

February 7, 2021 – Mark 1:29-39 & 1 Corinthians 9:16-27

Just a quick show of hands: how many people here have ever heard the name “Benny Hinn?” For those who have absolutely no idea what I am talking about, Benny Hinn is a Christian speaker and television personality. I hesitate to call him a “pastor” because, well, in my opinion, it takes more than standing up in front of a crowd and putting on a good show to be a pastor. And Hinn just doesn't qualify.

But he does put on a good show. I'll give him that much. You see, Benny Hinn is the epitome of a televangelist. In fact, he kinda represents everything that is televangelism. And usually, everything that is wrong with televangelism.

Because Hinn's other characteristic is being a faith healer. At his rallies, hundreds of people with various ailments line up to see Hinn. And when they do, they are immediately smacked in the forehead or beaten with a Bible and fall to the ground. 'Slain in the Spirit,' as Hinn calls it.

And, of course, if everything has gone according to plan – if they had enough faith and Benny didn't have a bad case of tennis elbow – they stand up completely healed from their injury or disease. It's a remarkable thing to watch, even if the whole thing does feel a bit like a Vegas magic show.

Now, I am not, in any way, saying that divine healing doesn't exist. In fact, I would go so far as to say it definitely does exist. The Bible promises us that.

Over and over again, Old and New Testament, the Bible talks about the Lord providing healing to the sick and injured. We see Jesus doing it in our Gospel lesson today. And we read Paul talking about the gift of healing in his Epistles. The fact of the matter is that God does sometimes intervene to heal people miraculously.

Does that mean I'm a fan of Benny Hinn? Or of 'faith healing' in general? Absolutely not. Because there's a difference between what Benny Hinn does and what Jesus did. In fact, I see a remarkable similarity between many modern day churches and the disciples in our Gospel lesson.

And that's not a compliment. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark, it's very rarely a compliment. The disciples tend to be whipping boys for Jesus' scorn in all the gospels. But Mark's gospel takes it one step further.

From what Mark presents to us, the disciples were a bunch of blundering buffoons. They were oblivious to Jesus' identity. Thick-headed, slow-witted, and stubborn concerning Jesus' mission. And downright cowardly in the face of Jesus' enemies. While Matthew's Gospel may be critical of Peter and John's Gospel may be critical of Thomas, in Mark's Gospel there is plenty of criticism to go around.

So here we have these pathetic excuses for disciples in their very earliest days of ministry with Jesus. And they have got to be thrilled with what they signed up for. I mean, they followed Jesus on blind faith. Following a rabbi that no one had ever heard of, from a backwater town in Galilee.

And suddenly, he is performing miracles. Miracles like they have never seen before. Miracles like no one in Galilee has ever seen before. He's driving out demons. He's healing the sick. He's making paralyzed men walk. In front of their very eyes, he has transformed into more than a simple rabbi. He has become a prophet. With power like that of Moses and Elijah.

And they're excited. You would be too. Because, with a guy like this at the front of their little organization, no one is going to be able to stop them. They will become rich and powerful. They will be able to challenge the Jewish authority. They may even be able to challenge the Roman authority. With Jesus leading the way, they will upset the status quo and bring a new order to Israel.

And all they need is time. Time to let the message get out. Time to get more and more people into Capernaum to see and experience what Jesus can do. Time to make Jesus into the most popular, powerful man anyone has ever seen.

And they wake up one morning, ready to make this happen, and... Jesus is gone. Well, not completely gone. He's wandered off. Found a secluded spot in the wilderness in which to pray.

OK... that's fine. The man needs a little downtime after a big day. But it's time to get back to work. The people are waiting. *"Everyone is looking for you!"* You've got a show to put on!

And Jesus' response? "No... I don't think so. I think we should go... somewhere else." Um... OK? Where? "There are other villages around. Let's go to one of them."

No, no, no! This is not how you build a popularity base, Jesus. This is not how you build brand recognition and marketing appeal. This is not how you become famous!

If you go to those towns, nobody is going to know who you are. You're gonna have to start from scratch. And every time you move, it's going to be the same thing. It's gonna take three years before anyone really knows who you are.

But that was the point all along. And Jesus says as much: *"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."* Why did Jesus come into this world? To preach.

Jesus' mission wasn't to heal people. In fact, I've heard it said that if Jesus' mission was simply to heal as many people as possible, then He was a complete and utter failure. Because in the grand scheme of things, over the entire history of the world, He healed very, very few people. And, as far as we know, the people He did heal ended up dying again anyway. So, from an eternal standpoint, those acts of healing that made Jesus so famous weren't all that important.

No, Jesus didn't heal people to just temporarily relieve their suffering. He healed people to demonstrate His eternal power. To authenticate His identity. To give us a glimpse of the world He wants give us.

He didn't heal people to put on a show. He healed people to give authority to His message. He healed people to give substance to His preaching. But it was the preaching that mattered.

It was the message condemning sin and impenitence and hypocrisy that mattered. It was the message exhorting us to care for the poor and the sick and the grieving that mattered. It was the message promising us God's unending love in the face of all our shame and guilt that mattered. It was Law and it was Gospel that mattered.

And it still matters, even today. Because the church is able to put on a good show. And you don't have to look far to find a nice, generic megachurch. With fantastic music and amazing audio/video effects and excited crowds. It doesn't take much channel surfing to find a televangelist ready to amaze you with acts of healing, while emptying your checkbook.

It's easy to be entertained. It's easy to be a disciple saying, "Everyone is looking for you! Put on a show for us!" But that's not what Christ's ministry was about. That's not what the Church's ministry is about.

Because, as St Paul reminds us in our Epistle, we're not in this for profit. We preach free of charge. We're volunteers in the Kingdom of God. And we have nothing to gain by boasting or giving ourselves anything to boast about. Because we need the message of God's love and forgiveness just as much as the people we reach out to.

We do it all for the sake of the Gospel. Not because we've been promised a reward if we bring in the crowds of a megachurch or a faith healer. But because the Gospel we share with others is the Gospel that is shared with us. The salvation we offer is the salvation we cling to. And the blessings of eternal life that we promise are the blessings of eternal life promised to each of us.

We don't put on a show. We preach. In every village. In every way. We become all things to all people. And, in the process, become nothing. All so that we might save even a few. For that is why Christ came to this earth. And that is why He came to each of us. Amen.