

Jesus and EMOTIONAL Problems

Does Jesus Heal Today?

Mark 5:1-17

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Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

When I left Rochester in 1985 to lead a church north of Minneapolis, I ran smack into trouble. The church I began to lead was divided. One group within the church was excited and impassioned. The other was fearful and angry. The first group had experienced a spiritual awakening. The other group felt spiritually wounded. The first group witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit and many healings. The others witnessed the pain of conceit, control and condemnation.

As a young pastor I had heard that the ministry of the Holy Spirit had brought division to many churches. Now, I was finding that out firsthand. I discovered that *healing* could become a curse. It could turn controversial. That was not my experience alone. Many others must have faced this. In 1988 a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary wrote a book entitled *How to Have a Healing Ministry Without Making Your Church Sick!*

In the church I led, I found the reports of healing credible and valid. Indeed, I observed it myself. There was not a problem with the experience. The problem was the

explanation I was hearing. It was my opinion that the experience was better than the explanation. I was convinced that the group that had faith to minister God's healing did not adequately understand why people were or were not healed. They often left those not healed feeling condemned. What sick or emotionally hurting person needs to feel condemned? Even more trouble resulted from the condemnation people experienced if they didn't agree with the group's understanding of certain passages of the Bible. As their pastor I not only became convinced that I needed to minister to sick and hurting people, I needed to search out the Bible for a divine explanation.

The Bible gives us a divine explanation, but my interpretation of it is human. Therefore, it will probably hold true after this sermon that the experience is still better than the explanation. Nevertheless, there are significant things we can learn.

In the Bible there are four gospels that tell the story of Jesus. These gospels were written not only to inspire faith, but also to equip believers in their redemptive mission to unbelievers. Some 41 times in these gospels Jesus heals people with physical and mental problems. Many of these times, Jesus heals large numbers of people with various problems. There are 3,774 verses in the four gospels. Some 2,517 convey Jesus' teaching, and 1,257 tell the story of Jesus' life and work. Of those narrative verses, 484 or 38.5 percent describe healing. Other than miracles in general, there is no other experience that commands such attention in the gospels.

Healing is so central in the gospels because it illustrates the point of Jesus' mission. Jesus didn't come to teach us. He was not on a mission of education. He was on a mission of liberation. He came to liberate people from the power of the evil one. Healing signals the arrival of God's kingdom, the exercise of kingdom authority on this

earth and the sharing of that authority with Jesus' disciples. In Matthew 16, Jesus pictorially described humanity as locked in and confined by gates of death. With keys of the kingdom, believers unlock those gates and liberate the afflicted.

One of the most dramatic examples of this liberation is when Jesus liberated a man from terrible emotional problems. We read his story in Mark, chapter five.

Jesus encountered a man who was deeply disturbed. Perhaps, you have been watching the story unfold at the Georgia crematorium, or you're familiar with the cases of Charles Manson, Jeffrey Dahmer or Ted Bundy. This man was haunted to that degree. He was not a little neurotic. He was not a little psychotic. He was not even a Dr. Jekyll – Mr. Hyde. Destructive forces dominated his every move. He made his home among the dead, living in a cemetery. He was so threatening and violent that people had tried to bind him hand and foot. In his rage he broke both the chains and leg irons. No one could calm him. No one confined him. Day and night he walked about the cemetery crying out and cutting himself.

Have you ever been around people in such torment? I've intervened in suicides. I've seen the cutting and witnessed the attraction of death. One time Diane and I had to work together to save a life. I was on the phone with a woman who overdosed while Diane ran back and forth, again and again, between a neighbors' house and ours with information so the police could eventually find her. I've seen how the attraction of death overtakes people in spite of their many reasons to live. The man in Mark 5 was well beyond that. Death tormented his every waking moment, yet he did not take his life.

The spirits in the man seized control of his voice and screamed at Jesus. Jesus had commanded the spirit to come out of him, but it didn't. Faced with the resistance, Jesus

found out more about who was afflicting this man. When those spirits left, they entered 2000 pigs that immediately ran to their destruction. That poor man had been fighting such powerful suicidal spirits. None of us know how intense the battle is for some who are struggling with suicidal thoughts and self-destructive compulsions, but Jesus healed one in such a battle, and the disciples learned that there is no force afflicting humanity that was too great for Jesus. There is always hope.

The Bible does not tell us how this man got so bad. It does not reveal whether there was a history of depression, whether he was a victim of something traumatic, whether he did something terrible, or whether there were biochemical concerns. All we know is that Jesus healed a man who seemed hopelessly lost, and Satan lost his grip.

All of us have battles in life. All of us get hurt. Some of us are betrayed by those closest to us. People more distant hurt others of us. We all get hurt, and time doesn't heal those wounds. Instead, it gives those wounds opportunity to fester and infect other parts of our lives.

I've found that emotional wounds haunt and invade my relationships with others. Callousness, insensitivity, insecurity, deceitfulness, defensiveness, selfishness are not only sinful and destructive; they are often attitudes that developed over time from interpersonal hurts.

A respected team of leaders in healing ministry wrote this:

The burden of pain that all of us carry drains our energy from creative and productive activity and makes us feel unworthy, guilty, hopeless, broken, and unforgivable. This burden would be destructive enough if its effects went no further, but such is not the case. These negative feelings, now converted over a period of time into attitudes, begin to develop within us negative patterns of behavior, and our past begins to destroy our present. That which is so negative begins to want to destroy itself, and so we develop habits of self-destruction or habits of sin.

They further advise:

Any unreasonable fear, anxiety, or compulsion caused by patterns built up in the past can be broken by prayer, provided the person is also doing his best to discipline his life in a Christian way. So many Christians are hindered in their lives by such things as a haunting sense of worthlessness, erratic fits of anger or depression, anxiety and unreasoning fears, compulsive sexual drives, and other problems which they would like to change, but find they cannot cope with on the basis of repentance and a decision to change.

Today Jesus is freeing many from their inner pain and destructive habits as they receive prayer and support from other believers. Christ is inwardly healing me.

Sometimes, that healing comes through the prayers and ministry of others. Sometimes, God uses truthful confrontations with family and friends. Regardless, healing is the aim.

Here are three questions that can help you decide whether you need healing ministry. *First, do your emotional reactions to people and events help you live the Christian life?* Do they reinforce righteousness in your life, or do you have to battle your emotions to do what is right? If you find yourself struggling with your emotions, you probably need emotional healing. *Second, do your emotional reactions instinctively work correctly?* Do you find yourself rarely getting into trouble with people, rarely misjudging and rarely having to apologize? If it's not so rare, you probably have some hidden hurts and need healing. *Third, are your emotional reactions subordinate to right responses?* In other words, do your emotions run you or do they support what you want to do? If you find yourself doing what you don't want to do, you probably need healing.

Have you gone to Jesus with your hurts? Jesus sent people in teams to help others. He shared his authority and Spirit with them. Jesus' brother James called believers to go with their hurts, sorrows and sins to other believers and receive ministry.

I encourage you to follow that counsel. If you're hurting, there is hope. Jesus still heals today. Don't keep him at a distance. Open up and invite his healing ministry.