

God's Healing Touch • Psalm 103:2-3

Matthew 9, Mark 5 and Luke 8 tell the stories of a desperate father with a dying daughter, an embarrassed woman who bled for twelve years and two men who were blind. All three of the stories occurred on the same day in the life of Jesus. There is no hint that they knew each other but they shared a common bond. They all wanted healing. And they all came to Jesus.

The father's name was Jairus. He was a prominent leader of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum. His twelve-year old daughter was dying and he desperately wanted Jesus to come and heal her. He was filled with hope when Jesus agreed to go with him, but just as they began to move they faced an agonizing delay caused by a woman with a menstrual flow that no doctor could cure. She was a marginalized woman but she had enough faith to simply reach out and touch Jesus' cloak. And she was instantly healed.

When Jesus finally arrived at Jairus' home everyone reported that Jesus was too late—the girl was dead. But Jesus walked into her room, took her hand and she got up.

Sometime later that day two blind men came to Jesus pleading for mercy. Jesus asked them if they believed he could help them. They said yes. Jesus touched their eyes and they could see. It was one of the most amazing days of miraculous healing in history.

Jesus touched the girl's hand. The woman touched Jesus' cloak. Jesus touched the blind men's eyes. All four were healed by the touch of God.

When was the last time you needed the healing touch of God? Sooner or later these stories become our stories. The dying daughter is our child. The chronic hemorrhage is our illness. The blind eyes are our affliction. Sometimes in desperation, sometimes in fear, sometimes with faith and always with hope we come to Jesus for healing. Often it is our bodies that are broken but sometimes it is our hearts or our marriages or our souls. We want the touch of Jesus—on our child, our af-

fliction, our eyes, our lives. The yearning to be healed is a universal human emotion.

When Jesus healed, people came. We read about that over and over again in the recorded ministry events of his life. In Matthew 4:24-25 we are told:

News about (Jesus) spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

In Matthew 15:30-31 it says:

Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

We read in Mark 3:10 that Jesus "healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him."

People came to Jesus to be fixed, to be made well, to become what God had meant them to be. In simplest terms it is about the universal desire to be healthy. But there is

something more significant behind the scenes. Hang in there with me as we look at a not-so-easy couple of paragraphs written by St. Paul. The first is in Romans 8:18-23 where Paul is writing to the people who were part of the church in Rome:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected

... we all yearn to be healed—to be all God designed us to be.

to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

God's original creation was very, very good. But sin entered the picture and ever since then sin has sickened all of God's creation. Our whole world yearns to be healed. And, we are part of the world. The sickness of sin has polluted our environment, turned angels into demons, corrupted culture and caused disease and death.

This is not the way it was supposed to be. God created our world to be sin-free. God designed us to be holy, happy and healthy. Deep in our hearts and heads we yearn to be what God created us to be. That is why we all yearn to be healed—to be all God designed us to be.

God wants what we want. That is why he heals our bodies, souls and relationships.

When God heals us it is to move us forward, not back. This is a profound and important concept. When God heals us it is not mostly about yesterday; it is about tomorrow. Let us consider some biblical examples.

Job's 42-chapter biography is found in the middle of the Old Testament. He was healthy, wealthy and wise until Satan tried to take him down. He lost his business, his health, his friends and all ten of his children (seven sons and three daughters).

God healed Job. He cured his painful disease and restored his relationships. His business prospered. He even fathered ten more children who were the brightest and best in the nation.

Yes, God healed Job but that healing did not take him back to the way things used to be. Ten children he loved had died. It was an unspeakable loss. Healing took him forward but did not make everything as it once had been. He was given ten more children. But he was not given back the first

ten. He lived over a hundred years after his life was restored, but I would imagine there were times when he still missed his children.

John 5 tells the story of Jesus going to Jerusalem and the Pool of Bethesda near the city's Sheep Gate. There was an ancient belief that once a year an angel would come to Bethesda and stir the waters. Whoever was first into the pool was healed of whatever was their ailment. So, the pool was surrounded with sick and disabled people.

It was there that Jesus met a man who had been severely disabled for 38 years. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?" It seemed like such a silly question. The man explained that he had no helper to get him into the water if an angel came. Someone else always beat him in. It was hard for him to want healing and never get what he wanted.

Jesus told him to get up and walk. The man obeyed. He was healed, he got up and he walked away from the pool fully restored. It was one of Jesus' great miracles.

But the man did not get back the 38 years he had been disabled. He was not instantly younger. Considering the life expectancy of his generation, most of his life was over. When others were running, praying, working, playing and dancing he was disabled. All his yesterdays were forever passed. Jesus healed him for all of his tomorrows.

In John 20:25 Doubting Thomas refused to believe Jesus was resurrected from the dead. He said he would not believe until he saw Jesus' crucifixion scars on his hands and side. So, Jesus accommodated Thomas by offering to let him examine his scars from the nails and spear. Jesus had been crucified, died and healed of death but he did not return to the way he was before he was crucified. Jesus was resurrected for heaven. He was healed for the future not the past.

All of this is so important for us to understand. When we are healed of an addiction that lasted thirty years we do not get those years back again. When God heals our illness it does not guarantee there will be no scars. When healing finally comes to a marriage or other wounded relationship all the memories of yesterday will not be erased.

