

Mark 1:29-31

Were we to ask a group of Sunday School children, “Which of Jesus’ miracles do you want to talk about?” Not one child would answer, “When Jesus healed the fever in Simon’s mother-in-law.” Raising the dead, calming storms, driving out demons—these are the miracles which stand out for them and for us. But curing a fever? In a few days, or a week at the most, she would have felt better anyway; and Jesus did not speak powerful words to rebuke the fever—He simply took her by the hand and lifted her up. No, this miracle is not going to make it to the top on anyone’s list. It’s just not that impressive to us.

But it was to her. When you are sick in bed with a fever, nothing else matters in life except to get better. A fever makes your whole body ache. You can’t do much of anything except lay there and be sick. That was Simon’s mother-in-law. We don’t know her name. We don’t know a thing about her. All we know is that she had a fever and Jesus healed her. And for her, on that day, no miracle could touch that one. For her, it topped the list of all of Jesus’ miracles.

Is there a fever causing you to ache right now? Is there something which, like a fever, is making life difficult, even unbearable? A bad marriage can do that; so can a financial burden; depression, hopelessness, an addiction...these all, like a fever, can affect everything that we do. These troubles can weigh us down so that, like someone sick in bed, all we think about is the trouble that is burdening us.

This miracle in Mark 1 tells us that we don’t have to have big problems for Jesus to care. Even our fevers; even those troubles which we’re ashamed to admit to anyone; which seem small compared to what others are going through, but which affect our life like a terrible, painful fever; even these are important to our Lord. They told Him about Simon’s mother-in-law and He came to her bedside. He cares also about every little thing that bothers you; about every trouble in your life which makes your life difficult.

As we read this story we should know that in the original Greek the word used by St. Mark means “to forgive.” Jesus “lifted” her up out of her fever literally means that He “forgave” her of her fever. Sicknesses, troubles, even death are the flipside of sin. The common cold is not sin, but they are two sides of the same coin. Sin in our life brings with it all sorts of problems—fevers, colds, bad marriages, money problems, addictions, and ultimately death. We all share the same disease of sin but we may differ with our symptoms. Some of us experience the symptom of poor health. Others have the symptom of a bad marriage. Others suffer from addiction. Still others deal with the symptom of a financial burden. And we all deal with the symptom of death—the death of a loved one and our own death in the future.

But the disease which causes all of these symptoms is sin. A bad marriage does not make that couple worse sinners than a couple in a good marriage. A woman in poor health is not more sinful than a healthy person. Someone deep in debt and struggling to pay the bills does not have more sin than a wealthy person. We all share the same sin in our hearts, but it affects our lives in different ways. Simon’s mother-in-law was a sinner. That day her symptom was a fever and Jesus dealt with her fever the same way He deals with sin—He forgave her of it.

It might be interesting if, when the words of absolution are spoken by your pastor, for your pastor to add: Your sicknesses are forgiven; your addictions are forgiven; I forgive you all of your money problems; all of your troubles are forgiven. I don't say those words, but it's really true. Every trouble that sin brings into your life, whether it's big or small, is forgiven. This means that Jesus carried it for you.

What happened to Simon's mother-in-law's fever? Jesus felt that fever on the cross. "He bore our sicknesses," writes Isaiah. On the cross Jesus endured the pain of your bad marriage. He felt your depression. He was plagued with your hopeless debt. The addiction that controls you wrapped itself around Jesus on the cross. Yes, He was punished for your sins there. All of our sins were laid upon Him, but so was the flipside of sin. Every pain, and trouble, and heartache that sin brings, and ultimately even death was all laid upon Christ for you.

Now don't run home and toss your aspirin into the trash. Don't cut up your medical insurance card. You're going to get sick and deal with troubles just like before; and you're going to die—just like you still sin day after day. But everything...your sins, your pain and troubles, your death...it's all forgiven. It's not a curse from God. It's not punishment upon you. Jesus took the punishment out of your common cold so when you get sick you can be assured that God is not angry with you; that He has not abandoned you; and that He will bring, through this sickness, His blessings for you. Jesus took the curse out of the troubles you have in life so that if your marriage goes bad God is not punishing you; if you struggle with your bills God is not against you. As you trust in Him He will lift you up as He did Simon's mother-in-law so that your life will be filled with His peace and joy.

Jesus took the pain out of death so that even when we bury our loved one we do not grieve as those with no hope. We bury our loved ones in Christ and our hope is reserved for us in heaven. Jesus took the guilt out of sin so that even as you sin each day (not because you want to but because we are sinners), God does not hold your sins against you. They are not charged to your account. They cannot keep you out of heaven because you trust in Christ.

Does all of this mean anything to you? The truth that all is forgiven...everything—sin and its flipside—all forgiven...does it mean anything to you? It meant something to Simon's mother-in-law. She was grateful. After Jesus forgave her fever she put on her apron and began to serve Him and His disciples. He didn't command her to. He didn't say before He healed her, "I'll cure your fever if you promise to serve Me afterwards." No...He healed her, He forgave her out of mercy; and she served Him out of a grateful heart.

Do we see that same grateful heart here in Augusta? We see the same mercy of God. We have the same forgiveness, the same blessings, the same hope of heaven and eternal life in Christ. And God does not give us His gifts on condition that you and I serve Him. He never says, "I'll forgive you if you will then don your apron and serve Me." No...it's pure mercy. That's why He blesses us and forgives us and gives us all things—it's because, for Jesus' sake, He is merciful.

Jesus' mercy is here in Augusta just as it was in the house of Simon. And Simon's mother-in-law is here also. I saw her yesterday putting on her apron as she served the family of Willie—setting up tables, bringing food, serving food, cleaning up afterwards. I see Simon's mother-in-law here in Augusta whenever someone is in need of help. She puts on

her apron and clears away the snow. She donates her time and money to help when a member is in need. She works on quilts in the basement. She comes to meetings. She takes care of the church's property. She stands in the back and greets visitors and helps with ushering. She takes care of this congregation in many ways sometimes just by simply opening the hymnal to sing praises to God and faithfully putting her offering in the collection plate.

And Simon's mother-in-law does not just put on her apron here at church; she puts it on at home, providing for her family and raising her children in the fear and love of the Lord. She puts on her apron in the community by helping her neighbor where there is a need; by witnessing to the love of Christ to those who see her.

And all of that, friends, is done out of a grateful heart because Jesus, out of mercy, has forgiven her...has forgiven you. This is a miracle, you know, because it's God's work in you and through you. And it's a miracle that God is doing here in Augusta which, as far as I'm concerned, is at the very top of the list. Amen.