



Is it God's Will to Heal? - Matthew 8:16-17

Getting Started

Hypothetical here: you're recovering from a stomach bug...do you drink 7up or Sprite?

Discussion

Was there anything that stood out to you from the sermon that you would like to discuss further?

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew 5-7. What do you know about that sermon and how is it connected to Matthew 8-9?

What two activities does Matthew record Jesus doing in v. 16? What is your experience with these two things, if any?

How do we see Jesus respond to sickness in the gospels? Name as many different reactions as you can think of. How should that inform our response as his disciples?

Faith is an important part of Jesus' healing ministry (Matt. 8:10, 26, 9:2, 22, 29). What is faith?

As you go

In v. 17, Matthew references Isaiah 53. Read that chapter this week and meditate on anything that stands out to you.

Prayer

Who has a need they would like the Group to pray for? How about a story from this past week of victory and praise?

Pray for healing or deliverance for anyone in your group with courage enough to admit that they need healing or are feeling stuck in an area of sin or oppression.



Guest Speaker:

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"Is It God's Will To Heal?"

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First Free Church

Purpose

This study guide aims to facilitate the study of Matthew 8 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. Although the sermon centers on just two verses, I have provided the overall structure of the section and commentary on the broader passage. As Pastor Shane teaches you every week, we must interpret every verse in light of the context!

Matt. 8:16-17 ESV

16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

STRUCTUREThe Authoritative Works of Jesus (8:1-9:38)

- I. Jesus displays His authority through miracles (8:1-17)**
 - a. Healing of the Leper (8:1-4)
 - b. Healing of the Centurion's servant (8:5-13)
 - c. Healing of Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15)
 - d. General healings (8:16)
 - e. Conclusion to the first set of miracles (8:17)
- II. Jesus' authority in discipleship: (8:18-22)**
- III. Jesus displays His authority through miracles (8:23-9:8)**
 - a. Authority over the storm (8:23-27)
 - b. Authority over demons (8:28-34)
 - c. Authority to forgive sins (9:1-7)
 - d. Conclusion to the second set of miracles (9:8)
- IV. Jesus' authority in discipleship (9:9-17)**
 - a. Sinners follow Him (9:9-13)
 - b. Jesus' New Covenant Discipleship (9:14-17)
- V. Jesus displays His authority through miracles (9:18-34)**
 - a. Two women restored (9:18-26)
 - b. Two blind men healed (9:27-31)
 - c. Mute man exorcized (9:32-33a)
 - d. Conclusion to the third set of miracles (9:33b-34)

General Commentary:

Like Moses ascending the mountain to give Israel the Law, Jesus ascended a mountain to preach the greatest sermon ever - the Sermon on the Mount - where He delivered the "Law of the Kingdom." Jesus speaks with a greater authority than Moses. If the authority of Christ's *word* permeates His famous sermon (Matt. 5-7), the authority of Christ's *works* highlights the ministry that follows (Matt. 8-9). Matthew is interested in revealing our Lord as the Messianic King, whose authoritative words and deeds cannot be easily divorced. Sometimes He heals with a word (8:5-13); sometimes He calms storms with a word (8:23-27); sometimes He casts out demons with a word (8:16, 32); sometimes He forgives sins with

His words (9:1-8). Jesus is the King who conquers every enemy: sickness, storms, Satan, and sin. All authority belongs to Him.

This section of Matthew has more miracle stories than any other, and the stories are almost all shorter than in the other Gospels. Matthew intends this as an anthology, creating a robust impression of Jesus' authority as a miracle worker. Even though these stories portray many works of power, Matthew tells them as ten distinct stories. This seems intentional. It appears that Matthew continues to contrast Moses with Jesus: Moses delivered the people by ten plagues; Jesus delivered the people by healing and exorcism. We live in a different era - a "gospel" era. Good news is here in Jesus, our Greater Moses.

Jesus had a prolific earthly ministry, but He was no lone ranger. Interspersed among these ten miracle stories, Jesus calls sinners to follow Him as disciples. Unlike sickness, storms, and Satan, not every sinner says obeys. Jesus displays His authority by calling disciples, but He refuses to drag them against their will. Those who reject Jesus receive the "woes" of His final sermon (Matt. 23); those who say yes receive the beatitudes of His first sermon (Matt. 5).

