

A Look at Healing (Part 1)

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John 4.46-54; 5.1-17; 9.1-41

In our continuing study of John's Gospel, we come to the healing by Jesus of an official's son (4.46-54). Following immediately after that is the record of the healing of an invalid at the *Pool of Bethesda* (5.1-17). The third account of healing in John's Gospel is found in chapter 9 – the man born blind. These three of course raise the topic of healing.

The most common prayer requests relate to people's physical health or mental well-being. There is nothing like sickness or a health issue to get our attention. Physical issues and our mental state range from very debilitating and impossible to ignore, to conditions that are readily cared for and require little attention.

How should we understand divine healing? Should we expect people to be healed today as they were when Jesus was on earth? The topic is huge and as I worked on this message, I realized I needed at least two messages to address it. Obviously, this will nevertheless be far from exhaustive.

Examples of Healing in the Gospel of John

1. The Official's Son (John 4.46-54)

Jesus went to Capernaum and while there an official, perhaps in Herod's service, learned He was in Capernaum and approached Him to come and heal his son who was ill with a fever (47, 52). Jesus replied, "*Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.*" (John 4:48, ESV). The official persisted "*Sir, come down before my child dies.*" (John 4:49, ESV). To which Jesus declared, "*Go; your son will live.*" The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. (John 4:50, ESV). The official was confident Jesus had healed his son, so much so that he didn't immediately go home but waited until the next day. When he returned, his servants met him and told him his son had been healed. It was then that it struck him that Jesus was far more than a "*miracle worker*" and he *believed* in Him; he placed his faith in Jesus completely (53).

2. The Invalid at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5.1-17)

Some time later Jesus attended one of the feasts in Jerusalem. While there He went to the *Pool of Bethesda*, which was located north of the *Temple*. Among the many blind, lame, and paralyzed who were scattered around the pool, was one particular man who had been an invalid for 38 years (3,5). Jesus singled him out from the others and knew beforehand he had been there a long time and asked him if he wanted to be healed (6). Rather than answer Jesus' question directly, the man pointed to his inability to quickly

get into the pool as the reason for his condition (7). Nevertheless, Jesus instantly healed the man and told him to take up his “bed” (likely a mat) and walk (8-9).

3. **The Man Born Blind** (John 9.1-41)

On another occasion when Jesus was in Jerusalem, He saw a man born blind. He spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, anointed the man’s eyes with it, and told him to wash in the *Pool of Siloam* (9.1, 6-7). The man followed Jesus’ directions and his sight was restored.

4. **Other Accounts of Healing**

There are of course many other accounts of Jesus healing people in the other Gospels. Some are described in some detail, but the majority are among the innumerable unnamed people whom He healed of every kind of disease, handicap, and demonization.

Causes of Illnesses and Diseases

When God created humankind, they had no disease or illness of any kind; He had described them as very good. Disease, illnesses, handicaps, and death entered humanity after the Fall and humanity began the journey to the grave. Thus, in the final analysis, all illnesses, frailties, etc. are due to the Fall and Satan is to blame. If Adam and Eve had not disobeyed God there would be no sickness, disease, or death. Disease and the wasting away of our bodies is therefore inescapable; while it differs in specific details and intensity, it is common to all humanity. As we grow old our bodies wear out and fail. Such was the case for Isaac whose eyesight had deteriorated to such a degree he was unable to distinguish Jacob from Esau when he pronounced his blessing on them (Gen 27.1).

While illnesses and diseases are common to all, there are some illnesses which result from specific sin. In 1 Corinthians 11, a passage often read at Communion services, we are cautioned to examine ourselves before partaking because some failed to do so and as a result, “*That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*” (1 Corinthians 11:30, ESV). Such appears to also have been the case with the man Jesus healed at the Pool of Bethesda, for He warned him afterwards, “*See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.*” (John 5:14, ESV). Those sicknesses may have resulted from God removing His hand of protection and giving more liberty to the enemy to afflict them.

