

**THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL HEALER"**  
**(Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4:31-37; Mark 1:29-34a;**  
**Mark 1:35-38, Luke 4:42b-44; Luke 5:12-16)**

8.23.20

## INTRODUCTION

Everybody know what a "food chain" is? Very simply put, a "food chain" is a sequence of food sources - from the smallest and simplest to the largest and most complex - that exists in nature and completes what some call the "circle of life." For instance, the grass on a plain in Africa may become food for an antelope, which will become food for a lion which, when it dies, will become food for a vulture, which will become food as it dies and decays for any of a number of decomposing organisms, whose body secretions will feed the soil that will make the grass grow - and the process starts all over again.

At the top of any of nature's many food chains is the so-called "apex predator." An apex predator is defined as "a predator without natural enemies to threaten them." Those include the big guys with which many of us are familiar - species such as lions, crocodiles, and grizzly bears. Actually, we used to think great white sharks would have had a spot in this group, but further studies showed that they are in fact the prey of killer whales.

Why this talk about food chains and apex predators? Because the Bible presents mankind as existing with, if not necessarily a food chain environment, certainly with an apex predator close at hand. These verses tell the story:

1. ***Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour - I Peter 5:8.*** Now he may use the "pleasures of sin" to do it, but Satan wants nothing less than that we be destroyed.
2. ***[O]ur struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms - Paul, Ephesians 6:12.*** In other words, no matter what is going on around us, there is a fundamentally more basic struggle going on in the spiritual world than anything we might see in the physical world.

Keep those verses in mind. They provide a useful filter as we explore our view of our Radical Rabbi today with a look at one of His most visually amazing ministries - His power to heal others. So, let's start it out with a **word of prayer**.

## TEXTS

Now obviously when it comes to things like taking a look at the healings that Jesus so graciously performed, the result could be a sermon that could last quite a while. And seeing as how some of you have to go to work tomorrow morning, probably the best way to go about this is to show a number of healings that are recorded in the gospel accounts of Christ's life. We'll try to see something a bit different in everyone we highlight. Now we're going to do this almost like summarizing chapters in one overall story, so I hope this works with everybody.

**Introduction:** Matthew 4:23-25 [Matthew 8:17 (quoting Isaiah 53:4)]

This passage will kind of give us a general overview of Jesus' activities at this time: ***Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases,***

*those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and He healed them. [This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" - Matthew 8:17 (quoting Isaiah 53:4).] Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him - Matthew 4:23-25.*

We see Jesus conducting a dual ministry - teaching the word and underscoring the authority of His word by showing His authority over "every disease and sickness among the people." And Matthew, as we have previously explained, as he is targeting a Jewish audience with his gospel, makes sure they understand the reason for thinking that Jesus is the Messiah by quoting from Isaiah 53 to make his case to his people that, among other things, Christ's literally welcoming "infirmities and diseases" to experience his healing was simply another affirmation of who Jesus truly was. And basically we see that all this coordinated activity was bringing Jesus audiences from all over that part of the world - from the south as far as Jerusalem in Judea, as far east as areas east of the Jordan River, and as far north as areas of Syria.

And why not? No matter the illness, no matter the issue, Jesus was showing the power to conquer it. At a time of virtually no healthcare or medical knowledge in the world, this must have put an amazing level of hope in people. And that was the whole idea - that there was something in this world that was far, far beyond this world, and available to anybody who asked. So now let's begin:

### **Chapter 1: Power Over Demonic Possession - Luke 4:31-37**

*Then He went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath He taught the people. They were amazed at His teaching, because His words had authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!"*

It should come as no surprise that, where God's presence is most profoundly seen, demonic activity would also be trying to be just as profound a presence. Such is the case here, as a demon-possessed man tries to interrupt God's word being taught to the people. Now the English gives us some level of how people were reacting to Christ's teaching - "they were amazed" - but the Greek tells us something more. Do you ever remember a moment when somebody told you something that literally stopped you in your tracks? That's the sense of "amaze" that is being presented here; Jesus' words are literally striking them, almost like punching them in the face, with astonishment. They have never heard God's word presented like this. It is having a tremendous impact.

