

#4. Come and See Jesus, The Healer (09/02/25)

Readings: Mark 5:25-34

1. Keith's talk shares personal stories of healing and loss. How do these experiences shape your understanding of God as a healer?
2. Keith touches on Cessationism, the belief that miraculous healings ended after the time of the apostles. What do you think about this view? Have you ever witnessed or heard of modern-day healing that challenges it?
3. In Mark 5:24-34, the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years was healed simply by touching Jesus' cloak. What does this story teach us about faith, healing, and Jesus' response to those who seek him?
4. Many in the talk prayed for healing but did not see the outcome they hoped for. How do we reconcile our prayers with God's will when healing doesn't happen as expected?
5. The talk mentions different kinds of healing—physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational. Have you experienced or witnessed any of these types of healing in your own life?
6. Jesus' healings in the Gospels were more than acts of power; they pointed to the restoration of all things. What does this mean for how we understand healing today?
7. Robert Sanday described his spiritual healing as more significant than his physical healing. Have you ever gone through a difficult experience that deepened your faith or changed your perspective on God?
8. The quote from Philip Yancey states, "Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse." How does this statement resonate with your own faith journey?
9. The talk speaks about Jesus entering into our pain rather than always removing it. How have you experienced Jesus' presence in times of suffering?
10. Keith's talk ends with Revelation's vision of a new heaven and a new earth. How does this promise of ultimate healing shape how we live our lives today?
11. Jesus asks us, "How can we put our woundedness, our experience, in service to others and for the glory of God?"

#4. Come and See Jesus, The Holy One (02/02/25)

Readings: Mark 1:21-28

12. Come up with some names of people (past and/or present) who you would describe as Holy. Explain why you think of them as holy – what characterises a holy person?
13. Read Mark 1:21-28. In Mark's Gospel, this is the first occasion when Jesus is recorded as preaching. The 'unclean spirit' (often a term in the New Testament for demon) recognises Jesus and can't keep quiet. What do you think he means by the term 'God's Holy One'? Why is the demon frightened by Jesus?
- (The unclean spirit/demon instinctively recognises, perhaps initially because of the 'authority' Jesus commands in his teaching, that Jesus is from God – God's Holy One – so possessing God's authority to command and to heal – he can recognise someone effectively filled with God's Holy Spirit; As an unclean spirit/demon he recognises that those things that dwell in darkness (unclean spirits) will be destroyed by the light of God's presence in Jesus)*
14. The first command that Jesus gives is to tell the unclean spirit to 'Be Quiet'. Why do you think he says this? Why does he then tell the unclean spirit to 'come out (of the man)'?
- (Jesus knows that Demons recognise who he is, but doesn't want their testimony – he wants people to realise who he is by themselves, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. He goes on to command the unclean spirit to leave the man because he has compassion on the man and wants him to be set free from his captivity, as Richard talked about last week).*
15. Last week, Richard talked about the healing and forgiveness of the paralysed man, a story from the next chapter of Mark's Gospel (2 v 1-12) when Jesus returns to Capernaum. Would you describe the action of the man's four friends as 'holy'? What do they have that leads to the paralysed man receiving forgiveness of his sins, (and only after that, healing of his body)?
- (In Mark 2 v 5 Jesus 'saw their faith' (that of the friends) and forgives their paralysed friend his sins – interestingly, it is not the man's faith that leads to forgiveness – but his friends. They have faith in Jesus and put it into action, whilst he is the beneficiary)*
16. Mike said that holiness is not a state of mind, nor a title that can be achieved, but is all about doing God's work. Do you agree? Thinking of the example of the friends of the paralysed man, read James 2:14-20. Are faith and works two sides of the same coin? To take the metaphor further, could that coin be called 'holiness'?
17. What distinguishes 'good works' from 'holiness'?
- (some may do 'good works' because it makes them feel good, or they want recognition – holiness is being infused with God's Holy Spirit and doing good works as an outpouring/outworking of the grace we have received – we love God and thus love our fellow man/woman as he loves them)*
18. Mike pointed out that it is often the 'outsiders' who recognise Jesus as infused with God's spirit (think of the woman at the well; the Roman centurion with his ailing servant, even the (John-Wayne) Centurion at the Cross. Why do you think the outsiders get it, when those who are supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the Jews in the Gospels don't – think of the parable of the Good Samaritan that Mike referred to – it was the Priest and Levite (assistant priest at the Temple) who didn't want to get their hands dirty?
- (Stuck in their ways, too afraid to admit to being wrong, too much to lose – power, authority, prestige, too comfortable with the best seats etc?)*
19. How easy is it to fall into the temptation of seeing outward observances as the things that please God? How important is it to remain vigilant, watchful, preparing, like the Wise bridesmaids mentioned in Matthews Gospel? How do we see the time between Keith's departure and the arrival of his replacement – a time of preparation or disengagement?
20. Mike finished by suggesting that holiness is something that we can all practice, by simply following Jesus in our daily lives, doing the ordinary small things with great love. Do you agree, and what small things can you think of that God may be calling you to put into practice? Are there people like the paralysed man that you may be being called to help?

