4. Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) believed that with God's permission, it is the demon's job is to tempt us to sin. However, he stated that demons have no real power; it is only our weakness and failure that give them success<sup>1</sup>. *If this were so, why would God allow that? Do we need a force outside of our own nature to cause us to sin???? What comfort is there in knowing that demons have no real power in and of themselves? How do we, today, understand demons?*
  
5. Read Isaiah 65: 1 – 5. Matthew loves to connect the work of Jesus back to the prophecies of the Old Testament. In this passage, God voiced through Isaiah that he is so tired of the Jewish people rebelling against him, that he is ready to go to a people (the Gentiles) who have not sought him out, and yet are ready to respond. In the Isaiah passage, it seems that he is accusing the Jews of following the ways of the culture surrounding them, also sitting among the dead (unclean), eating swine (unclean) and telling God not to come near because they are "too holy" for God. *What comparisons can be drawn today of how the church simply mirrors the unhealthiness of society as a whole, rather than setting itself apart from unholy behaviors or attitudes? What are ways that churches enjoys the perks of our culture rather than challenging "unclean" social practices?*
  
6. After Jesus vanquishes the demons to the pigs, the people ask Jesus to leave. Some interpreters believe that the crowd recognizes that they are not worthy of one so powerful to be there with them. Others say that they were upset with the loss of livelihood and ask Jesus to leave them alone because they care more about wealth than individuals. *What is your interpretation of their request for Jesus to leave them alone? How might it seem that we would prefer that God stay out of our finances and lifestyle? Where do we (individually and as a society) not really want to be challenged?*
  
7. Before this story begins, the disciples have encountered a sea storm. They fear for their lives while Jesus, exhausted from the day's events, is sleeping in the boat. There are two Greek words used in both this passage and the next that we will study. The first is *oligópistos* (from *olígos*, "little in number, low in quantity" and *pístis*, "faith") The commentaries point out that the translation: "O you of little faith" is more accurately understood as simply "little faith" – almost like a nick-name or pet name. The second word (rebuke) is *epitimáō* – from *epi* (*to*) and *timaó* (*honour*) – to mete out due measure, or we would say, "to put in its proper place". When we read the passage in Matthew, we feel like Jesus is rebuking or scolding the disciples rather than the storm. However, he first addresses his disciples with a kind of pet name – "O little faithys" and then Jesus weighs the merit or value of the storm and puts it in its proper place or perspective – he calms the storm by putting its perceived power in perspective. We too, need to rebuke rather than fear – to put the evil, or the threat in its proper place and demote it, rather than giving it more power by our fear. *How might this put a different perspective on how you view Jesus and his interaction with the disciples in this story?*

---

<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew, Vol. 1: Feasting on the Word Commentary, edited by Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth

**Now turn to and read Matthew 17: 14 - 21. The story is also found in Mark 9: 14 – 29 and Luke 9: 37 - 43**

1. The setting is again important to this story. Jesus, Peter, James and John have just come down from the mountain after seeing Jesus transfigured before their eyes along with a vision of Moses and Elijah. This is the true definition of a mountaintop experience. They have seen their Lord not only as a Jewish rabbi who can teach them things, but also as extraordinary! These three disciples heard the very voice of God along with this holy vision. They know, beyond any doubt that Jesus is not just some Galilean bloke but one chosen by God. And Jesus tells them to keep it a secret! *What emotions would be stirring around these four as they descend the mountain into the crowd?*
2. Coming off this incredulous experience, they encounter the rest of the disciples in a situation. *Use your imagination and describe the scene as you envision it taking place and add some dialogue. What are you observing?*
3. The harshness of Jesus as he responds to the other nine disciples is difficult to grasp. “You unbelieving and perverted generation!” He uses the word *á pistos* (from “not” and *pistós*, “faithful,”) and then *diastréphō* (from *diá*, “through, thoroughly,” which intensifies *stréphō*, “turn”). The word that we use as perverted, is literally *thoroughly twisted* or out of shape. It is not so much a statement of morality as it is perspective. They have no faith and they get everything so twisted that that they cannot do what God has empowered them to do. *What are the implications for us as people of faith and yet often feel so powerless to make a difference? What is it that we get twisted or out of shape about that hinders our ability to do God’s will?*
4. We again encounter the word “rebuke” as Jesus gives “correct merit” to the demon as he casts it out. As with the storm, Jesus puts the demon in its proper place. He reduces its power by weighing it against the power of God and it comes up very short. *With this understanding, how might our faith be stronger and our ability to disempower the evil around us more effective?*
5. Once again the phrase “little faith” is used, only not as a descriptor but a noun (*oligopistian*) so because of “little faith”, the boy was not healed. And yet, Jesus goes on to use the metaphor of the smallest seed as the measure of faith needed. *What is Jesus trying to say here with this strange mustard seed analogy?*
6. *In reflecting upon the healing stories so far, what faith does the one who is in need of healing require; and what faith is required of those who are vehicles of that healing? Should we be seeing more miracles of healing today?*

### Lesson 3: The Touch that heals Leprosy

Let us begin with a bit of background to the way that the three synoptic Gospels record the events of Jesus. According to the chronology in the book of Mark, the first healing that Jesus performs is to cast out the demon from the man who was disruptive in the temple. As the pace of ministry moves very quickly in Mark, in the first chapter alone John the Baptist is introduced and Jesus and is baptized by him, then cast into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted. He calls four fishermen to join him in his mission described in Mark 1: 15: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news”* and from that point on, Jesus is off and running. He visits the local synagogue and begins to establish his reputation as one who teaches with authority and demonstrates his power over the demonic and oppressive spirits. WHEW! In the book of Matthew, there is much more detail given to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Matthew 1-2 contains the birth narrative; Chapter 3 is the baptism account and the 4<sup>th</sup> is the temptations. Matthew then simply states that *Jesus “went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease . . .”* without giving detail to any of those healings. Chapter 5 – 7 contains the Sermon on the Mount, where the teachings of Jesus are laid out in detail whereas Mark does not contain this teaching at all. In other words, Matthew takes 7 chapters to cover what Mark mentions in his first chapter and the chronology begins to line up from that point, though there are still some variations. The book of Luke also contains a birth narrative, the baptism and wilderness experience of Jesus in greater detail up to the middle of Chapter 4. Luke then gives the account of a sermon that Jesus preached in his hometown of Nazareth, which is not recorded in the other two gospels and Luke now matches up to Mark’s chronology at that point. The healing of Simon’s mother in both Luke and Mark comes after Jesus heals the demoniac in the synagogues, though Luke gives no mention to the calling of disciples before this account, where Matthew and Mark tell us of the four fishermen. This is why the chapter numbers vary so much as to where the stories appear in each gospel. The order may still vary but not as dramatically as it appears.

**Read: Mark 1: 29 – 31; Luke 4: 38 – 39 and Matthew 8: 14 – 17**

1. At this point, it appears that Jesus has called only the four disciples and they go to stay at the home of Peter. The text does not mention the wife of Peter but we assume that he is married since his mother-in-law lives in his home. *From the very few details given, would you assume that she had been ill for a long period of time, or that Peter came home to discover she was unwell?*
2. *What was the purpose of this healing and for whose benefit?*
3. *What did it reveal to the disciples about the ministry and character of Jesus as they being this new journey with him? What does it reveal to you?*

We will now go to the healing of the man with leprosy. This story continues the theme that Jesus is not afraid to enter the realm of the unclean (demonic) and is willing to touch those who are the

outcasts. It is good to remember that there was good reason for those with skin diseases to be quarantined from the rest of community, yet what a horrible life sentence!