Moving from the broad storyline to the narrow scope of Matthew 8:16-17, the first verse provides a general summary of Christ's vast ministry of healing and deliverance; the second one portrays how this ministry fulfills prophecy and fits into His atoning work.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY

16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

--"That evening": this appears to be the evening of the same day when Jesus "came down from the mountain" (8:1) after preaching about the kingdom. The narrative flow thus links Christ's authoritative *teaching* and *miracle-working*. These belong to the same fabric of Christ's kingship. We observe the link between *proclamation* and *demonstration* throughout Matthew's Gospel:

- [Mat 4:23 ESV] 23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease** and every affliction among the people.
- [Mat 9:35 ESV] 35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease** and every affliction.
- [Mat 10:7-8 ESV] 7 And proclaim as you go, saying, '**The kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.** You received without paying; give without pay.

--"they brought to him":

- This is faith for healing in action. The people "brought" the sick to Jesus, hoping that He might touch them. When Jesus came to town, everybody who stayed home stayed sick. The faith of their friends and family members expressed itself by doing whatever they could to bring their loved ones to Jesus. This is a principle we see throughout the Gospels. The people who get healed are those who inconvenience themselves, elbow their way to the front of the crowd, and cry out for mercy even when crowds tell them to shut up. Faith is not passive. Faith assertively does whatever it takes to touch Jesus.
- When people hear about healing and deliverance ministry, they'll travel far and wide to receive it. Some say that we don't need these ministries any longer because we already have the gospel. For instance, here is Reformer John Calvin: "*[The] gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the preaching of the gospel marvelous forever...*"
- I like Calvin, but this makes no sense. Jesus had "the gospel of the kingdom," and His signs did not detract from it; they magnified it. Jesus is a show-and-tell Messiah.

- His subsequent death, resurrection, and ascension did not change this. Jesus continues “to do and teach” - to show and tell, to proclaim and demonstrate - from His seat at God the Father’s right hand (Acts 1:1), through His Spirit-empowered church (1:8).
 - When a church begins to move in power, people will be “brought out” to receive the continued ministry of Jesus. Miracles open wide doors for the gospel. This purpose did not expire in the first century. According to JP Moreland, about 70% of rapid evangelistic growth worldwide occurs because of signs and wonders.
 - In this story, Christ’s miracles made much of the gospel. When healing ministry is practiced correctly, we make much of Christ, not ourselves and our platform.
- “oppressed by demons... healed all who were sick”:
- Scripture distinguishes between demon oppression and sickness. Some illnesses are caused by demons; some are not.
 - We do well to maintain this tension. Some people blame everything on demons, trying to cast them out of people who don’t have them, which unintentionally embarrasses and shames them. Others discount demonic causes outright, betraying their reliance on science but not Scripture to define their worldview. Worse, they leave demonized people in the same state as before.
 - The word “oppressed” is the Greek word, *daimonidzomai*, which could be rendered, “demonized.” The word “oppressed” is a good translation, but it does not necessarily reflect that the oppression—whether physical, mental, or spiritual—hounds people “from the inside.” The context leaves no doubt, though. Jesus “cast out the spirits,” suggesting they had taken up occupancy.
 - A few more notes on demonization:
 - Demonization can be articulated as *having a demon* (Mat. 11:18; Luk. 4:33; 7:33; 8:27; Jhn. 7:20; 8:48, 49, 52; 10:20).
 - Multiple demons can inhabit a person (Luke 8:2, 30).
 - Arnold: “The expression, ‘he has a demon’ (echei daimonion) does appear in the Gospels (e.g. Luke 4:33; 8:27), but the inverse, ‘a demon has him’ never occurs.”
 - Jesus healed “all who were sick” in this story. Other similar verses:
 - Matt. 4:23: Jesus healed “*every disease and every affliction among the people.*”
 - Mark 6:56: “*And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.*”
 - Luke 4:40: “*Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.*”
 - Nevertheless, Jesus did not heal every single person on every single occasion:
 - He did not heal many in His hometown because of their unbelief (Matt. 13; Mark 6).
 - He healed one man at the pool of Bethesda but passed by many others (John 5).
 - Likewise, the apostles occasionally healed every single person:
 - Acts 5:16: “*The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*”
 - Acts 28:9: “*And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.*”
 - Nevertheless, the apostles did not heal every single person on every single occasion:
 - Gal. 4:13: “*You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first.*”
 - Phil. 2:26-27: “*for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed*

because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."

