

How many of you have ever known someone who's deaf? Please raise your hand. Me, too. How many of you would love to be able to touch a deaf person's ears and miraculously enable that person hear? Wouldn't that be awesome?

How many of you have ever known someone with cancer? Have you ever known someone with depression, or an addiction, or severe anxiety? Raise your hand. And raise your hand if you've ever known a person with heart disease, or lung problems, or cholesterol issues, or high blood pressure? If you had the power to just touch those people with your hands and miraculously cure them, would you do it?

Some of you may be doctors, nurses, therapists, and medical personnel. And we love you for the healing work you do. But none of us have the miracle power to heal the sick, to cure the ill, just by speaking a word or laying on our hands.

And, yet, Jesus did. St. Mark, in his Gospel, tells many stories of Jesus traveling around from town to town, healing person after person. And these healing miracles were not just exhibitions of his godly power. The Lord was also demonstrating God's ultimate will for his people. By curing the ill and restoring the lame, Jesus was offering vivid, unmistakable proof that God wants his people to be whole and healthy. Sin has brought all sorts of pains and problems into the perfect world God created; but God ultimately wants his people to be free from all afflictions, adversities, and addictions. God desires for all his people to be able to see, to hear, to speak, to walk, to be healthy in every way.

When the Son of God walked this earth, Jesus brought God's healing to hurting, suffering, sick, chronically ill children of God. He laid his hands on them. He used divine power to restore and cure them.

It was a deaf man, Mark tells us in chapter 7, a man who could barely speak. Jesus was on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, in a non-Jewish region called the Decapolis. The people there begged him to help this man. Jesus took him aside, touched his ears, and touched his tongue. Then he said, "Ephphatha," that is, "be opened." And, suddenly, this man could hear and speak. The crowd rejoiced. They may not have fully understood who Jesus was, or accepted him as Lord and Savior; but, for the day, they celebrated Jesus' greatness and power.

How do you react to Jesus? What's your response to this story? Mark, in his Gospel, is giving us a clear picture of Jesus, the Christ. These stories of healing testify to us, and they challenge us.

Have you learned and accepted that Jesus, the healer, is truly God? Do you believe that Christ Jesus still has power to heal? And what kind of relationship do you have with him right now, and especially in those times when you or your loved ones are sick and healing doesn't seem to come?

Let me share three important, foundational truths about Jesus, drawn from these Gospel miracles of healing. I pray these three truths will help you take a little step forward in your relationship with Christ today.

Here's #1: ***Jesus is Savior of all, with divine power over all.*** God sent his Son to live on this earth as one of us, and Jesus would give his life on the cross to pay for the sins of all humans. And, yes, Jesus lived among and ministered to the chosen people, the Jews. But Jesus crossed over the boundaries and the barriers that separate people. He didn't

discriminate. He reached across the borders, bringing God's concern and compassion to those who weren't accepted by his own people. By healing the deaf man in the Decapolis and in other Gentile regions, Jesus demonstrated that God is concerned for the well-being of all people, all nations, all ethnicities, and all skin colors. And, in the end, Jesus gave his life to make that happen.

I ask you today, do you accept that truth?

Here's another, #2: ***Jesus' mission is to heal our ills of body and soul.*** This one can be hard to swallow, once we close our Bibles and look around at the real world we live in. One Gospel story after another shows us Jesus taking time to bring healing to one person after another. He's moved with compassion. He's compelled by the needs of others. Jesus truly cares about the hurting and the suffering.

But, no, Jesus doesn't cure every sickness in our day and age, does he? No, he doesn't fix all our bodily aches and pains, let alone our heartaches and emotional pains. The hospitals are full of sick people, and we've all lost and buried loved ones. We all have spiritual sickness, too. Every human suffers the consequences of sin, and we can't free ourselves.

This is why Jesus came, though. For suffering, hurting sinners, like us. His mission? To heal all our ills of body, and of soul. He died on the cross to win our forgiveness, and to make us right with God eternally. But his healing miracles testify to Christ's deep desire for health, wholeness, and restoration for all of us – not just spiritually, but physically, too. It may not come for you and me in this life. Sometimes it does. Jesus still does miracles of healing. Any of our medical personnel who are here will tell you that. But, ultimately, in heaven, in the life to come, there will be perfect healing, complete wellness, and no more sickness.

That's Jesus' mission, to heal our ills of body and soul. Do you accept that truth?

Here's one more, #3: ***Jesus calls you to an ongoing relationship of trust and reliance.*** When Jesus went around healing people, there was a buzz around him. Everybody was excited, and awe-struck. But Jesus knew that these short-term reactions to his miracles weren't enough. What people back then really needed – and what you and I really need – is to have a long-term, lasting, deep-rooted relationship with Christ.

Mark doesn't tell us what happened with that deaf man, whether he went on to develop a faith relationship with Jesus. But I want to challenge you today to stop and assess the health of your relationship with Jesus. Do you really believe he is God? Do you truly accept him as your God? Are you trusting him fully as your God, or only partially? Are you relying on Jesus only for this church/religion/spiritual part of your life? Or do you actually rely on Jesus, submit to his will, obey his commands, build your life on his promises, in all the everyday parts of your life?

Jesus calls you to an ongoing relationship of trust and reliance. Do you accept that truth?

I often close my sermons with a prayer. Today I invite you to pray silently, in acceptance, to Jesus: your Savior, your Healer, the one who calls you to trust and rely on him. Let's pray.