**Read Mark 1: 32 – 45**

4. Consider how quickly the word about Jesus and his ability to heal spread around the community of Capernaum (verse 28). It is so easy to share good news when we personally experience it. *What can make it difficult for us to share the good news of Jesus today?*
5. Jesus needed to take time out for prayer in order to have the strength to carry out his calling. The need is so great and Jesus could have spent his whole ministry just healing the sick in Capernaum but he knew that was not all he was called to do. There was a “greater good” – the proclamation of the message from verse 15 that was his ultimate calling.
  - a. *First of all, how does prayer restore your energy for ministry and secondly,*
  - b. *How does prayer help you discern where God would have you ministering?*
6. The Gospels share that Jesus brings healing to many, many people but we are not given the details of very many of the stories. Just a few have been singled and told in more detail. *Discuss why you think this particular healing of the man with leprosy is highlighted by all three gospels? What is the significance of this particular encounter?*
7. *What are the aspects of Jesus’ personality that come through in this narrative? Do the other Gospel accounts offer any other perspectives?*
8. *What is it about the attitude of the leper that moves Jesus to heal him?*
9. Jesus wants the leper to be fully integrated back into society and so he asks him to follow the proper protocol set out by the priests to show that he is healed. (See Leviticus 14). If you read the chapter you will recognize how very cumbersome and antiquated was the process so *why did Jesus require this man to jump through all the hoops? What does this say about the ways that Jesus was willing to work within the structures of Judaism and follow the laws in contrast to the times that he seems to cast the laws aside?*
10. Jesus asks the leper not to say anything but the man cannot help himself. *Did the man betray Jesus or was it an unfair request to be asked to keep quiet? Would you have been any different?*
11. *How was this man’s life completely changed by this healing? What might be some comparative stories of how the touch of Christ completely changes the community and stature of a person through healing and transformation today?*

## Lesson 4: Healing those stuck in no-man's land

**Read Luke 17: 11 – 19 of the healing of ten lepers. This account is only in the book of Luke.**

1. Luke's chapters 9 – 18 are crafted around Jesus heading toward Jerusalem where his story will come to a climactic conclusion. In this story, Jesus travels "between" Samaria and Galilee. If you look at a map of the area during this time period, there is no actual land in-between the two regions, but there is a valley that runs east to west and so rather than heading straight down through Samaria, Jesus was on a path that would take him around the outskirts. In one sense, Jesus is in a "boundary place" – that middle land where tensions run high between ethnic and religious groups. *What might be the spiritual significance to you of where Jesus was willing to tread? What kinds of environments make you feel uncomfortable socially, religiously or politically?*
2. "Keeping their distance, they call out 'Jesus, Master' . . ." They stood afar, knowing that their disease obliged them to keep their distance. Not only was the skin disease a cause for fear of infection, it was also viewed by the Jews as an inflicted punishment for some horrible sin, therefore a mark of God's displeasure. They call out "have mercy on us!" *Why did they ask for mercy rather than ask for healing? Is there any difference in terms of what they were hoping for? Why or why not?*
3. Now look at Luke 7:18 - 22. Jesus tells John's disciples to share what Jesus is doing as a sign of the Messiah. Would this be enough evidence for John? *How do miracles play into the identification that God is at work? What is the evidence that we look for today to know that something is the work of God among us?*
4. Jesus does not touch them, as he did in our previous story, but he does tell them to go and show themselves to the priest for the same certificate of cleansing. There is a step of faith involved, for they have not yet experienced the healing. Compare this with the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5: 8 – 15 and the role of "taking steps" in both stories. *Has Jesus ever asked something of you that required a step of faith before you could see his hand at work? Share any stories that come to mind.*
5. It is interesting to note that Jesus asks a Samaritan to go to a priest as well, though they were not allowed to associate with the Jews or see a priest. The Samaritan would have gone to see his own priest at Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans worshipped and would have thus parted company with the other nine. *What insight does this add to understanding the dynamics of this group of 10?*
6. God's grace is extended to all, but that does not mean that all necessarily gain their salvation. Ten left Jesus and "on their way" they were healed. Nine of them continued on their way to their priests to be declared clean. In one sense they were only fulfilling what was commanded of them. They carried out the "letter of the law" and so they were not "wrong" and yet they missed out on something in their obedience. *What lesson is there in*

*this to Christians who are moral and upright – they do everything correctly - and yet might still be missing something in their walk with Jesus?*

7. One was moved beyond obedience and into worship. Martin Luther was once asked to describe the nature of true worship and his answer was “the tenth leper that turned back”. *What then, is Luther’s definition of worship?*
8. The leper did not directly praise Jesus, but “glorified God with a loud voice!” He recognized the true source of his healing and Jesus as the conduit of God’s touch. *What might be some circumstances where we pay more attention to the person that God uses rather than our eyes being drawn to God and our hearts to worship?*
9. “Your faith has *saved* you” – This same phrase is recorded in Luke in three other accounts (7:50) (8:48) (18:42). *Who are the recipients of healing in these stories?* The Greek word, “sesoken” from “sozo” can mean *healed, made well or saved*. The King James Version most beautiful captures it’s meaning with “your faith has made you *whole*”. Beyond the healing of this man’s illness, his whole soul and identity finds healing. *Again, what role does faith play in healing and how would you define faith from this story?*

In Summary – from Dr David Louse who is the president of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia from [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org):

<sup>2</sup>Stewardship is not first about giving, but about seeing all that we have been given and rejoicing in a way that cannot help but shape how we act.

Perhaps this is also the key to the worship we carefully plan and tend week in and week out. Worship is not simply about hearing God's story or even praising God in response; rather, hearing the story through Scripture and sermon and praising through song and gifts is all intended to help us see God at work in our lives and the world. Perhaps this is even the key to the Christian life. Before we are called to believe or confess or help or do we are called simply to see...and to help others do the same. We are called, that is, to point out blessing, to claim mercy, to name grace wherever we are and with all the courage we can muster.

At the outset of this story, ten men are stuck. They live "between regions" in a "no-man's" land of being socially, religiously, and physically unclean. By the end of the story, all ten are made well. But one has something more. He has *seen* Jesus, recognized his blessing and rejoiced in it, and changed his course of action and behavior. And because he *sees* what has happened, the leper is not just healed, but is made whole, restored, drawn back into relationship with God and humanity. In all these ways he has been, if we must choose a single word, *saved*.

What is true stewardship, worship, and Christian living? It is the tenth leper turning back, for now as then, seeing makes all the difference.

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=783](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=783) October 10, 2010

## Lesson 5: The Centurion and his Servant

This is a marvelous and mysterious story in Scripture involving many layers of relationships. First we have a Roman Soldier who would have as little to do with the Jews as possible – or perhaps as a Gentile, the Jews would have as little to do with him as possible. Secondly, you have this Army officer coming to an itinerant preacher on behalf of his slave, no less! The questions abound! Why would a Soldier care that much about his servant – a piece of property by the standards of their day?

Read this story in Matthew 8: 5 – 13, also found in Luke 7: 1 - 10

1. Notice there are a few key details that differ in both accounts. In Matthew, the Centurion goes to meet Jesus in person, where in Luke, he sends some Jewish Elders to intercede on his behalf. *From the Luke account, what do we come to understand about the character of this Roman? Why were Jewish leaders willing to vouch for him?*
2. We are in the town of Capernaum. *What do you know about that town, and how would the Centurion have heard about Jesus?* (NOTE: Capernaum was the center of Jesus's activities in the Galilee and his town during that time. Jesus taught in the local synagogue. It was also the hometown of the apostles Peter, James, Andrew and John, and the tax collector Matthew.) *What did the Jewish elders know about Jesus and why did they recommend Jesus to the Centurion?*
3. "My Servant" – the most common word for servant is 'doulos', but in Matthew, the term is 'pais' which can also be interpreted as young child or boy as seen in Matt 2: 16 (boys) Matthew 14: 2 (servant), Matt 17:18 (boy), Matt 21:15 (children). Luke uses both *doulos* and *pais* to describe the ill servant. This may indicate that the servant was a younger man or adolescent that had grown up in the household. The Greek adjective "entimos" denotes that the servant was held in high esteem and precious to the Centurion.
4. *Why is Jesus so impressed with the Roman soldier? What is it about his nature and character that warms the heart of Jesus? A Jewish person would have been made unclean by entering the home of a Gentile – how is this reflected in the Soldier's request of Jesus?*
5. Jesus once described himself as gentle and humble in heart. The officer identifies with Jesus as a man of authority. Jesus identifies with the officer as a man of humility and both are correct. *Name some humble leaders that have impressed you and increased your respect for their authority.*
6. In each lesson we have asked, what role does faith play in each healing and how do we interpret that in light of our own faith. *How would you describe the faith of the Centurion?*
7. Jesus uses this as a teaching moment for the Jews and disciples that are witnessing this encounter. Read again Matthew 8: 10 – 12. *What is the lesson for us here?*