- 1 Tim. 5:23: *"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."*
- 2 Tim. 4:20: *"Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus."*
- These stories add nuance to our understanding of healing. Healing was not "on command" even for Jesus. He didn't always heal everyone, every single time, and neither did His apostles.
- Whatever "theology of healing" we land on, it must leave space for mystery. Some are not healed. It must also make space for miracles. Many people are healed.
- John 1:1 describes Jesus as "the Word of God." Just like our words express our hearts, God's Word—Jesus—perfectly expresses His heart. If you ever have a question about the Father's heart—what He loves, what He hates, what He wills—look at Jesus. The Father's heart is to heal everyone.
- How can it be that God's heart—His will and desire—is to heal everyone? Does not the evidence prove otherwise? Many are not healed, as we observed above.
 - We have many examples like this in Scripture. I'll focus on one. God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), yet not all are saved. This must mean that God has two wills. If Arminians are correct, it means that God wills all to be saved, but He has a greater will (or desire) for all to have a free choice. For Arminians, God's will for humans to maintain freedom to choose or not choose Christ trumps even God's will for all humans to be saved.
 - Calvinists have a similar solution, for they too believe in two wills of God. Like Arminians, Calvinists believe God wills (or desires) all to be saved. However, He has a greater desire that trumps even that: the desire to maintain His own freedom in electing sinners for His own good pleasure and glory.
 - Without getting lost in the debate between Arminians and Calvinists, their theology of "two wills" applies to healing.
 - In a sense, God wants everyone healed. He created a world without sickness, came to bear our infirmities, and suffered death to end all death—and the illnesses that cause it—forever. As He says through Jeremiah, whatever afflictions we suffer, they do not come "from his heart" (Lam. 3:33).
 - In another sense, God wills that suffering and illness continue for a season until Christ returns, as the examples above illustrate.
- One more note about the connection between healing and casting out demons. Everyone agrees that demons are enemies, but church folks tend to treat sickness differently. We act like sickness is a gift for deepening our faith. This thinking crept in centuries ago when the church traded its theology of healing for a theology of suffering—lionizing the latter but almost abandoning the former—rather than holding them in tension. In truth, God redeems our suffering (Rom. 8:28), transforming us through it (Rom. 5:3-5), but this does not mean we should desire suffering over healing. Healing prayer is commanded in Scripture (James 5:14-16).
- We don't have to choose between a theology of suffering and healing; we can have both. We can wring the rag of affliction for every drop of wisdom, even as we plead for our Father to end the anguish speedily.
- Casting out demons and healing the sick go hand-in-hand. Like the devil, sickness is not

a friend; it's an enemy. There's never in instance in this passage, nor in all the Gospels, where Jesus says, "You need to keep your sickness; it's a gift from God." Instead, when Jesus saw sickness and disease, He got emotional. His heart broke. In Mark 7, He sighed with agony over the suffering of a deaf man. In John 11, He weeps over the death of Lazarus. Jesus hated disease and sickness with a visceral, palpable, emotional energy. Every single time Jesus encountered sickness, He treated it as an enemy.

- Learn everything you can from your pain. But unless God tells you to stop praying for healing, pray for healing. That's what Jesus did. He always treated sickness as an enemy.
- My personal practice is to assume God wants to heal someone unless He tells me otherwise. A good example of this is the Apostle Paul. Nobody knows with certainty what his "thorn in the flesh" was, but it doesn't matter. Paul pleads for God to remove it three times, and finally, God says no - He had redemptive reasons for leaving it. In the same way, we can pray for healing (or anything else) with confidence that our Father answers. We can plead like Paul, assuming His goodness as the ground for our prayers—but without ever presuming. God can say no. Until He says no, I think we can pray as though His answer will be yes.
- This gets harder after many years of praying. My encouragement would be to not place your hope in the answer to prayer but instead in the One who answers prayer. If He doesn't answer, prayer still brings us closer to Him. If He does answer, that brings us closer, too. At the end of the day, life is not about "getting our answers"; it's about friendship with God.