#3. Come and See Jesus, The Forgiver (26/01/25)

Readings: Mark 2:1-12

1. “Humanity has been characterised by captivity for nearly all its history – ancient and modern.” What examples can you think of from ancient and modern history of humanity’s propensity to captivity?
2. In contrast, “Where there is captivity, God is in the “business” of bringing freedom from captivity.”
 - a. What examples can you think of this from Scripture?
3. What thoughts, words, or images come into your mind when you think of the words locks, chains, padlocks, shackles? Are these simply physical things made of iron and steel?
4. (Read Mark 2:1-12) Some say ‘Jesus never claimed to be God’. Do the Scribes agree with this? (vv. 5-7)
 - a. The Scribes rightly state that only God can forgive sins. Jesus also knew this and still says, “Son, your sins are forgiven”. The Scribes thought Jesus was a blasphemer (claiming to be God when you are not) – but Jesus knew He was claiming to be God, and He was God.
5. Jesus demonstrated that he provides freedom from what holds us captive. From physical captivity through healing (more on this another week) and from spiritual captivity through forgiveness. How does this information give you confidence in the power of Jesus?
6. Richard suggested that unforgiveness and forgiveness correspond respectively with captivity and freedom with the key being the forgiveness. What do you think of this?
7. We all have the keys of forgiveness to unlock the chains of shame, guilt, resentment, hatred, and retribution. When they are used, they can bring freedom, healing, love, reconciliation, and restoration.
 - a. Do you have any examples you would like to share of keys of forgiveness being used?
8. We are not only asked to use them but commanded to use them. Read Matthew 18:21-22.
 - a. “Seventy-seven times” is not a target to obtain but a command to forgive with limitless extravagance. How good are we at using our keys in this way? What stops us?
9. Take a moment to pray together for areas of our lives where unforgiveness is binding with chains and locks. You don’t have to mention specifics, but it might help if you feel able to (explain the confidentiality of Connect Groups). Pray that we would be able to give and receive forgiveness.
10. Returning to Jesus, The Forgiver. As the Scribes rightly pointed out, although we can forgive, only God can forgive sins. Take a moment to examine the word sin. It might help to watch the following Bible Project Video: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/khata-sin/>
 - a. Share what struck you from this video and what do you think about its description of sin?
11. Do you recognise in your own life, the issue that Paul explains in Romans, that even when we try to do good, we find ourselves not doing it. Even when we delight in what God asks of us, we find ourselves not doing it? What might this look like for you? (maybe just for personal reflection here)
12. Jesus says, “Son, Daughter, My Child, your sins are forgiven” – allow these words to sink from your head to your heart. Sometimes we don’t fully believe that we can be forgiven and yet Jesus says (John 8:36), “if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”
 - a. Spend some time in prayer, asking for God’s forgiveness for when you have “missed the goal” and for God’s forgiveness to be a reality in your life.
 - b. Then, having received the limitless extravagance of God’s forgiveness, pray for each other that we would be able to use our keys of forgiveness also with a limitless extravagance.

#2. Come and See Jesus, The Only Son of God (13/01/25)

Readings: Matthew 8:29, Mark 3:11, Matthew 16:16, John 11:27, Matthew 27:54)

