

November 5, 2006

Redemption, Wholeness and the Healing of Persons (#4)

Matthew 13:53-58 / Mark 11:22-26 / Luke 5:17-26

Galatians 5:19-26 / Mark 7:31-37

Before I begin, I need to CORRECT something I said last week. Nancy came up to me after the service and pointed out that I made a mistake when I said that Bryan, the boy I mentioned who was healed of stomach cancer, had to have hemoglobin shots on a monthly basis. It was immunoglobulin shots. Sorry, my doctorate is in ministry and not medicine! So next time (as she reminded me) check with her first when it comes to medical terms! I'd also like to THANK the many people who came up to me after the service last week to ask your questions, two of which I will address today in my first two points!

So again today, in keeping with what I had planned and the questions you asked, I'd like to address FOUR more issues in relation to the topic of healing:

- 1st) What about doctors and medicine? Is it a lack of faith to go to doctors or use medicine (as some do suggest)?
 - 2nd) How does what I said last Sunday differ from what is practiced by those involved in the Christian Science Movement?
 - 3rd) What about the whole issue of faith? What is faith (since Jesus teaches that it does play a necessary role in divine healing), and what role it does play?
 - 4th) What about the Fruit of the Spirit? Are the Fruit of the Spirit necessary in addition to faith and the Gifts of the Spirit in order for healing to take place?
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So **FIRST**, what about doctors and the use of medicine? Is it a lack of faith (as many imply) to seek out their expertise, or use medicines?

And in regard to this question (though I myself have encountered many who would disagree with me, and some vehemently — mostly in the "Faith Movement,") I believe there is nothing in the Bible that would in any way discourage the people of God from seeking out and availing themselves of BOTH — prayer for healing, and the expertise of good, honest, well-trained, and competent medical personnel, as well as the assistance of helpful, scientifically proven, medical treatments or drugs.

And I don't just say that as my opinion, I say it because I believe there is biblical support for it! In Exodus 15:26 (which I mentioned last week as being the place where God gives Himself the name Jehovah-Rapha — "the God who heals you") the context is all in relation to the Israelites wandering in the desert for three days without finding any water, and then coming upon a spring called "Marah" (which in the Hebrew means "bitter" and therefore undrinkable). And so Moses prays, and in response, the Lord turns his attention to a tree, or log, and tells him to throw it into the waters. And when he does, the water becomes sweet.

And let me say it's NOT unspiritual, or out of the question, to think that God asked Moses to throw THAT particular tree into the water because the bark, or the sap in that particular log or tree would create a chemical reaction with the water that would make it "sweet" (or drinkable). God didn't just "do it," He led Moses to use a plant to do it (possibly in the same way that I used to take little giardia pills with me to put in the stream water I used to drink when I went hiking in the mountains of New Hampshire or the Dominican Republic).

Likewise, in Isaiah 38, Hezekiah becomes ill to the point of dying (apparently the result of a boil that has become infected, or gangrenous). And as a result he cries out to God to heal him.

And how does God choose to heal Hezekiah? God instructs Isaiah to tell Hezekiah (or most likely Hezekiah's court doctors) to make a medicinal salve and apply it to the infected wound. In verse 16 he says to God: "You restored me to health, and let me live." And as an explanatory note telling us the means God used to bring that healing about, we read in verse 21: "Isaiah had said, 'Prepare a poultice (a paste-like ointment) of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover.'"

And no matter how you read it, it's hard to see it as being anything other than a biblical text where a prophet of God is instructed to tell Hezekiah to use a medicinal remedy!

Meaning that for Hezekiah to use it is NOT a LACK of faith, but rather, an ACT of faith. It's a clear example of God instructing His prophet to take the extracts of a plant, mix it together (possibly with other things) and then rub it into Hezekiah's wound, in the same way we might take and apply some triple antibiotic cream to a wound.

And when you think of it, is that not what pharmaceutical companies often do? Take extracts from various plants and make them into medicines? If God made and gave us AS FOOD "every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth, and every tree that has fruit with seed in it, and every green plant" (Gen. 1:29-30), is it not REASONABLE to suggest that eating them will not

only NOURISH our bodies, but that substances taken from them would bring HEALTH and HEALING to our bodies as well when they are ill?

Are not the substances derived from their juice, or sap, or seeds, or leaves, or stems, or roots, or bark, or skin of plants and fruits be used to ward off sickness, and also heal us when we're sick? Thus it would not only be REASONABLE, it would actually be UNREASONABLE to suggest that they wouldn't! In fact, it would be an affront to the wisdom and knowledge of God to suggest that He would CREATE LIFE and then not create all the things necessary to SUSTAIN that life!