And sure enough, Satan's forces go on the attack to try to disrupt this divine effort. And what a perfect disguise - simply an ordinary-looking guy coming into a synagogue on the Sabbath. Nothing unusual there, right? But in the middle of Jesus' teaching, He reveals Himself. The Bible says the demon made the man shout "at the top of his voice." This was not a subtle raising of the hand to politely make a comment; this was screaming at the top of his lungs. In fact, the Greek word used here gets partial credit for our English word "megaphone." Need I say more?

***"Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.***

Anyhow, he goes on his tirade, but curiously also identifies Jesus as exactly who He is. Yet Jesus tells him in no uncertain terms to essentially, "Shut up," and then, "Get lost!" And the demon does - showing Christ's authority over anything that Satan and his forces would try to serve up to disrupt His ministry. The man is healed, rescued from this possession. But why should Jesus silence somebody, whoever it is, who declares Him for who He is? Well, first of all, there was a huge risk that this demonic-inspired declaration would confuse the people further. I mean, they were already missing the boat on God's plan of salvation with their understanding of a coming "messiah" being all about a power - an earthly, physical power - that would destroy and get rid of the Romans. Now, did Jesus have power? Absolutely. And in the ancient pagan world, the "gods" were all about power. But was Christ's power for political purposes, or for restoring the greatness of past kingdoms? No. His greatest power would be shown in His obedient death on the cross, accomplishing the awesome purpose of offering salvation for the sins of mankind; the only enemy, the only kingdom to be destroyed would be Satan and his forces. And second, the last thing Jesus wanted in this world was for His enemy to identify Him. In a sense, that would give Satan a power over Him because it would be the devil and his demons' identification that would define Him. Jesus simply was never going to allow that to happen.

***All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power He gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!" And the news about Him spread throughout the surrounding area.***

So, this particular demon was silenced - immediately, impressing the people even more. What power, what authority, they thought, that even demon spirits listen to Him - and obey Him! What kind of word could do that? What kind of Man could do that? Just exactly what kind of Guy is this Nazarene? It caused His fame to spread even farther - and faster.

## **Chapter 2: A Personal Touch - Mark 1:29-34a [Luke 4:39a, 40b, 41]**

***As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a [high] fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, [bent over her and rebuked the fever,] took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.***

This is such a sweet, personal moment. Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever, and Jesus is told about it. So He goes to her, He bends over her and, in the Greek, "rebuked" the fever, meaning that He literally ordered the fever to leave her and, as she was healed from the fever and her strength returned, Jesus took her hand and helped her get up out of bed. This little story shows us so many things about Jesus: His power for sure but also His compassion and His individual concern for each person. Jesus wants us to take Him personally. That's how He comes to us. That's why He came; He came for us. We again see His willingness to be immediate, to be touched. It is a wonderful outcome of His coming to earth.

***That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and [laying His hands on each one,] Jesus healed many who had various diseases. . . . [Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting,***

***"You are the Son of God!" But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew He was the Messiah.] - Mark 1:29-34a [Luke 4:39a, 40b, 41).***

We see that same intimate, personal dynamic that Christ showed to Simon's mother-in-law later that evening as, following sunset (and the conclusion of the Sabbath with its regulations), the whole town came to where Jesus was with their physical and spiritual calamities. Notice that Luke tells us that Jesus "laid His hands" on each person who was ill. He didn't just "throw" His power to the masses, but made their healing personal - literally, "for you, from Me." And it's possible that this went on for many hours; the Greek tells us that people "kept bringing" those who were ill. And so, Jesus kept healing. It was possibly a very long night. And again, we also see that same power was displayed against these demons as against the man in the synagogue. His power ruled overall.