8. Yet again, the one who is healed has little to do with the story. The one who loves and cares for them in their suffering intercedes on their behalf. *How might this encourage our own prayer life? What role did faith play in the request of the Centurion? What role does your own faith play in your prayers for the healing of loved ones?*

### **Let us jump to John 4: 46 – 54: Jesus heals the son of a royal official**

The similarities to this story in John with the account we just read has led some to believe that this is John's account of the same story. There are, however, also several key differences. *Name those differences:*

The man was most likely an official in the service of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. We know of another believer from the household of Caesar. Chuza, the husband of Joanna who followed and financially supported Jesus (Luke 8:3) managed the household of Herod. It would be interesting to know if Joanna influenced this man to pursue Jesus, or if the healing influenced Joanna's interest in Jesus. All we do know is that this father asks Jesus to come and heal his "paidion", an uncommon word that has much affection attached to it such as "my little lad" might better convey. We can all imagine the heart-felt grief and desperation a father would feel for his child and the urgency to travel the 26 miles with an altitude gain of 1250 feet to Cana to find Jesus.

*Question: This desperate man travels as fast as possible to meet the healer but what are the first words out of the mouth of Jesus? Why would Jesus respond so warmly to the Centurion in Luke, and so harshly to this royal official? What do you think is going on in this scene?*

Read verses 43 – 45. Here, we gather that Jesus was somewhat frustrated by the number of people who were amazed at his miracles and followed him for the spectacular, but were not really coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus had been performing miracles in Jerusalem and was now headed back to where he knows that as the "carpenter's son". He was welcomed back in Galilee, but as seen in Luke 4:22, they *spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words . . .* until Jesus pointed out their weaknesses in faith and exclusive behavior – then they were ready to run him off the cliff! The harsh words that Jesus spoke addressed not particularly the royal official for the word for "you" is plural in the Greek, as in "you Jews . . .".

These words do not deter the father – he just repeats his request: *"Sir, come down before my little boy dies."* *How does Jesus respond to his request? How might the man have felt to have come all this way to see Jesus and Jesus does not want to return with the father? How easily would it be for any of us accept the words of Jesus, "your son will live" when he had not even seen the boy?*

*Name some occasions when prayer has been answered but not in the way you had anticipated.*

The response "your son will live" is more accurately in the Greek, "Your son lives". The healing has already taken place, as verified by the servants who meet the official on the road to say that the boy had been healed at the very hour Jesus spoke to the father.

*What encouragement do you receive from this encounter for your own story or prayer life?*

## Lesson 6: Sin and Sickness

In some of the healing stories, Jesus makes a direct correlation between forgiveness and healing such as our lesson today. At other times, Jesus wants to disconnect sin and illness as when the Pharisees asked him, “Who has sinned, this man or his parents?” and Jesus assures them that sin is not the issue (John 9: 1 – 3). The truth is, we know of times when sin or unhealthy lifestyle choices have led to poor health and sickness, and other times when an illness strikes out of nowhere the healthiest person we know. We live in a world that somewhat believes that it can control life expectancy by diet and exercise or that something or someone is to blame when unexpected illness strikes. On the other hand, we do not always want to own our part of the scenario when there are consequences to our health because of the stresses caused by the pace of life we live. We are coming to understand more and more that we are holistic beings of body, mind and soul and the health of one part affects the whole. If sin is defined as a “disconnect” from the will of God, then certainly there is much illness and suffering caused in this world as a direct result of sin. We also know that the innocent are often not protected from such consequences. Let us see what we can learn from Jesus about the link between illness and the need for forgiveness.

### The Paralysis of Sin: Read Luke 5: 17 – 26

1. We are so blessed when we have friends who truly care for us and want God’s best in our lives. *Describe from the story how these four friends were a) creative b) urgent c) sacrificial and d) persistent in bringing their sick friend to Jesus.*
2. Consider some of the ills or issues facing society today such as the recent refugee crisis, the Supreme Court recent rulings on euthanasia and prostitution. *How might the church be more creatively proactive and urgent in addressing these ills? What might be the sacrificial and persistent elements needed to bring about change? Do we give up too easily?*
3. We know that we cannot inherit salvation through our family or friends and so how do you understand verse 20: “When he saw **their** faith, he said, ‘Friend, **your** sins are forgiven you’? *How does our faith benefit others?*
4. The Scripture notes that the Pharisees were “sitting” near by. This could actually have been a sign of disrespect, as it was most common for the Rabbi to sit and the student stand to out of respect during the teaching. This is reminiscent of the time Anne Graham Lotz was invited to speak at a Seminary in Kentucky and when she came to the pulpit, the men picked up their chairs and turned their backs to her. Their lack of respect and a teachable spirit did not stop Anne from sharing God’s word, and neither did it stop Jesus. *Have you ever faced opposition in doing what you felt called by God? How were you able to carry on?*
5. What did Jesus see or recognize in this man that he believed the need for forgiveness was at that root of his ailment? *What are some of the ways that sin can paralyze our lives or cause our spiritual life to go stagnant?*

6. Saying that someone is a sinner is different than saying someone needs forgiveness. The first can carry connotations of condemnation, whereas the second shows compassion and grace. *In what ways can words of forgiveness bring healing, especially where we struggle with guilt or shame? Does it make a difference in your relationships to hear the words "I forgive you"?*
  
7. In Jewish practice, somewhat similar to the Catholic practice of confession, a person could go to the Temple and seek forgiveness through the offering of sacrifices and prayers. When the requirements spelled out in Jewish law were fulfilled, the Priest would pronounce absolution – "Your sins are forgiven". (II Sam 12:13) The priest would not be claiming to be God, but standing in as a representative for God acknowledging the forgiveness received through acts of sacrifice and repentance. In this situation, Jesus is not necessarily claiming to be God by offering the paralyzed man forgiveness, otherwise he would have said, "I forgive your sins". However, by acting as a priest to this man, Jesus was rendering the Temple, the Priest and the sacrificial system obsolete. This was the blasphemy that the Jewish authorities could not abide. The real Messiah would affirm all things Jewish, not abolish them! In another sense, Jesus was offering forgiveness to all of Israel symbolically through this healing. Jesus was offering the opportunity for all to stand directly before God with no mediator and receive the full and forgiving love of God. Not only is the man paralyzed, but also the whole Jewish system of laws and regulations had paralyzed the people from being able to come to God and receive healing. There were so many barriers created by the system that made it more exclusive than inclusive. The Pharisees in the room at the time were certainly paralyzed in their ability to put faith Jesus after what they witnessed. Many needed to be set free that day! *In what other ways did Jesus as Messiah remove the barriers between God and man?*
  
8. *What are some of the barriers today that keep people from receiving God's forgiveness – either self-imposed or due to institutional practices?*
  
9. The paradox: It can be easier to speak words of comfort than to pronounce someone healed. The results of one are far more evident than the other. And yet, what it truly costs to forgive another can be great indeed, as it cost Jesus his very life on the cross. It also cost the friends a great deal of time and effort and faith to bring the man to Jesus. Jesus applauds those willing to make the sacrifice. I know in my own life, I wrestle with becoming involved because it is inconvenient or time consuming. It is much easier to say, "If there is anything I can do to help, let me know" than to creatively think of what would actually be helpful to another in their situation. Instead of bringing a casserole, should I offer to scrub bathrooms, or provide taxi service, or simply spend more time with someone that takes more than they can give at this stage of their life? *What are ways that we could become more proactive in our caring?*

Jesus gives the needed proof that his words of forgiveness were accepted and received by God as the man stood up and walked. He proved that he was not a blasphemer but the one sent by God to free the nation of Israel, not from bondage to Rome, but bondage to their own sinful ways. He is the Messiah!