That's in reference to MEDICINES. But the same affirming attitude seems to prevail in relation to DOCTORS.

In Genesis 50:1-3 we read that, "Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm (the dead body of) his father Israel." The text even shows us that Joseph (a man of immense faith, and through whom the Spirit of God had done miraculous things) had a staff of medical doctors at his beckon call, and he availed himself of their expertise.

Likewise, in Jeremiah 8:22, the prophet asks: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?" Jeremiah is, of course, speaking metaphorically (which as I pointed out last week is fine and obviously Scriptural on occasion)! The "balm" refers to the spiritual medicine of God's Word / the "wound" refers to a spiritual wound (caused by idolatry and immorality) / and the "physicians" are the O.T. priests who should be applying the balm of biblical truth to heal that wound.

In fact, because there ARE priests in Gilead who should be doing just that, Jeremiah can ask, "Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?" Those spiritual doctors are there, says Jeremiah, so what are they doing?

It's instruction by comparison. And thus Jeremiah is essentially saying: When the medical doctors of his day applied the correct medicinal ointments healing usually took place. So why, he asks, isn't that same healing taking place in the spiritual realms if the priests there in Gilead are applying the correct spiritual ointment?

You see, it's actually an AFFIRMATION of the role MEDICAL DOCTORS played in his day, and the positive results they had, in comparison to the PRIESTS who were having little or no results. It's Jeremiah's way of saying the priests, unlike the doctors, are applying a bogus salve to the wound of God's people — a salve other than the ointment of God's life-giving Word. That's Jeremiah's whole point!

And little changes when we come to the New Testament. Jesus never puts down doctors, forbids the use of doctors, nor implies it is a lack of faith to avail oneself of their expertise. Instead, He actually encourages people He has healed to go to the “priests” (who carried out a function similar to doctors in that day) to be checked by them and have their healing confirmed.

That’s also what Francis MacNutt did in relation to the girl with the short and twisted leg (which I mentioned last Sunday). When her leg was approaching normal size, they sent her to a physician to examine it, and told her NOT to try and walk on it until the DOCTOR said it was OK. He worked in conjunction with the doctors, rather than in competition with the doctors — thereby following the example of Jesus.

Doctors shouldn’t be excluded, but included — since the knowledge they possess, can be of immense help. I even like having doctors or nurses on the prayer teams because they can help explain what we need to pray for. Good doctors (in my estimation) are a gift God has given to His people, and to avail oneself of their expertise is simply a wise way of showing our appreciation for their skills.

After all, we know from Colossians 4:14, that LUKE, who wrote the Gospel that bears his name, and the Book of Acts, was a medical doctor, a traveling companion of Paul on some of his missionary journeys, and therefore an actual eyewitness to the healings he recorded there, and possibly an active participant in the prayers that brought miraculous healing to so many. I find it fascinating that God chose a well-educated medical doctor to write the most detailed history of Jesus earthly ministry, and the only history of the early church that we have — both of which included many accounts of miraculous healing!

And I’m NOT saying there aren’t some bad doctors. There are. Doctors who don’t always know what they’re doing, and are in it just for the money. There are charlatans in every field — including the church.

In fact, Mark 5:26 alludes to that fact. In the only really negative reference to doctors in the entire Bible, Mark says of the woman who was “subject to bleeding for 12 years,” that “She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she only grew worse.” But that’s not so much a negative estimation of doctors in GENERAL as it is a negative estimation of SOME doctors whose motive for being in the field, or lack of knowledge, or stab in the dark approach to remedies leaves a bit to be desired.

In fact, if we get any message out of that verse, it's the message that medicine (even the best of medicine) can only go so far. And in those cases where medicine has done all it can and still can't bring healing (as with the lady Mark mentions) that person has no where else to turn but to God. And notice that Jesus was NOT offended that she came to Him as her last hope, or last resort. He was merely pleased that she came at all — her faith even spurred on by her sense of utter desperation.

Then **SECONDLY**, I need to address another question I was asked last Sunday in relation to prayer for healing. The question of how what I said last Sunday differed from what he had seen practiced by those involved in the Christian Science Movement. Yet as I explained to him, so also I say to you, the two are not even similar in any way! Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science (and a very intelligent woman in her own right) wrestled philosophically with how evil, sin, sickness and suffering could enter into a universe that was created TOTALLY, 100% GOOD? How could those things sprout up in a universe where there were no seed of them present to begin with?

If there is "no darkness in Him at all," where did evil come from? She did NOT (and I believe rightly so) buy into the argument that free-will explains it all. It doesn't! Nor could she believe (and rightly so once again) that a Good God purposely created evil to infect His universe. A God of love, she said, wouldn't do that.