This "chapter" is a wonderful picture that sometimes gets a little lost. Yes, the Bible says that ***God so loved the world - John 3:16a***, but He loves that world each individual by each individual. He doesn't just see and love that mass we call humanity; He sees us individually. No one is overlooked; there is no anonymity, no oversight. He sees each and every one of us - with all His grace, all His compassion, all His power and all His never-ending love.

### **Chapter 3: The Power Behind The Power - Mark 1:35-38; Luke 4:42b-44**

***Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ...The people were looking for Him and when they came to where He was, they tried to keep Him from leaving them But He said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea - Mark 1:35-38; Luke 4:42b-44.***

Jesus was about two things during this earthly ministry we're looking at: proclaiming God's word - both in word and deed - and living in the power behind that word. What did living in that power look like? Prayer. Jesus Himself had said: ***"I did not speak on My own, but the Father who sent Me commanded Me to say all that I have spoken. . . . So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say"*** - ***Jesus Christ, John 12:49, 50b***. He knew that He was here only to do His Father's will; in order to remain always in the awareness of what His Father's will was, He prayed. In fact, Isaiah prophesied that the Lord's anointed one would feature this relationship: ***The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed - Isaiah 50:4***. He prayed for strength; He prayed for those around Him, in particular, the disciples - the ones God had given Him. But mostly He prayed that His life would be a glory to God. Jesus was always a person of prayer. He could not perform His mission without it.

### **Chapter 4: Power With Priorities - Luke 5:12-16 [Mark 1:45]**

***While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged Him, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered***

***him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." [Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere.] [T]he news about Him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed - Luke 5:12-16 [Mark 1:45].***

On the face of it, we simply see here another healing, and in it Christ's power over disease itself. But there is something else here - something beautiful but so quiet it's almost hidden. Lepers were outcasts in this society - and for good reason. It was a highly contagious disease, including one form that attacked the nerves so that the infected person could not feel pain. As a result, infection easily set in, and this could ultimately lead to degeneration of the tissue. Limbs could become deformed and eventually fall off. (Even today, over 200,000 people, over half of them in India, suffer from this disease.) Leprosy was so dreaded that its victims were kept far away from the community - which meant no family and synagogue fellowship; in fact, they were ordered, they were commanded, to be far away from their community. So, this guy is literally breaking the law just to get close to Jesus.

And being near somebody with leprosy risked ceremonial uncleanness for that person as well. And the absolutely worst thing you could do was to touch a leper. Might as well pack your bags and leave now. But what does the text say? Jesus reached out His hand "and touched him" - even before pronouncing his healing - thus not only healing him but restoring him back to his family and his community. Jesus was constantly letting Himself be seen as a friend of those who were outcast. He did it with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and here He does it with a leper. And the message is loud and clear: Jesus will not separate Himself from anybody - no matter the circumstances we could ever think of! What a wonderful picture of compassion - not to mention that it shows that uncleanness, of whatever kind, does not affect Him. He, on the other hand, is the one who provides cleanness - physically and, more importantly, spiritually. His ability to cleanse is greater than any ability of sin - or anything else for that matter - to corrupt.

But this story also shows a difficult issue that arose because of the healings. Jesus' healings had far more purpose than the obvious end to pain and suffering. They were also meant to be a vehicle by which people saw God - His power and His love - which were intended to drive them to seek Him for all the moments of their lives, not just moments of perceived need. And Jesus' concern was that peoples' desire to come to Him stopped at their needs, without a thought to their more consequential spiritual needs - for which the same power of healing was available. He didn't want to be known strictly as a "medicine man" or a "miracle man" but as the one and only "Messiah Man," the one God had sent for spiritual healing, for new life, for reconciliation with God by forgiveness of their sins, for restoration of relationship with God, and for a lifetime joining with God that would extend right into an eternity with God. That's why He was often so adamant about not having those being healed telling the source of their healing. It held the danger of limiting how people saw Him, as well as the additional danger of bringing so many crowds to Him that He couldn't do what He most urgently wanted to do: to tell people the good news of the kingdom of God. And it was as a spiritual healer, bringing a