## Lesson 7: A Healing within a Healing

All three synoptic gospels contain this wonderful account of a healing interrupted by a healing. In the context of Matthew, Jesus is back in Capernaum and has just called Matthew, the tax collector to follow him. They go to a home to eat their meal and there are several unsavory types at the table, which raises questions about whom he eats with from the Pharisees and why he eats from the disciples of John. Jesus is apparently having too good of a time and hanging with the wrong crowds, which is puzzling to them, because they have been appreciating his preaching and teaching in the Capernaum synagogue. His words and his actions don't seem to line up according to their idea of what they thought righteousness should look like. The party is interrupted by Jairus, whose daughter has taken ill and he needs Jesus to come right away. Jesus gets up and follows him home, but on the way, there is another interruption as a desperate woman reaches out for healing. At times we can get caught up debating all sorts of things "about" Jesus, but in the end, we personally need Jesus to touch our lives and bring hope and healing. It is not what we think but how we experience Jesus personally that builds our faith. Jairus doesn't care with whom Jesus eats or what he eats, he just wants him to come and heal his daughter. A woman who has suffered for years finds the courage to touch the hem of hope.

**Read all three accounts: Matthew 9: 14 – 26; Mark 5: 21 – 43; Luke 8: 40 – 56.** Name and gather all of the known details about each character involved.

1. *What do we learn about the Synagogue Leader? Do we know anything about his character or story? Since Jesus had spoken in the synagogue of Capernaum before, and this man was in charge of lining up the teachers and readers for worship, there is a strong chance that Jesus knew Jairus and Jairus had heard him teach. Jairus boldly makes his way through the crowd – it is an annoyance but not a hindrance to his determination to pull Jesus away. What might be some "annoyances" that keep some from personally encountering Jesus?*
2. *What do we learn about the woman hemorrhaging? What is her plight caused by this ailment, physically, socially and economically? For her, the crowd represents both danger and protection; danger if she was recognized as unclean, but safety in that she could cover her face and hide among the throng as she made her way to touch Jesus. She touched his hem (most likely the tassels of his prayer shawl) so as not to make Jesus unclean. If you were she, how confident would you be that this tactic would work? In football a "hail Mary" is when you throw a long bomb hoping it will be caught and run into the end zone to win a losing game. It is synonymous with a long shot. Was this a long shot or a true act of faith?*
3. Consider the contrasting situation of the Ruler and the woman. One would have financial resources and one was in poverty because of her illness. Jairus certainly had more social standing than the woman, yet illness is always the great equalizer. There are certainly some things that money cannot buy and at this point, both are helpless and in need of Jesus. *What needed to take place in the heart of each person for them to come to Jesus? In what ways might our own health and personal resources keep us from depending on God in daily life?*

4. *Do you think Jesus knew the woman's need before she touched him – that someone in the crowd was in need of healing and honored the faith of reaching out to touch his robe, or do you believe that Jesus had no idea that a woman would touch his garment and be healed – implying that the healing power was not in his control? Could God use Jesus without Jesus being necessarily aware? Consider a time when God used you in a way that you were unaware until it was told to you after the fact. Share if something comes to mind.*
5. *What would be some of the reasons that Jesus stopped and identified the woman to the crowd and made her healing public knowledge? It is wonderful to note that this is only time recorded in the gospels that Jesus calls a woman “daughter”. What might that signify to you?*
6. *In the mean time, Jairus' hope is dashed, for where there is life, there is hope, but now there is no life for his daughter has died. Imagine the devastation for him. Yet Jesus speaks words to restore hope, for even in death, there is hope for those who trust in Christ. How have you felt frustrated that God has delayed answer to prayer? What has renewed your hope when it seemed the cause was dead?*
7. *Did Jesus lie (tell an untruth) by saying the girl is only asleep? What is the double meaning? How do we view death in light of this?*
8. *There is a tenderness to Jesus made evident in this healing. One can almost hear a mother saying the same words in the morning to her child. “Little One, time to get up – rise and shine!” What other instructions does Jesus give and what insight does this give to the nature of Jesus?*

*What we see in these passages is that God is not only a God of infinite power, but that He is a God of infinite compassion and tenderness. He is deeply touched by human needs. He is sensitive to our sufferings and trials in life. He cares not only for the raising up and putting down of kingdoms, but also for the missed meal at a time of illness.<sup>3</sup>*

Discuss what evidence of this truth have you experienced in your own life or recognized God at work in the lives of other. Spend some time in prayer for someone you know that needs a special measure of compassion in their life at this time.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/10-where-there-s-death-there-s-hope-mark-521-43>

## Lesson 8: Withered Hands and Withered Hearts

Jesus continues to face deep opposition from the Jewish establishment, the Pharisees. They have witnessed his power, seen his healings and yet they refuse to soften their hardened or withered hearts. The Pharisees have been the power brokers for the Jewish faith. They were the ones who defined holiness – what holy living looked like for a Jew. They said “yea” or “nay” to which person was in and which was out according to the rules they had established. The problem was not that they did not believe Jesus had power and authority but rather they recognized it as a threat to their structures. They had no desire to submit to this new authority at the risk of losing their own positions of power and so they plotted to bring Jesus down. In the context of our reading today, they are essentially stalking Jesus – following him from town to town waiting to see him break one of their laws. Their stubborn hearts (Mark 3:5) angers and distresses Jesus as he reveals how much easier it is to heal a withered hand than to heal a withered heart.

**Read** Matthew 12: 1 – 14, Mark 3: 1 – 6, Luke 6: 6 - 11

1. Keeping the Sabbath was a key identifier of the Jewish faith. My former pastor, Dan Colborne once said in a sermon that the first thing that God gave the Jewish people when they were set free from their slavery in Egypt was a day off! Giving God the last day of the week was an act of faith – that God had provided enough for their needs and would continue to provide. It was a gift from God to his people that they could truly rest in Him.

*“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy (set apart). Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or daughter, your male or female servants, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”* Exodus 20: 8 - 10

The commandment is clear enough, but what does “labour” actually entail? Is it work if I walk to use the privy and then brush my teeth? These are the questions that Pharisees loved to dig into and discuss and eventually came up 32 laws to define what counts as work. Though this might have been helpful, it ultimately missed the understanding of Sabbath as a gift to the people and became a legalized Judaic custom.

*In what ways is the Sabbath a gift to you? What blessings do you receive when you observe a day of rest that is honoring to God?*

2. Jesus and his disciples did not always have easy access to food as they traveled. They relied on the Leviticus 23:22 instruction that farmers were to leave some grain in the fields for the poor and the widows. We see this principle in the story of Ruth going to glean in the fields of Boaz. On this particular day, the disciples are hungry and so they stop in a field to glean a bit of grain to relieve their hunger pains. The Pharisees do not just “happen” to be there – they have been following along to catch Jesus doing something to discredit his reputation and they now seize on their Sabbath laws. A “good” Jew would not behave in this way and therefore Jesus is not good, in spite of all the good teaching and healings they

have witnessed. It is no wonder that the term, Pharisee has become synonymous with self-righteous, hypocritical behavior. Sadly, Christians today are often labeled in the same way by the world. *Why is this the case?*