Thus, contrary to Orthodox Christianity (which to this day says it is essentially an irresolvable mystery) she came to the conclusion that if God didn't create it, and free will can't explain it, the only other alternative (and this is the one she ended up adopting) — it must be an illusion! It doesn't exist (not really)! Evil, sin and sickness do not exist anywhere but in our minds, as a false perception of reality (and that, she would say, is what we need faith to believe — that they don't really exist!)

Therefore the CHRISTIAN SCIENTIST does NOT pray in faith that sicknesses will be healed. But rather, they use faith to believe that such things do not exist; that people are not really sick in the first place and that it's all an illusion!!! That's why they will not take medicine, and reject going to doctors, because to take medicine or go to doctors would be to deny the primary tenet of their faith, believe what is not real, give in to deception, and admit the illusions of evil and sickness are real!

CHRISTIAN HEALING, on the other hand, begins from the opposite perspective! It begins by admitting that sin, evil, and sicknesses (such as pneumonia and cancer) do indeed exist, and are a very real part of life in this fallen world. They are not illusions, nor false perceptions of the mind (though I do grant you some illnesses seem to be psychosomatic in nature—in which case Christian Science can work).

The Christian Science Practitioner heals an ulcer (for instance) by trying to focus their “faith” or the power of positive thinking, or their mental energy, or will power on it, and then say, “This doesn’t exist... It’s not there... You’re not really sick... It’s all a figment of your imagination... God only created good things and therefore this can’t be real... ”

The Orthodox Christian on the other hand, admits it does indeed exist (for whatever reason), and then looks in faith to GOD, and lifts their heart to GOD, asking Him to do what they KNOW He is ABLE TO DO, BELIEVE HE HAS PROMISED TO DO, and TRUST HE DESIRES TO DO! To the Christian Scientist, “faith” is really little more than the power of the mind exerting itself in an attempt to change reality by denying reality). It is faith in the power of faith instead of the power of God.

It’s similar to the “Positive Confession Movement,” endorsed in some Pentecostal circles, where you’ll see people in slings or with physical ailments denying they have them—as was the case with a friend of mine who was told by her pastor, that despite the fact she could not work, or use her right arm, and had it in a sling, she was to walk around telling everyone, “God healed me.” (past tense)

I cringed when I heard her say it, because it made Christianity look so ridiculous — a lady with her arm still in a sling, going around telling people God had healed her, hoping that her “positive confession” (or denial of reality) would trigger her healing.

Which brings me to my **THIRD** point — the issue of FAITH — what it is, and the role it plays in the whole scheme of divine healing. And here, let me say right off the bat, whether it be Christian Science, or the Positive Confession Movement — biblical faith never asks us to DENY reality. But rather, it looks in faith to the God who controls reality, and asks Him to CHANGE that reality. Now here, there are so many passages that refer to the instrumentality of faith in healing that it’s hard to know which ones to include and which ones to exclude, since I don’t have time to cover them all.

That faith plays a significant part in divine healing is evident from many passages, such as Matthew 9:29, where Jesus asks the two blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes Lord," they replied. Then He touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith it will be done to you," and their sight was restored."

Similarly, in Mark 10:51 blind Bartimaeus comes to Jesus and Jesus asks him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And Bartimaeus responds, "'Rabbi, I want to see.'" "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road."

Jesus even asserts from the opposite perspective that a lack of faith is at least partially responsible (on occasion) when healing doesn't take place. In His own home town, we read in Matthew 13:58: "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." It didn't stop Him from healing, but it did seem to hinder it, or at the very least cause Him to choose not to do as many miracles, or miracles that were as great as He did elsewhere.

Likewise, in Matthew 17:14-21, a man brings his boy to the disciples to have them heal his son, "but they could not heal him," says the man. So he asks Jesus to do so. And when the disciples ask Him why they couldn't heal the boy, He doesn't say, "Because I'm divine and you're not." But rather, He looks at them and with a note of disappointment says, "Because you have so little faith."

And then He goes into His well-known discourse on how they only needed "faith as small as a mustard seed," and they could not only "move mountains," but "nothing would be impossible for them." (v. 20b)

It's an odd response in light of the fact that He just told them they had such "little faith"! It would make more sense, from the perspective of human reason, to have Jesus say to them, "I tell you the truth, you should strive to have faith as BIG as a towering oak tree, or as BIG as Mount Sinai!"

If the problem results from their faith being so little, it's only reasonable to assume that the solution would rest in having towering amounts of faith, or mountain loads of faith! I even heard a preacher preach it that way! "Some people," he said, "ask God for faith and then hold up a thimble, I ask God for faith and hold up a swimming pool!"