1. How do you understand the New Testament claim that Jesus is the only Son of God?
2. How do you feel about the New Testament claim that Jesus is the only Son of God?
3. Keith spoke about how Jesus being the only Son of God provided him with clarity/reassurance; in that to know Jesus, is to know God. He went on to say that, "By looking at Jesus, we see the heart of God fully expressed: a God who is both holy and approachable, sovereign yet serving, and infinitely loving." How do you understand this? Does this align with your experience of faith? (You might want to refer to Jesus in John 14:9 "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father")
4. In the NT, in his letter to the Colossians 2:9 Paul writes, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form", and also in Hebrews 1:3 "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being". Keith claimed that, "It's a very straightforward litmus test. If it doesn't look, or sound, or act, or be like Jesus, it ain't God." Can you argue, using the Bible (including Col 2:9, Heb 1:3, John 14:9) the validity, or not, of Keith's claim.
5. Many theologians over the centuries have, often in defence against heresies, had to restate the unique Sonship of Jesus. One theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 in his *Summa Theologica* elaborated on the concept of divine descentance ('filiation' is the word used!), explaining that Jesus is the Son of God by nature, while humans are sons and daughters of God by adoption through grace. Discuss the many differences of Jesus' Sonship with God the Father, and our sonship/ daughtership.
6. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* explained Jesus as "God's only Son" using the analogy of light from a lamp: just as light emanates from the lamp, so the Son eternally proceeds from the Father, sharing the same divine essence. Discuss how this analogy is a helpful way of expressing Hebrews 1:3 and the nature of Jesus' sonship.
7. Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) argued that traces of divine truth could be found in other religions and philosophies, referring to Christ as the *Logos* (Word) that illuminates all. He also maintained that Jesus, as God's only Son, is the fullness of truth and salvation. How might this way of thinking about other religions help you build bridges, and find common ground, with people of different faiths, whilst maintaining the Gospel truth of Jesus' unique Sonship.
8. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) taught that natural reason allows humans to grasp some truths about God, but full knowledge and salvation come only through Jesus Christ. Discuss this? (You may want to bring into your discussion that all are created in the Image of God, and Romans 1:20). How might these ideas help you build bridges, and find common ground, with people who claim to have no faith.
9. In some current divisive political discourse 'Christian' is used in phrases like 'White Christian', or 'Christian tradition', or 'Christian nation', as the opening salvos that go on to denigrate other faiths and their followers (usually either Jews or Muslims). How do we confidently hold on to the uniqueness of Jesus' Sonship, whilst not aligning ourselves with such hatreds, or further fuelling such divisions. Some thoughts...
 - a. Dialogue and Witness: Engage respectfully with people of other faiths, emphasizing mutual understanding while sharing the Gospel.
 - b. Humility and Love: Reflect Christ's love in actions and attitudes, avoiding arrogance or hostility.
 - c. Recognition of Truths: Acknowledge elements of truth in other religions while pointing to their fulfilment in Christ.
 - d. Prayer and Trust: Pray for others to come to know Christ and trust in God's mysterious and sovereign ways.

#1. Come and See Jesus, Our Friend (05/01/25)

Reading: Mark 2:13-17

1. We begin this year reminding ourselves to Come and See Jesus and reminding ourselves to invite others to do the same. To come and see who He is and allow that interaction to impact our lives and the lives of those around us. Before we begin, what do you think of Jesus and who He is?
2. The reading includes a comment on Jesus from the Scribes and the Pharisees. Why do you think the Scribes and the Pharisees disliked Jesus so much?
3. In the narrative of this reading, Jesus and His disciples are sitting and eating with “tax collectors and sinners”. This was not observed with approval from the Scribes and the Pharisees.
 - a. Why do you think the Scribes and the Pharisees disapproved of this event?
4. The Scribes and Pharisees phrased their comment as the question, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”, but it was meant as an insult. What do you think was their intended meaning?
5. The Scribes and Pharisees considered Levi and his friends to be sinners and therefore to be avoided.
 - a. What was Jesus’ response to their comment?
 - b. Did Jesus disagree with the Scribes and Pharisees labelling of Levi and his friends as sinners?
 - c. How did Jesus’ response to Levi and his friends differ to the Scribes’ and Pharisees’ response?
6. Jesus became known as, “A friend of tax collectors and sinners”. This was meant as an insulting label. Why did Jesus seemingly own this label proudly?
 - a. [It is the foundation of the Good News of who Jesus is and why He came]
7. Richard said he has some good news for you for the start of 2025 and then proceeded to say that you are, “greedy, dishonest, impure, unclean, unholy, immoral, a cheat, impatient, a swindler, envious, selfish, unkind, and much more...” and that, “you are a tax collector, and you are a sinner”.
 - a. How does that make you feel?
 - b. Why is this Good News?
 - i. [If you know yourself to be a tax collector and sinner, the wonderful news is that “Jesus is your friend.” And there is no greater friend to have than Jesus.]
8. Richard encouraged each one of us to let the following truth sink deeply into our hearts, minds, and spirits, “Jesus sees you, sees exactly who you are and where you are at and, before anything else, before working with you to restore you to his image, chooses to be your friend.”
 - a. Spend a moment in the quiet allowing this to sink in. Perhaps take turns to speak it out loud.
 - b. Personal reflection – is there an untruth, mistruth, or lie that others have said to you, or you have said to yourself, which this truth can free you from? Ask God to help you.
9. Richard ended by saying that this truth is for everyone and said the following phrases:
 - a. You have never met a person who God doesn’t love.
 - b. You have never met a person who is too “far” that God can’t reach them.
 - c. You don’t know anyone that God doesn’t want to be a friend to
 - d. There is no one, you or anyone else, that God wouldn’t want to hear the words, “you are a tax collector, and you are a sinner, and God calls you His friend”.
 - i. This might be difficult to hear for some of us. I encourage you to spend some time asking God to help you realise this truth for all people. It does not mean that God condones or approves of the pain that someone has caused. It simply recognises the need of every person to have God as a friend.