3. *Why is it sometimes easier to view things as black or white, right or wrong? How can this get in the way of compassion?*
4. When we are confident in the spirit's leading, criticism won't have as much influence upon us. Jesus is not a bit concerned about their accusations and begins to point out some Biblical examples of exceptions to the rules. I Samuel 21 recounts the story of David fleeing from Saul and going to Ahimelech, the priest of the tabernacle because they were desperate for food. The only food available was the 12 consecrated loaves of bread, which only the priestly line of Aaron was to eat. (See Leviticus 24: 5 – 9) The rules were broken for the needs of David and his men. In the second illustration Jesus points out that priests must regularly work on the Sabbath as they prepare the offerings and sacrifices in the temple – kind of like a preacher has to work on Sundays! Jesus is our High Priest and Jesus is also the temple – the very presence of God among us. This is why He, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. As the Pharisees understood what Jesus was claiming in that statement, it was pure blasphemy to their ears!
5. The story continues from the fields to the synagogue – a good place to be on the Sabbath. {NOTE: There are some textual differences in the gospel accounts. Matthew and Mark give the sense that this is the same Sabbath day, where Luke indicates that it is two separate occasions. Luke sites that the first incident in the field occurred on *the second first Sabbath*, which would indicate that this was the Sabbath following the Passover feast. The Jews were to count off seven Saturdays after Passover and then return to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Some assume that Jesus and his disciples were thus traveling back from Jerusalem to Galilee, several days journey by foot, which is why they were hungry and also why the healing likely took place on a different Sabbath}. In Matthew, the Pharisees ask Jesus first if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath and Jesus turns their question back to them with, *is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath*. It is not clear if the Pharisees set up the man with the withered hand as bait, or he happened to be there. *Does it make a difference in why the man received this grace of healing? How did the man participate in his own healing?*
6. *Why had the Pharisees lost their compassion? Are there situations where we have lost our compassion in favour of the rules? Is it possible to err on the side of compassion?*
7. In Mark's account, we see the emotional response of Jesus to their hardness of hearts. As I mentioned in the introduction, it seems that a physical healing is easier for Jesus to accomplish than a healing of the heart. The Pharisees are bent on destroying Jesus and resist his transformational power for fear of losing their own power and comfortableness with the way it has always been. *In what ways does the church today seem to resist to being transformed by Christ? What are we afraid of losing if God wanted us to "be church" in a totally different way that brought more healing to our world?*

## Lesson 9: From Scarcity to Abundance – Water to Wine

It is interesting to note which miracle by Jesus is first recorded in each of the four gospel accounts. Mark and Luke begin showing the power that Jesus has over the demonic. They want it to be clear that from the very beginning of his ministry Jesus has an authority immediately recognized in his teachings and in his actions. There is nothing to fear that Jesus cannot overcome, including the demonic. In the book of Matthew, Jesus establishes his authority through his teaching (Sermon on the Mount) and then he touches a leper as his first miracle of healing, perhaps to signify that no person will be beyond the loving touch of Jesus. The book of John begins with what is referred to as the first of seven *signs* in John revealing Jesus as the Messiah. It is the account of Jesus turning water into wine. This is not a physical healing as we have been studying, but a miracle with a message to us all. The book of John does not often refer to the theme of grace, and yet we see the fulfillment of verse 1:16 over and over in the signs and wonders Jesus performs. *“From his fullness we have received grace upon grace”*. It is this theme of abundance that we will now explore.

### Read John 2: 1 – 11

There is some disagreement as to the actual location of Cana as it is only mentioned in the book of John and was likely a small town with little significance to be mentioned in other historical documents. There are a few ideas of towns close to Nazareth with similar names such as Khirbet Kana or Ain Qana as possible candidates but we can gather that it was small and poor, and so the wedding was not likely a princely affair. Weddings lasted 7 days and it was very important to have enough food and drink to last for the entire time. It would be socially inexcusable to run out.

1. This first miracle is as much about Mary as it is about Jesus. Mary is never mentioned by name in the book of John but as “the mother of Jesus”. She appears in this gospel only here at the beginning of his ministry and then again at the foot of the cross. *What can we discern about the relationship between Jesus and his mother from this information?*
2. *What does it reveal about Mary and her connection to the bridal party that she is concerned that the wine has run out?*
3. *Why would she ask Jesus to intervene? Was it fair of her to bring the problem to Jesus and what did she think he could do about it?*
4. *How do you interpret the initial response of Jesus to her request?*
5. “Do whatever he tells you.” This statement reveals Mary’s faith in her son and also her great understanding of their relationship. *What does it say to you?*
6. *In what way is Mary responsible for inaugurating the mission of Jesus? Why did she feel he was ready? Is the presence of some “disciples” significant as to the readiness of Jesus?*

7. It is very symbolic that Jesus used the water jugs that were set aside for ritual cleansing. In one sense, these jugs contain the legalisms of their Jewish faith with their rules for hand washing before and after eating. The Jewish person would lift their hands and a cup of clean water would be poured over them three times as they recited *“Blessed are you, Hashem our God King of the universe Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us concerning the elevation of hands.”*<sup>4</sup> *Netilat yadayim*, the term for washing is transliterated “raising the hands”. The more we understand germs and the need for good hygiene, many of their cleansing rituals make perfect sense and we see how God protected his chosen people by giving them practices before medical understanding. So though the rituals were important, they could represent the more serious side of Jewish life. Jesus takes these six jugs for ritual washing and fills them now with “the wine of gladness”. *From this symbolism, what kind of kingdom would Jesus be ushering in?*
8. If John calls this a “sign” then what is the sign pointing to? Whenever Jesus reveals something about his divinity, he also reveals something about his humanity. *What can we glean about the character of Jesus from this even both of his divinity and humanity?*
9. The key element of this miracle is the abundance of grace revealed. Having wine for a wedding is not a life or death situation, but it is a social obligation and put the family in an awkward place. Jesus responds out of the prompting of his mother lavishly and provides 120 – 150 gallons of wine – more than enough to meet the needs! *In what ways have you experienced God’s extravagance in life? What does the “abundance of grace” taste like?*
10. There is a clear theme of knowledge in the book of John. “Who knows what” often frames the stories. Jesus is careful not to make a spectacle out of his power for he wants to draw followers to him for the right reasons. We can only speculate how widespread the news traveled as to where the wine came from, but the host would not want it to be known that he had run out. Perhaps the reason only John records this miracle is that Mary told him after the resurrection when she went to live with him. We are drawn to this story because of it has the feeling of frivolity and fun. It is certainly the punch line of many jokes – the ability to turn water into wine. *But what is the quieter truth revealed? What does the story mean for you?*

There is an intimacy expressed between Jesus and his mother that we don’t often glimpse in the gospel narratives. In this gospel, Mary is the bookends of the ministry of Jesus as she senses the timing of its beginning with her request and weeps at the foot of the cross three years later. She is always his mother to the very end (John 19: 26 – 28) and Jesus is her beloved son. We can talk about Jesus as the miracle worker, as the new wine replacing the rules and rituals with relationship in the kingdom of God. We experience the lavishness of his grace with the abundance of provision but most poignantly, we see a man and his mother honoring one another.

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual\\_washing\\_in\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual_washing_in_Judaism)

## Lesson 10: Maybe the Blind can lead the Blind!

There are several healings of those with blindness in the four gospels. It was a sign of the coming Messiah that he would be able to bring sight to the blind as we see in Psalm 146:8 and Isaiah 35:5. Of course, there is also spiritual blindness in need of healing, and this metaphor is intertwined with the physical healings that Jesus performs. It is always important to notice who sees what and who does not see in these healing accounts. This week we will study three healings in the first three Gospels and next week we will look at the longer story in John of the man blind from birth.

### READ Matthew 9: 27 – 34

1. *How did the blind men address Jesus? Why would they choose this title?*
2. The book of Matthew was aimed primarily at a Jewish audience and so this title would emphasize that Jesus was the promised Messiah. This is the first time Jesus is addressed in this way. *What is the spiritual significance of the blind men using this title?*
3. Not only do these blind men who have not “seen” any of the 17 previously recorded miracles in Matthew recognize Jesus as the true Messiah, they also recognize that God is a merciful God from whom healing may come, for what do they ask of Jesus? *Why are they in need of mercy?*
4. The account is a bit curious, as Jesus seems to keep walking to the house in which he is staying and the blind men follow him there. Speculate why Jesus did not immediately respond to their request.
5. The tenacious blind men follow with hope. *What does Jesus ask the blind men? What is “this”?*
6. Jesus then touches their eyes. *Why is this touch important?*
7. “According to your faith, let it be done to you.” *What faith did the blind men have in Jesus? Why were they so convinced that Jesus could heal them?*
8. In this instance, their faith is not so much required for healing, but is the evidence that they really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They called him by the correct title before any other person has acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah. Evidence of the Messiah was that he could bring sight to the blind – this was a promise that only the Messiah could fulfill. This is why the word “healing” isn’t used, because the faith rested in the recognition of the identity of Jesus. **These two blind men see what no one else has seen.** Physical handicaps are obviously no barrier to spiritual insight. The blind can lead the “blind”!
9. The next healing is important in this sequence of events, for there were three signs of healing that the true Messiah would perform. He would heal one blind from birth; he would raise a person from the dead and he would cast out a demon from one who was mute. The Jewish leaders could cast out demons but the demon had to state its name in

order to be cast out. A mute person could not speak the name of the demon; therefore it could not be removed. Matthew is making it very clear by placing these three stories together - the raising of Jairus's daughter, the healing of the blind men and the exorcism of the mute demoniac - that Jesus has fulfilled the signs of the true Messiah.