--Consistently throughout this "miracle anthology," Matthew emphasizes the role of faith:

- **Healing of the centurion's servant** (8:10): *"When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."*
- **Calming of the sea** (8:26): *"And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"*
- **Healing and forgiveness of the paralytic** (9:2): *And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."*
- **Healing of the issue of blood** (9:22): *Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.*
- **Healing of the blind men** (9:29): *Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."*

--Despite what faith healers claim, faith is not psychological certainty. Nor is it a denial of reality, as though we must pretend we are healed when we are not. Abraham accepted that his body "was as good as dead" (Rom. 4:19), yet he "did not waver" and "grew strong in faith" (4:20).

--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego display faith when they tell Nebuchadnezzar, who promises to burn them alive: *"our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."* (Dan. 3:17-18). Notice that they don't have to know the outcome in advance to serve as models of faith. They have confidence in God's character, which causes them to assume God will probably save them. But even if He doesn't save them, they still won't compromise their faith.

--"demons... spirits":

- Demons are wicked spirit beings that serve Satan and oppose God.
- Demons tempt (1 Kgs. 22:22), deceive (1 Tim. 4:1), and afflict (Luk. 13:11).
- Demons perform these functions as angels/messengers of Satan (2 Cor. 12:7; cf. Matt. 25:41).

- Augustine: “‘Angel is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit’; if you seek the name of their office, it is ‘angel.’ From what they are, ‘spirit’; from what they do, ‘angel.’”

--“with a word”:

- I have commented above about Matthew’s emphasis on the authoritative “word” of Jesus. However, we should not infer that Jesus cast out every demon with just one word. With the Gerasene demoniac, Mark’s Gospel portrays the deliverance as a process with the past participle verb tense: “For he **was saying to him**, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit” (Mark 5:8 ESV).
- Keener: “Many of Jesus’ contemporaries sought to chase away demons by means of incantations, pain compliance techniques like smelly roots, or invocation of higher spirits to get rid of lower ones....”
- Justin Martyr (2nd century): “Every demon exorcised in the name of the Son of God, the First-born of all creatures, who was born of a virgin and endured human suffering, who was crucified by your nation under Pontius Pilate, who died and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven—every demon exorcised in this name is mastered and subdued. Whereas if you exorcise in the name of any king or righteous man, or prophet, or patriarch, who has been one of yourselves, no demon will be subject to you. . . . Your exorcists, I have already said, are like the Gentiles in using special arts, employing fumigation and magic incantations.”
- Tertullian (3rd century): “For it is not by incantations that Christians seem to prevail (over evil spirits), but by the name of Jesus, accompanied by the announcement of the narratives which relate to Him; for the repetition of these has frequently been the means of driving demons out of men, especially when those who repeated them did so in a sound and genuinely believing spirit.”

17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”

--Matthew consistently quotes the Old Testament to show how Jesus fulfills it. Here, he cites Isaiah 53, which is quoted many times in the New Testament. It is one of four “servant songs,” which portray the vicarious sufferings of a Jewish servant for Israel and the world.

--Isaiah 53 is the most famous of the servant songs because of how profusely it elaborates on Christ’s atonement, eight centuries before Christ came.

--Matthew’s quote appears to be slightly different from the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, although it captures all the same ideas. Some scholars believe he uses a variant Septuagint, and others see him providing an “author’s translations.”

--This verse fascinates me because it refers to Jesus’ earthly healing ministry in 8:16, yet the quotation sounds like it refers to Jesus’ death on the cross - that he “took our illnesses and bore our diseases” on Calvary. What is going on?