Along the same line, sometimes sickness may be punishment for sin; that’s what the disciples thought regarding the man born blind, “*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” (John 9:2, ESV). In a broader sense, God has His hand in the physical welfare of people, as is apparent in “*The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.*” (Proverbs 10:27, ESV). God often guards His

people from getting illnesses and diseases because of their walk with Him and it is also conceivable they enjoy better and longer life due to their better choices in how they live.

Whenever a person has an illness of disease, or lives with an enduring handicap, it is an occasion for personal growth; however, there are also occasions when that is much more intentional. That was the case with Paul and his notorious *thorn in the flesh* (2 Cor 12:7, ESV). Similarly, God also allows people to be tested, including with physical diseases as was the case with Job when God allowed satan to inflict him. Job's steadfastness revealed he trusted God not only in the good times, but in adversity also. While 1 Peter 1:6-7 addresses persecution as a means by which people's faith is tested and proven to be genuine, the same principle applies to God's people as they victoriously cope with disease.

Reasons for Healing of Illnesses and Diseases in the New Testament

The primary reason for divine healing by Jesus was to authenticate who He was and is. "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, **a man attested to you by God** with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22, ESV). Coupled with that is **to display God's glory**; to unveil who Jesus really is; He is more than a prophet or special ambassador of God's. "Jesus answered, *'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'*" (John 9:3, ESV). The role of miracles and signs to **validate and authenticate** was also the case with Jesus' disciples and their message of life in Jesus Christ. "*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*" (2 Corinthians 12:12, ESV).

Healing people, as well as performing other miracles, was also instrumental in fostering people's faith to recognize who Jesus really was and trust in Him for salvation. That was the case with the official who approached Jesus to heal his son. "*The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.'* And he himself believed, and all his household." (John 4:53, ESV). Initially, the official was only concerned about his son's health; it was like going to a doctor for a prescription, but it ended with the realization that Jesus was so much more than someone who could care for a physical need. The official's eyes were opened and he saw his own need, the fact he was dead spiritually, something which is pictured by physical sickness. The healing of his son drew his attention to Jesus' ability to heal his soul; thus, he believed in Jesus for his salvation, as did others in his household.

The healing of the man born blind also vividly points to a much deeper spiritual truth. It is hard to miss the more comprehensive message in the man's succinct reply to the unbelieving pharisees, "*Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*" (John 9:25, ESV). Embedded in that reply is the truth that restoration of physical sight by Jesus points to a far greater need, people's spiritual

blindness. Jesus is the One who can restore spiritual sight to those who believe as He enables them to **see**.

On some occasions Jesus healed people out of compassion and mercy. That appears to be the case with the invalid at the pool. Jesus selected only him from the many others around the pool (John 5:3-8, ESV). On another occasion, "*When he [Jesus] went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*" (Matthew 14:14, ESV). There is no indication the people placed their faith in Jesus for their salvation; He was gracious and merciful to them and healed them.

The Experience of Healing Today

The question at the forefront of most people's minds is, "*What about divine healing today? Is divine healing a legitimate expectation?*" Answers to those questions range from an emphatic and unqualified, "Yes," to an absolute, "No."

At one end are those who contend it is God's desire that all people be healed now. Some contend sickness is abnormal and God doesn't want any of His followers to be sick. Thus, it is in their opinion, God's desire to heal everyone; only unbelief, lack of faith, doubt, sin, or negative confession prevents that from happening. Before Covid lockdowns in our hospitals, an individual whose child was dealing with cancer didn't want anyone to visit who wasn't totally persuaded her child would be healed. If they had any doubts, she wanted them to stay away lest their doubts hinder her child's healing.

It is true, sickness and disease are abnormal from God's original design. As I mentioned earlier, when God created humanity there was no sickness or disease of any kind. It, along with death, appeared because of the Fall. There are many other evidences throughout creation that we live in a fallen world. "*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*" (Romans 8:22, ESV). That groaning will not stop until God creates a new heaven & new earth.