restoration of a healed spiritual life, that was infinitely more important for them to see than as merely a physical healer. After all, all these physically healed people would eventually die anyway; it was their spiritual lives that held the most importance for Christ; those lives would go on forever. But this guy told people the source of his healing anyway; he probably couldn't help himself but, as a result, Jesus had to live almost a secret life, trying to avoid the wear and tear of constant crowds as much as possible while also being able to call people's attention to a more important illness: sin.

## APPLICATION

Now at one level, these stories are simply adding dimension to understanding Christ's powers. We have seen His power over elements (changing water into wine), His power over distance (healing the nobleman's son in Capernaum while Jesus was still in Cana), His power over circumstances (walking through the angry crowd in Nazareth), and His power over the creatures of nature (the huge catch of fish in Capernaum). And these stories have certainly added to that list: We've seen His power over disease (over viruses, bacteria and other organisms) and we've seen His power even over demonic forces.

But remember those two verses I asked us to keep in mind, to filter these episodes as we took a look at them? You know why that was? Because they give us a hint as to the common, underlying cause of all these issues that Christ so graciously and miraculously confronted, and it's one word: Sin. Sin is why we have disease in the same sense that sin is why we have weeds and thistles and the like. Sin is why we have divisiveness and hate. Sin is why we have weapons of war. Sin is why the concept of "family" is broken almost beyond recognition. Sin is why we have conflict instead of community, why we have fracture instead of fellowship. You see, sin broke the purity of the creation God made so, by choosing sin, mankind also wound up inviting all the brokenness that sin would bring to the world - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually - including disease (both physical and mental), hurt, injury and ultimately death.

Now God has for His own purposes given Satan a limited rule over this planet. As such, when he chooses to do so within those limitations, Satan can and does infiltrate people to the point of possession. I have a feeling that, if we could truly see all the impacts of evil in our world, we would be stunned - seeing it in illnesses and behaviors that would confirm how pervasive is Satan's influence in the world. Satan is that "apex" predator who has captured so many people and imprisoned them in "cages" of sin that are locked in so many ways.

But we can never forget that Satan has an "apex" predator who goes after him - Christ Himself. As John wrote in his first letter: ***[T]he one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world - I John 4:4.*** Satan never has been and never will be anywhere near as powerful as Jesus Christ; we see it in all these demons who absolutely had no choice when Christ commanded them to leave the people they were possessing. But, in addition to that, Satan is neither omniscient (knowing everything) nor is he omnipotent (all-powerful) nor is he omnipresent (existing everywhere at once). In other words, he is a finite being! Christians cannot become possessed (we have been sealed by God for Himself through Christ). Now is Satan bigger, stronger, wiser than us? Absolutely! But bigger, stronger, wiser than us in Christ? No chance! So, because of that, we can walk into any situation fearlessly because our

God is bigger than the world's "god." We can rely on a greater wisdom, a greater power, a greater direction, and an eternally greater outcome than Satan will ever know.

But there's more. A very wise man once said: "Jesus is God explained" - which is a great way to describe what Jesus once said to Philip: ***"Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father"*** - ***Jesus Christ, John 14:9b*** - which adds incredible weight to Christ's telling His disciples: ***"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you"*** - ***Jesus Christ, John 13:15***. So a conclusion for Christians today would be: As Christ's life revealed what God is like, so a Christian's life should reveal what Christ is like.