### **Read Mark 8: 22 – 26**

10. Once again we have a curious incident. Friends bring a blind man to Jesus for healing but Jesus does not respond immediately but takes the blind man by the hand and leads him out of the village of Bethsaida (House of Fishing). This was a small fishing village outside of Capernaum and the hometown of Phillip, Andrew, Peter and possibly James and John. We see in Luke 10:13 (read) that even though Jesus was doing many miraculous things in these areas, including the feeding of the 5000, people were not coming to faith. *Could this have anything to do with Jesus leading the blind man out of town?*

11. The second curious event is Jesus using spittle upon the man's eyes. *Any thoughts as to why this might be?*

*From ancient times in Judaism, there was a tradition that the saliva of the first-born son of a father had healing properties. Writes A. Cohen, "For eye-trouble spittle was commonly used, but we are told there is a tradition that the spittle of the first-born son of a father has healing powers..." (Everyman's Talmud, p. 253). The Talmudic reference is B.B. 126b, for those who wish to check it for themselves.*

12. If the above quote is accurate, then Mark could be affirming Jesus as the first-born Son of God – or it could simply be that using saliva on the eyes did have healing properties. *What might be a reason the man not receive immediate clear sight?*

13. One commentator draws a spiritual analogy that the people of Bethsaida were like rootless trees in their faith – they could not recognize the Messiah living right among them working miracles. Jesus tells the healed man not to return to that faithless community but to figuratively move on and not be like them. Another commentator takes the medical view that eyes that are not used to seeing have to be retrained to interpret what the eye sees, so this is an accurate description of healing. *Which explanation has meaning for you?*

### **Read Luke 18: 35 – 43 and Mark 10: 46 – 52**

14. In Mark, we are given the man's name. He is the son (bar) of Timaeus. The setting is Jericho – one of the oldest inhabited city in the world "The city of Palm trees", dating back 10,000 years. This is also the place where Zacchaeus encounters Jesus.

15. Notice the reaction of the crowd. *How does it change through the story?*

16. "What do you want me to do for you? If Jesus asked you that question, what would you say? Spend a moment in quiet reflection and prayer as you answer His question to you.

## Lesson 11: Blind so that God's works might be revealed

Jesus came down from Galilee into Jerusalem during the festivals. He does some teaching in the temple that impresses some and upsets others. We see a pattern of Jesus spending time in prayer at night on the Mount of Olives (east of the city walls and the temple) and then returning to the temple to teach during the day. As Jesus gives testimony to the calling upon his life, the Pharisees question his legitimacy. In John 8: 13 they challenge Jesus "You are testifying on your own behalf: your testimony is not valid". Jesus responds that his testimony is enough and that of the Father. It is this context that we come to our passage in chapter 9 where Jesus heals a man blind from birth – the ultimate witness or testimony to his identity as the true Messiah. The pool of Siloam was built during the time of Hezekiah by tunneling through solid rock to the Gihon Spring, ensuring that Jerusalem had a water source if under siege. They cut from both ends and met in the middle – an engineering feat for the ancients. Some believe that the pool was used as a Mikva (ritual bath) but if so, it was the largest one ever discovered. It could also have been a swimming pool. It would make sense that Jesus asked the blind man to go to a Mikva for ritual cleansing.

READ: John 9: 1 – 12

1. Once again the Pharisees are viewing the world through their own lens of understanding, believing that bad things don't "just happen" – there has to be someone to blame. Since this man was born blind, it is hard to imagine what sin he could have committed before birth. We do, however, have a greater understanding of how the behavior of the mother and even father can affect the child in the womb such as smoking, alcohol use and drug abuse. We also know that illness during pregnancy can greatly affect the unborn through no fault of the mother. On a more positive note, some try to play certain music to the fetus to prime their musical tastes and influence brain development. It would be wrong to flatly say that sin has no effect on our health and well-being, either our own or those around us. In this case however, Jesus is firm that there often is no link between sin and suffering. Life happens and in this case, this man was born without sight. *How do you personally wrestle with the question of suffering and the "why" question?*
2. *Was this man born blind just so he would be in the right place and the right time for Jesus to perform a miracle of healing? How do you interpret the response of Jesus, "He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him"?*
3. Consider the next verses: "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day: night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Discuss the following quote from the IVP New Testament Commentary<sup>5</sup> and the five types of suffering suggested here.

*Jesus' statement touches on the theme of suffering. There is a sense in which every aspect of our lives, including our own suffering, is an occasion for the manifestation of God's glory and his purposes. Scripture describes four types of suffering viewed in*

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/John/Jesus-Light-World-Opens-Eyes>

*terms of causes or purposes (cf. John Cassian Conferences 6.11): first, suffering as a proving or testing of our faith (Gen 22; Deut 8:2; Job); second, suffering meant for improvement, for our edification (Heb 12:5-8); third, suffering as punishment for sin (Deut 32:15-25; Jer 30:15; Jn 5:14); and fourth, suffering that shows forth God's glory, as here in our story and later in the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:4). To these should be added a fifth form of suffering, that which comes from bearing witness to Christ, illustrated by what happens to this former blind man in being cast out of the synagogue.*

4. *What role does struggle play in our relationship with God? If the world were without any sorrow, would we be as dependent upon God?*
5. The man does not ask to be healed and it is in fact the Pharisees that take note of him in order to ask Jesus this theological question. Jesus chooses to heal him, but he includes an act to which the man must respond. *What is that act?*
6. Jesus seems to heal each person in a unique way, from simply touching the eyes, to using his spittle, to making a mudpack. By sending the blind man away to wash the mud from his eyes, the man never actually gets to see who healed him. He discovers that he can see but the healer is gone. *Why do you think Jesus sent him off on his own for this healing?*

READ John 4: 13 - 40

7. It is hard not to shake our heads at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. A man who was born blind has been healed! He can now see and yet the topic now centers on the fact that Jesus made mud and therefore worked on the Sabbath! In their minds, a Sabbath-breaker could not possibly do the work of God. *What might be some ways that we find it difficult to believe that God might use certain people? One example that came to my mind is the smooth TV Evangelist and I wonder if God could really use them to touch lives or certain authors that I strongly disagree with. Do we box God into who we think can be a blessing?*
8. The healed man considers that Jesus could be a prophet. He is not declaring him the Messiah at this point but does recognize he is of God. The parents have a different response. The text says that they were afraid of the Jews. *Putting yourself in their shoes, what might have been other possible responses?*
9. Consider how this man moves from not just physical sight, but spiritual insight. *What is the thinking process that moves him from seeing Jesus as a prophet to believing that he is the Messiah? What was he willing to see that the Pharisees could not see?*
10. *What does Jesus condemn in the Pharisees? What is the tragedy about their blindness? What are the ways that we in the church, though we should know the truth, have areas of blindness because God isn't working the way we have imagined he should?*

Pray that God would reveal to each one of us the areas where we might be blind to God's work.