Healing is about the future. Healing gives us

what we need to live the life God wants us to live. Healing is not perfection or even correction. Healing is God's gift for a better tomorrow.

The ultimate healing is resurrection. God promises Christians resurrection bodies that will be an updated version of our present bodies that will last for eternity. We will be who we are. We will be recognized by our appearance. We will not return to the way we once were but we will be totally healed and ready for forever. You can read about this in I Corinthians 15 and elsewhere in the New Testament. We will be healed of death!

This perspective explains the seemingly strange words of the person who says, "I have been healed but not cured." God may not have eliminated her body's disease but he gave her healing of the soul to live for the future.

All of this helps us realize that when it comes to our hurts and illnesses God knows, he cares and he heals. In theory it is easy to say that God knows and cares but it is not so easy in the midst of pain. When your child is sick, when your body hurts, when your depression is deep—and God is silent to your prayers—it is not hard to wonder if God really knows what is happening and if he really cares about your pain.

The clear message of the New Testament is that Jesus personally understands suffering. He has been there! He knows what it is like to go through the tortures of pain, humiliation, depression, loneliness, temptation and death. He knows what it is like to pray for deliverance and not get it. He prayed three times for God the Father to call off the crucifixion and was refused every time. The repeated message of the Bible is that God cares about our pain. Jesus went out of his way to help and heal. His biography is full of reports of miracles to touch the lives of those with needs.

With absolute confidence I can tell you that God is there for you for whatever healing you desire. If you wake up every morning with pain, if you have been diagnosed with cancer, if your arteries are blocked, if you are estranged from your family, if your marriage is breaking up, if your

soul is infected with sin, if your spirit is broken—God knows, God cares and God heals. You need never doubt the interest of God or the goodness of God in your life.

So, who among us really believes this? According to Newsweek magazine most Americans believe in divine miracles. It states that 84% of Americans believe in divine miracles, 79% believe in the reality of miracles described in the Bible, 48% have personal experience with miracles, 63% know of people who have experienced miracles, 77% believe God heals sick people who have been given no chance of survival by medical doctors.

But, what do medical doctors believe? How do their percentages compare to the rest of us? According to a survey taken at a meeting of the American Academy of Family Physicians, 99% are convinced that religious belief can heal and 75% believe that the prayers of others can help a patient's recovery.

But surveys and percentages do not heal any of us. God does that! I truly believe that. So, let's get practical. Every week at Wooddale Church there is a sheet in the ChurchNews with prayer requests taken from the previous weekend's information cards. The majority of requests are for healing. One week they included these requests:

Grief over the death of Brad in a fire
 5-month old Victoria with whooping cough
 Steve's father with a kidney infection
 Mother with cancer
 Friend with a drug addiction
 Joseph's pain in his right hand
 Dave's radiation treatments
 Michael's salvation
 Jerry's colon cancer
 Evelyn's stomach cancer
 Janet's cancer
 Brother's aggressive scleroderma
 Genie's knee surgery
 Daughter's lump on her neck
 Student depression and loneliness
 Couple with troubled marriage
 Will God heal these afflictions? He will. Some

Healing is God's gift for a better tomorrow.

will be sooner and some will be later. Some will be as requested and others will be unlike what was asked. Some will be direct and spectacular; some will be indirect and seemingly routine. Some will be through physicians and counselors; some will be by a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Some will be through death and resurrection. The Bible abounds with examples of all these different ways but in every case—God knows; God cares; God heals.

I don't pretend to know why God instantly healed St. Peter's mother-in-law but three times declined to heal St. Paul's disability for which he prayed. I don't know why some for whom I have prayed recovered and some have died. Trusting in God means that we believe God is good and wise whether he gives us the answer we want or one that we would never choose.

What would I do if I were yearning for miraculous healing? If I am diagnosed with some unexpected disease or disability I hope I will believe God knows, cares and heals. I will ask him for a miracle. And, I will trust him to do what he knows is best.

I have debated whether to tell you stories of divine healing. There are plenty to tell. Sixty-three percent of Americans say they know someone who has experienced a miracle. I like stories of God doing spectacular, wonderful miracles. They expand my faith. But, I fear that such stories might discourage you if God has a different answer or a different plan. So, let me tell you just one story—a true story that comes from the pastor of a local congregation.

A woman named Innocentia was a devout and committed Christian. She found a lump, went to her doctor and was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her physician told her the disease was incurable. She was offered a mastectomy that might prolong her life a short time or she could do nothing. Either way, she was told, death would come soon.

Her pastor says, "She turned for help to God alone, in prayer." She dreamed that God wanted her to wait at the baptistery for the first woman who came out after being baptized and to ask this woman to make the sign of the cross over her diseased breast.

Innocentia did what she dreamed and was completely healed. She went to her doctor who responded with a sound of contempt, "I thought you would reveal some great discovery to me!" She was surprised, even shocked, by his words and tone. Seeing the look on her face he added, "What great thing was it for Christ to heal a cancer? He raised a man who had been dead for four days. If Jesus can raise the dead he surely can heal our diseases."

This true story took place in the city of Carthage. The pastor's name was Augustine. The city of Saint Augustine, Florida, is named for him. The year was about 395 AD. God healed her. God has been healing people for a long time.

We believe that God knows, cares and heals. Pray and see what God will do for you. And remember Psalm 103:2-3: "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all yours sins and heals all your diseases."

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