And for we humans who inhabit this fallen world, in due course we will all physically die unless the Lord returns first. Thus, even if people are healed of physical disease, it is only a temporary reprieve; such was the case for those Jesus healed – they still died physically. Even Lazarus whom Jesus restored to physical life, eventually died again. Joshua said this of his impending death, "*And now I am about to go the way of all the earth*" (Joshua 23:14, ESV).

Physical disease constantly reminds us we are all fallen people; we are sinners. It points to the truth that all people are spiritually dead until they are *born-again*. Physical death underscores the inescapable presence of sin. While those whose faith is in Jesus for their salvation still physically die, they have been made alive spiritually, and will therefore, *live*.

Are sickness and disease abnormal from God's original design? **Of course!** Does God want people to be freed from all sickness & disease? The answer is also an emphatic, **Yes!** However, that does not mean it will be fully realized in this life! God desires all His creation to be freed from bondage to sin. He died on the cross to reverse the effects of the Fall. Those who turn to Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life and who trust Him for their salvation, will one day be totally free from all sickness and disease. But it will not be complete until they are given resurrection bodies. In the meantime, we will face sickness and disease, including very Godly people and Spirit-filled people.

Thus, those who claim it is God's desire to heal everyone of their sicknesses and diseases in this life and the only barrier to that happening is lack of faith, are mistaken.

Their claim that people only need to have enough *faith* ignores the many Godly people whose love for the Lord was unmistakable but who were nevertheless not healed and were left disillusioned and guilt ridden. Shortly before we arrived in one Church Beverley and I served, a Godly couple had buried their son, an only child. Their pain and grief were very visible. Their son had only been married a very short time. Both him and his wife walked with the Lord and were very much a part of the Church. I believe he had been diagnosed with cancer before they got married, but they nevertheless decided to go ahead with their marriage. Understandably, much prayer went up from the Christian community for his healing. When his condition worsened; some determined he wasn't healed because of his own sin, or his parents, or their lack of faith. They all searched their hearts deeply and sought the Lord would reveal any sin that stood in the way of his healing. And oh, how they all wished they could get this illusive faith that it was alleged they lacked. I can still see the pain and anguish on the face of this young man's father as he shared with me his journey in pursuit of enough faith for the healing of his son. In the years that followed, Beverley and I spent a lot of time with this young man's parents. As we look back, they vividly stand out as faithful and steadfast servants of the Lord. A model couple committed to the Lord. They didn't walk away from the Lord or His Church as a result of their disappointment and profound sense of loss. But the wounds and pain of those who attributed their son's death to lack of faith remained.

There are those who claim God desires to heal everyone and at the other end of the spectrum are those who believe divine healing no longer exists; they contend it ceased with the death of first disciples. They believe divine healing is a false expectation. In their opinion it is based on a promise not supported by Scripture. They are correct when they assert that healing similar to the first century experience no longer occurs. A quick overview of the pages of Scripture makes it abundantly clear that healing during New Testament times was unique. Those whom Jesus and His disciples determined to heal – were healed, and their healing was immediate and complete. Nothing of that magnitude or comprehensiveness occurs today. Hence, it is correct healing in our generation does not correspond with that of Jesus.

Conclusion

Most of us are aware of the excesses of “*faith-healers*,” their exaggerated and unverifiable claims, and often, also their *prosperity gospel* and indulgent lifestyles. You may have met people who have embraced similar beliefs and hold to them passionately. Some of us have met and tried to care for people who have been disillusioned by unfilled claims that God would heal them or their loved one. The couple I mention above is an example. You may know individuals who went forward in a healing service and were told they were healed, only to discover otherwise. We are also faced with the evidence of the past 2,000 years which does not validate the claim that God heals all His children of illnesses and diseases; among them are people who demonstrated enormous faith.

But at the same time, we aren’t ready to deny divine healing outright. Both the Bible and the experiences many of us have had, indicate divine healing continues. Next week I will share some of my experiences and present a balanced approach to healing which is consistent with the promises of the Bible.

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