## Lesson 12: Miracles Unique to Luke

**Study Luke 5: 1 – 11** by reading the passage three times, each time asking a different question.

1. First Reading: What word or phrase catches your attention as you read it. Share that with one another but do not expand upon it.
2. Second Reading: What is it about that word or phrase that reveals something about Jesus, something about the disciples or something about yourself?
3. Third Reading: What is the challenge, invitation or lesson that you would take away.
4. Who most benefited from this miracle and what was the purpose behind it?

**READ: Luke 7: 11 – 17**

1. Discuss the place of a widow in society. *What was her means of support?*
2. “A large crowd from the town was with her” – *what does this tell us about the character of the woman?*
3. Jesus’ heart went out to her – why? *Why did he care about this particular widow, when there were many widows around?*
4. *What did it cost Jesus to raise her son? What happened because he touched the coffin? (think of the laws regarding clean and unclean)*
5. *What has/could it cost you to meet the need of another?*
6. *What confidence does this healing offer us as God’s beloved? How will he meet our needs? Is this a guarantee?*

**READ: Luke 13: 10 - 13**

1. Luke seems to take particular note of women in his Gospel. Once again he seems to care for those that society often ignored. *In Jesus’ day would the ailment of this woman be worth breaking the Sabbath? How is this a double affront to the Pharisees?*
2. *What risk did Jesus take to minister to her?*
3. Visualize this woman as bent over – head down – going through life never looking anyone in the eye. Now see Jesus lifting her straight and looking directly into her eyes. *What would that experience do to her self-esteem?*

4. Consider what issues affect a woman's self esteem. *What kinds of attitudes keep women hanging their head – afraid to look others in the eye? Do you think it is true that women generally have low self-esteem? Is this improving in today's society?*
5. *How has society played a part in keeping women in bondage and crippled for years?*
6. *Can you think of any way that the love of God has helped you with your sense of dignity and worth that you would be willing to share?*

**READ: Luke 14: 1 – 6**

(Dropsy is also known as Edema: Edema is the medical term for swelling. It is a general response of the body to injury or inflammation. Edema can be isolated to a small area or affect the entire body. Medications, infections, pregnancy, and many medical problems can cause edema. Edema results whenever small blood vessels become "leaky" and release fluid into nearby tissues. The extra fluid accumulates, causing the tissue to swell. Wikipedia!)

It was often customary to invite visiting Rabbis for a meal where the synagogue leaders would debate and ask scriptural/theological questions of each other. We know from Luke 7:36 that Jesus had been invited to Simon's home for a meal yet was not shown any of the common courtesies that a host should offer a guest. He was not greeted with the traditional kiss on both cheeks, nor were his feet washed. The invitation was not heart-felt, but perfunctory in order to prove that Jesus was not a true Rabbi, let alone the expected Messiah. Here as well, we have the sense that Jesus was extended the invitation but not shown respect. Verse 7 reveals that they took the best seats and left Jesus the lowest place at the table. Jesus is willing to place himself in these situations that lack dignity for an opportunity to show the Pharisees their wrong thinking. It is also good to remember that beggars were allowed into the courtyard area to clean up whatever food was left after the meal as there was no method of refrigeration so the food would just be wasted. This may be why the man with dropsy is present – to glean the leftovers from the meal.

1. *Skimming the rest of chapter 14 – what are the lessons Jesus is here to teach to the Pharisees?*
2. *What do we need to learn from these lessons?*

Luke 17 – the healing of the Ten Lepers is also unique to Luke but we have already studied that passage together. The last unique miracle is found in Luke 22: 50 – 51. Jesus heals the ear of the soldier's ear that Peter cuts off with his sword. What does this act of healing reveal about Jesus and his character, especially under these circumstances of being arrested?

### Lesson 13: Miracle Unique to John – the Raising of Lazarus.

For such an amazing miracle as raising one from the dead, it is peculiar that this miracle is only mentioned in this gospel of John. In fact, Lazarus does not appear in any of the other gospels, despite the fact that he along with his sisters Mary and Martha were well loved by Jesus. Luke does mention the visit of Jesus to the home of Martha and her sister but no word of having a brother. Why was this miracle not central to the other gospels as well, when it is such a profound event in the ministry of Jesus? Jesus brought others back to life, as we have already studied, but this raising of a man dead for over four days steps up the game another notch!

One explanation for the silence in the other gospels is that their recorded events of Jesus and his ministry center on the region of Galilee and Capernaum where Jesus did spend the bulk of his three-year ministry. The accounts in the Gospel of John center more on the events around Jerusalem and Bethany. Another explanation may be that since the Synoptic Gospels were written much earlier than John's Gospel, the three could still have been living at the time with threat of persecution as Bethany was very near Jerusalem so better to leave their names anonymous. We read in John 12:10 that the priests intended to put Lazarus to death so there may have been a continual threat. When the Gospel of John was recorded, they would have been closer to the end of their lives or already deceased.

There are other interesting details to note about the three siblings: The fact that the home in Luke belonged to Martha and not the male sibling meant that Lazarus was the youngest in the family and not yet considered a man of age. By the time of his illness and death, he was of legal age to be called a man. His young age may be why Lazarus is not named as a disciple or mentioned in the first three, whereas after his bodily resurrection, Lazarus became a fervent disciple and spoke into the events recorded in John. In fact some believe that "the beloved disciple" mentioned in the book of John is actually Lazarus for in verse 3 of chapter 11 he is called "the one whom you love" and again in verse 36 as Jesus wept, the crowd responded, "See how he loved him". For the first time in the Gospel of John 13: 23, we have a reference to "One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him" which is a similar setting to John 12: 2 where Lazarus was "one of those reclining at the table with him". In John 21: 20 – 23, Peter asks about "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and the rumors that this disciple would not die, indicating perhaps that because Lazarus had already been raised from the tomb once, that he would not die again.

Why all this speculation? It may not be at all significant to the story, but for me, I get the sense that this young Lazarus was like a younger brother to Jesus and that is why the love for this particular person is singled out. If you recall, the real half brothers of Jesus were quite skeptical of their elder brother's itinerant preaching and even somewhat embarrassed by him. It is not until after the resurrection of Jesus that we know of one brother, James becoming a leader in the church of Jerusalem. The acceptance of Martha, Mary and Lazarus into their home was very meaningful to Jesus and he deeply loves them for it. When tragedy strikes, it strikes the very ones Jesus is closest to, and he weeps.

## Now read John 11: 1 – 44

The toughest questions we bring to this text center on God's timing and God's purpose. Most of us have experienced great tragedy where we struggle with the "why" of it all. Why did my dad get cancer and die at the age of 60? Why was there no miraculous healing? To what greater purpose did his death serve? Why did my friend's daughter drop dead alone with no identifiable cause at the age of 25? You have your own stories and questions arising from this text. *Share a few of them with one another.*

1. "'Absence, absence' cries the heart" – I read this quote many years ago with no recollection of its source, but the words stayed with me as ringing true. There are times in our lives when we simply feel the absence of God. Martha and Mary felt the absence of Jesus during the toughest time in their life. They sent word to Jesus but he did not come right away. In their minds, he showed up too late. *How do you deal with those experiences where God feels absent? How does it affect your faith in God's love and care for you?*
2. When we feel hopeless and in desperate need, we trust that God has placed us front and center in his thoughts and actions. Mary and Martha knew of the love that Jesus had for them and expected him to drop everything and run to their need. The disciples were certainly not keen to go back to where their lives were in danger. *Would you consider this a reasonable request and from the text, what are some events presently going on in Jesus' life that could delay his coming?*
3. When Jesus finally did come, Martha is first to meet Jesus, which is not surprising from the image we have of her bustling personality. She is beside herself with grief; in one sense angry with Jesus and another hoping he'll do something. *What did she mean by the words, "But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." What was she hoping for, particularly in light of her response to the request of Jesus to remove the stone?*
4. Anger toward God when we are grieving a loss is a normal and even invited by God as we see in the Psalms and Lamentations. Love is safe and in our own relationship it can be helpful to allow others to express their anger freely without offering any platitudes in response. When Mary falls at Jesus feet weeping with the same words of Martha but in a totally different tone, Jesus simply weeps with her. *What do you find difficult when you endeavor to come along side someone who has experienced great loss and sadness? What have you personally found most helpful or comforting?*
5. One of the most difficult verses to unpack is verse 40, "Did I not say that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" Once again we ask the question of what role faith has in God working miracles amongst us. *Did Martha really believe that Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead? Whether she did or not, it did not seem to affect the outcome. In our own stories, it is not believing in the outcome of our prayers, but believing in the One to whom we pray. The two sisters trusted in Jesus and in his presence with them. That was the faith that God was able to use to bring Him glory. What faith do you bring to your prayers?*

## The Greatest Miracle of All – The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ

What does it take to believe in a miracle? Do you need to see it with your own eyes? Does the one who tells you of the miracle influence your ability to believe? Do you “consider the source?” What did it take for the disciples to believe that Jesus was alive after they had witnessed his death and his burial? What does it take for us to believe this outlandish story today?