But, you see, that's to miss the whole point! Because we don't need great amounts of faith, according to Jesus! An amount as SMALL as one of the smallest, tiniest seeds we could imagine, is sufficient to move mountains!

Why would He say that? I believe the answer to that question lies in our passage from Mark 11, where, in relation to the withered fig tree, Jesus gives us the key to correctly understanding the concept of faith and role faith plays in healing. There, to Peter's great astonishment at how Jesus could have withered a tree from the roots up merely by cursing it, Jesus' response is simply this:
"Have faith in God."

Which means that for the Christian faith is always God-ward. It is a quiet, assured, confidence in the power and goodness and willingness of God to intervene on behalf of His people! We are NOT to focus on how MUCH faith we have, but to focus WHATEVER faith we have in God!! Because in the end it's NOT how strong your FAITH is, but how strong GOD is!

That's where people tend to go wrong! They focus on having great amounts of faith, instead of realizing (as Jesus says), that even the smallest amount of faith, when placed in an infinitely Good and Powerful God is sufficient to do awesome things!

We are not people who put our faith in the POWER OF FAITH. That's humanism. We are people who put our faith in the goodness and power of our awesome God! In fact, when we do put our faith in the power of FAITH, instead of putting our faith in the power of GOD (who is pleased to move in response to our faith), God will often withdraw His power — because at the point that FAITH becomes the object of our faith instead of GOD, faith has become an idol, and God refuses to honor idols! In fact, He promises to strike them down!

As Jesus goes on to say in verses 23-24: "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart (and in light of Jesus initial statement that faith is to be in God, He obviously means "does not doubt" THAT GOD CAN and WILL DO IT) but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (And notice it says "believe" you have received it, not "confess" you have received it!)

You see, faith is a matter of trusting GOD so much, that you don't doubt that He CAN! That's why Jesus asked the two blind men, "Do you believe I am able to do this?" Because that's what faith is — an assured confidence that God can! It's simply believing that God is ABLE to do what we ask!

That's what Paul says in Rom. 4:21. The faith which enabled Abraham and Sarah to have a child even though "his body was as good as dead," and Sarah's "womb was also dead," was simply a matter of Abraham, "being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised."

(And it doesn't even need to be the person being prayed for that exercises such confidence in God, because as Jesus shows us, God will honor the faith of others on our behalf—as was the case with the paralytic lowered down through the roof. Jesus, we are told, "seeing THEIR faith (the faith of his friends) healed the man." (Lk. 5:20))

Which brings me to my **LAST** point. What about the Fruit of the Spirit? We've covered faith and the Gifts of the Spirit, but what about the Fruit? What part, if any, do they play?

And here, I need only appeal to the method of Jesus in healing. In our passage from Mark 7, I hope you noticed the way Jesus proceeded with the deaf man who could hardly talk — and by "hardly talk" it probably means he had a speech impediment. Tyndale translated it, "deaf and stambled in speech." That is, he stuttered. And so what does Jesus do with a man who others may have laughed at? He sensitively "takes the man aside, away from the crowd," where no one else can follow, and heals the man in a private setting.

Barclay puts it this way: "Here is the most tender considerateness. Deaf folk are always a little embarrassed.... A deaf person knows he cannot hear; and when some-one in the crowd shouts at him and tries to make him hear, in his excitement he becomes all the more helpless. Jesus showed the most tender consideration for the feelings of a man for who life was very difficult." And a chapter later he does the same thing with the blind man at Bethsaida: "He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village."

It's nearly impossible not to see the degree of love and sensitivity and gentleness and caring Jesus exercises when healing these people.

And that's my whole point. I had a poster on the wall of my house in the Dominican Republic which said: "Where there is great love, there are great miracles." And in light of Jesus demeanor with these men / the stated compassion (or love) that moved Him to heal people in Matt. 9:36 and Mark 1:41 / and Paul's words about love being "the most excellent way" in I Cor. 13, stuck as they are in the middle of his whole discussion on the use of Spiritual Gifts / I can't end this message without telling you that LOVE is as necessary to the ministry of healing as FAITH is — maybe even moreso.

Too many people do more harm than good, because they approach healing as an exercise of power, rather than an expression of love. They rant and rave, and announce the person's struggle or sin to everyone (Nancy), making it into a big spectacle, on a stage, in front of spot lights and TV cameras — doing exactly what Jesus refused to do, or was too compassionate and loving to do.

It is true my friends — Where there is great love there will be great miracles, even moreso than where there is great faith without love. I'm even convinced from Scripture and personal experience, that the exercise of the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, etc) enhance the effectiveness of the Gifts of the Spirit. For where GREAT LOVE is present, GOD is present!