But how's that gonna work with these stories? These are miracles and, the fact is, we might not have been gifted with that particular ability. So, if you take away the possibility of my doing any miracles, what's left for me to apply? How about these ideas? We should be:

- 1) Underscoring everything, reflecting the **LOVE** of Christ. Love is the most basic fundamental when it comes to a Christian's life explaining Jesus. While every miracle was a profound display of Jesus' grace - His undeserved favor - towards us, the fact is that, as Christ followers and ambassadors, we are to reflect that same graciousness to all those around us - no limits. Simply put, one of the most constant and consistent messages of Scripture is that we are to love others as Christ loves us. That's it; no other plan, either in place or in development. Christ's love is not only our directive, but our measure as well.
- 2) Reflecting the **COMPASSION** of Christ. Peter said it so simply and so well: ***He cares for you - I Peter 5:7b***. Does that compassion extend to those outside the Kingdom? Absolutely! Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: ***"[Y]our Father in heaven ...causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 5:45b***. Our compassion cannot be limited only to those who think like us or look like us or even believe like us. Christians are literally "stand-ins" for Jesus. Our compassions explain Jesus to those around us, and those compassions need to reflect how He showed compassion to everyone with whom He interacted. Do we truly care for people? Do we care to know about their needs, do we care to know how they are doing, do we care to learn how we can help change somebody's moments by interacting in the name of Christ in their lives? The one thing all these miracles of compassion have in common is that they dealt with people in their physical as well as spiritual circumstances. Our compassion needs to be just as broad.
- 3) Reflecting the **CHARACTER** of Christ. Remember what feels like a couple of hundred years ago when we looked at the "fruits of the Spirit" in Galatians 5? Something that often gets lost is that the fruits of the Spirit are in fact, the fruits of Christ's spirit. That's His character we're talking about in those verses: ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - Galatians 5:22-23a***. It's His spirit that has come to reside in our lives. It's His spirit that molds us and makes us to reflect the character that Jesus showed, no matter the circumstances, every moment of every day.

## CONCLUSION

These are great stories, some of my favorites. But in the midst of being "wowed" by these

wondrous things that Christ was doing, don't forget to be equally "wowed" by the love, the compassion and the character of God that Christ was reflecting as he went about his ministry. You see, at its most basic, the ministry of Jesus, directed by God, was built on one incredible premise, and John tells us what it is: ***The word became flesh and made His dwelling among us - John 1:14a.*** God came alongside us in the person of His Son. He became us and lived with us. That's where He ministered - alongside us. Now He has given us the mandate - be alongside others as He was. Love them as He did. Have compassion as He did. Show the character that He did.

I know from talking with a bunch of you that many of us are having a difficult time in these days of social unrest - so much dissension, so many opinions and viewpoints, so many horrific (and sometimes flat-out stupid) behaviors, so many ceaseless demands. Is there ever going to be an end to it all? Actually, yes there is. And spoiler alert: Jesus wins! But you know, we are not being asked to respond with our opinions, with our viewpoints, with our judgments. This is not about who we're voting for, or a call to rally or march or protest, or all the other ways that people think is ever going to make an impact on our culture. None of those matter because they will fail.

Why, how do I know? The late theologian RC Sproul said it like this: "Not until we take God seriously will we ever take sin seriously." That's why I know: This culture does not take God seriously; therefore, their sin marches merrily along. David saw the same thing in his time: ***There is no fear of God before their eyes - David, Psalm 36:1b.*** But, in the midst of these crazy times, there is one plan that won't fail, and it's this: We are being asked to respond in one way: Jesus. He's the model, He's the blueprint. Note those are singular: one model, one blueprint. The one and only way, truth and life! If He's my master, my king, there is only one option - to do my life His way. So, are you ready to give up all of yourself to be like Jesus? To even beg to be like Jesus? To not be satisfied with anything less than looking, sounding and responding like Jesus? Are you ready to do anything simply for the sake of Jesus? Is Jesus' sake enough? Is doing that more important than anything else in your life, anything else you could even think of? Well, that's the gig - and the most amazing life we could ever imagine. Let's pray!