READ: Luke 24: 1 – 12 and John 20: 1 – 18

Lee Strobel is a well-known apologist for Christianity who looks for proofs that the Christian story is true. Here are five key points that he makes regarding the resurrection of Jesus:

- 1. Was Jesus really executed?** In Strobel’s opinion, the evidence is so strong that even atheist historian Gerd Lüdemann said his death by crucifixion was “indisputable.”
- 2. The tomb was empty:** Scholar William Lane Craig points out that Christians and non-Christians alike knew its location. So if it hadn’t been empty, it would have been impossible for a movement founded on the resurrection to have exploded into existence in the same city where Jesus had been publicly executed just a few weeks before. Also, since there was some concern that the disciples might try to pull such a trick and steal the body, they would have been on the watch for such an event.
- 3. Post-mortem Appearances:** I Corinthians 15: 3 – 8 states that Jesus appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the 12 and then he appeared to more than 500 at one time, most of whom are still alive . . . to James and then to Paul himself. This letter is dated about 20 years after the resurrection and would be considered a primary source or first-hand account.
- 4. Conversion of Saul of Tarsus:** Paul had everything to lose and nothing to gain by converting to Christianity. As a prominent leader in Judaism, nothing really explains his radical conversion to the “enemy” apart from a personal encounter with the Risen Jesus.
- 5. The Boldness of the Disciples:** There was a radical change of personalities – from those who fled when Jesus was arrested, kept their distance during the crucifixion, and hid in the upper room as he was laid in a tomb to those boldly proclaiming a risen Christ to the fate of their own spearing and crucifixions. Would people give their entire lives over to a hoax and lie?
- 6. The Explosion of Christianity:** This could be a strong argument or a weak one, as many movements have expanded, even though they are false. But it is notable that it expanded during times of persecution and with no force, whereas Islam expanded through perpetrating violence.

*Which one of the above arguments would be most objectively be convincing to you?*

Now look at the Scripture texts once more and see what convinced the women and the disciples. Look at each character individually and discuss what brought each individual to belief.

### **Luke 24: 1 – 12**

- Women seeing empty tomb are “perplexed”; “terrified”, then they “remembered his words”. *What brought these women to belief?*
- The women tell the disciples of the story but it is considered “leros” – trash, nonsense, useless. (Only time this word is used in Scripture)
- Peter – runs to the tomb and looks in, then went “home” (where is home?) amazed.

The text ends here with amazement, which is a suitable emotion for Easter. It is a crazy, nonsensical story in many ways. How can we make sense of it? Wonder and amazement is as much a faith statement as many of us may be able to muster for it takes us closer to belief than doubt! *What moves Peter from amazement to belief?*

### **John 20: 1 - 18**

- Mary Magdalene seeing empty tomb believes the body has been taken.
- Peter and beloved disciple run and see the empty tomb – go inside to inspect it. If the body was taken, why would it be unwrapped?
- The beloved disciple “saw and believed” – believed what?
- They returned “to their own homes” (separately?).
- Mary stays at the tomb weeping. Did the disciple who “believed” tell her what he believed or just left her there? She looks into the tomb and encounters angels yet still believes the body has been taken.
- She sees Jesus but thinks he is the gardener until he speaks her name.
- Mary calls him “Rabbounni!” (my Rabbi or my teacher – emphatic form denoting *the* head teacher or leader in Aramaic Galilean pronunciation) In doing so, she is also proclaiming herself as his disciple.
- Jesus does not tell her to announce his resurrection, but rather to announce his ascension. *Why? Is this significant?*
- Mary declares to the disciples “I have seen the Lord”! It is a first- person declaration as opposed to a third person claim, “He is Risen”. *How does this signify belief?*

Belief that is dependent on empirical evidence will only take us so far. True, unshakable faith is most often grounded in a personal encounter with the risen Lord. Experience will trump data or statistics any time. Later in the John 20, the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Thomas is doubtful until he too sees Jesus for himself. *How have you encountered the risen Lord? What does it mean to you personally that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to God? How is this the foundation of your Christian faith? Have each person share.*

Death continues to rob us of our loved ones and of life, and yet we sing that death has been defeated. *What did Jesus accomplish on the cross that matters most to you?*

One interesting image that John gives us is Mary’s recognition of Jesus as the gardener. In many ways, her statement rings with truth, for the image brings us back to the Garden of Eden - where sin began, it has now been defeated. The garden of Gethsemane reversed “God’s will denied” in Eden to “God’s will honored and fulfilled”. The garden of the tomb is now the garden of life. This is the miracle of all miracles through which we all have been healed. May our faith continue to grow as we daily experience the presence of our Risen Lord!

### 37 Miracles of Jesus

#	Miracle	<a href="#">Matthew</a>	<a href="#">Mark</a>	<a href="#">Luke</a>	<a href="#">John</a>
1	Jesus Turns Water into Wine				2:1-11
2	Jesus Heals an Official's Son				4:43-54
3	Jesus Drives Out an Evil Spirit		1:21-27	4:31-36	
4	Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-Law	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
5	Jesus Heals Many Sick at Evening	8:16-17	1:32-34	4:40-41	
6	First Miraculous Catch of Fish			5:1-11	
7	Jesus Cleanses a Man With Leprosy	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-14	
8	Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant	8:5-13		7:1-10	
9	Jesus Heals a Paralytic	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
10	Jesus Heals a Man's Withered Hand	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
11	Jesus Raises a Widow's Son in Nain			7:11-17	
12	Jesus Calms a Storm	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
13	Jesus Casts Demons into a Herd of Pigs	8:28-33	5:1-20	8:26-39	
14	Jesus Heals a Woman in the Crowd	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:42-48	
15	Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter to Life	9:18, 23-26	5:21-24, 35-43	8:40-42, 49-56	
16	Jesus Heals Two Blind Men	9:27-31			
17	Jesus Heals a Man Unable to Speak	9:32-34			
18	Jesus Heals an Invalid at Bethesda				5:1-15
19	Jesus Feeds 5,000	14:13-21	6:30-44	9:10-17	6:1-15
20	Jesus Walks on Water	14:22-33	6:45-52		6:16-21
21	Jesus Heals Many Sick in Gennesaret	14:34-36	6:53-56		
22	Jesus Heals a Gentile Woman's Demon-Possessed Daughter	15:21-28	7:24-30		
23	Jesus Heals a Deaf and Dumb Man		7:31-37		
24	Jesus Feeds 4,000	15:32-39	8:1-13		
25	Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida		8:22-26		
26	Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind				9:1-12
27	Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon	17:14-20	9:14-29	9:37-43	
28	Miraculous Temple Tax in a Fish's Mouth	17:24-27			
29	Jesus Heals a Blind, Mute Demoniac	12:22-23		11:14-23	
30	Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman			13:10-17	
31	Jesus Heals a Man With Dropsy on the Sabbath			14:1-6	
32	Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers			17:11-19	
33	Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead				11:1-45
34	Jesus Restores Sight to Bartimaeus	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
35	Jesus Withers the Fig Tree	21:18-22	11:12-14		
36	Jesus Heals a Servant's Severed Ear			22:50-51	
37	Second Miraculous Catch of Fish				21:4-11