- Matthew is quoting Isaiah 53:4, which could speak of Jesus’ life, His death, or both. I don’t know which translation Matthew worked from, but here’s the ESV, which translates the Masoretic text: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” Again, Matthew renders “griefs” as “illnesses” and “sorrows” as “diseases.” Both are true. But when does Jesus bear these afflictions? In His earthly life or in His death on the cross?
- Part of the reason we struggle to parse this is that the atonement was not just about Christ’s death. That was the climax, but if a lamb acquired any blemishes throughout its life, it could no longer be offered in sacrifice. Likewise, Christ’s atoning death holds no meaning apart from the righteous life that preceded it. We can’t entirely divorce the life

and death of Christ. Just like Jesus forgave sin before paying for it on the Cross, He healed sickness before bearing it in full.

- Does this mean that Jesus technically paid for sins and bore our diseases on the cross, but His earthly ministry applied some of those benefits in advance?
- That could be a solution. Jesus' earthly ministry demonstrated the beginning of His reign, which culminates in subsequent events.
- Another solution is that Isaiah 53:4 - about bearing griefs/sorrows/illnesses/diseases - is focused exclusively on Christ's ministry in Capernaum. To support this, we need only to view the context, where Christ ministers there through healing, long before the cross is in view. While I like the simplicity of this view, it is hard to understand how Christ might have borne our emotional and physical burdens through His ministry in one small village alone. When Matthew quotes Isaiah, it can't mean that Jesus ONLY fulfilled verse 4 for those specific individuals. Isaiah's prophecy is far too universal to apply to a few hundred (or possibly thousand) people in some ancient Jewish town. Matthew must mean that Christ's healing ministry in its entirety fulfilled Isaiah 53:4, of which the ministry in Capernaum provided an example. It would be like saying, "Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53:4 when He healed in Capernaum, for example, and also throughout Israel."
 - If this is true - that fulfillment in Capernaum was exemplary of a broader fulfillment - then we can easily extend that fulfillment all the way to His death on the Cross.
 - In other words, it's possible to say: "Jesus bore our infirmities through His healing ministry in Capernaum and beyond, culminating on Calvary, where He bore them once and for all."
- Supporting this view is that Isaiah 53:4 precedes a verse that mentions healing in the context of Christ's death. Here are verses 4 and 5 in full context:
 - *"Surely he has borne our griefs (Matthew: "illnesses") and carried our sorrows (Matthew: "diseases"); yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and **with his wounds we are healed.**"*
 - Especially when we link Matthew's translation of 53:4 with the healing mentioned in verse 5, it becomes harder to separate Christ's earthly healing ministry and His "wounds" in which we are "healed." These are all connected.
 - Some have tried to say that "with his wounds we are healed" refers to spiritual healing. In a sense, they are correct (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24), but Matthew's translation and inspired application prevent us from overly restricting the healing as spiritual. The word "peace" (Heb. shalom) in verse 5 would have been all-encompassing of spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational peace.
- In what sense did Jesus carry our sorrows and illnesses during His earthly life? Michael Green remarks, *"Matthew sees him coming from the mountain of revelation (chs. 5-7) and entering into the valley of the shadow, where sickness and demonic forces held sway. And he was willing to carry the burden of the pain, ostracism and defilement of broken humankind, just as he would later bear its sin. Here is a fulfillment of the prophet's words deeper than he could have ever imagined."* I think Green captures well how Jesus bore our infirmities in His earthly life by entering into "the shadow" and bearing the weight of sorrow over sickness and spiritual warfare. Having prayed for many sick people, it truly is a burden to bear, especially when you do so for many hours.
- In another sense, as we've observed, Jesus also carried our sorrows and illnesses on the Cross. Isaiah 53:4 connects so closely with verses 5 and following about crucifixion that we cannot separate them.

- R.A. Torrey: "It is often said that this verse teaches that the atoning death of Jesus Christ avails for our sicknesses as well as for our sins; or, in other words, that 'physical healing is in the atonement.' I think that is a fair inference from these verses when looked at in their context."
- To summarize: Jesus began to bear our sorrows and illnesses through His earthly healing ministry when He entered the shadow of spiritual, emotional, and physiological suffering, laboring under great pressure and against great forces, to set people free. However, this was only the beginning. Jesus continued bearing our sorrows and illnesses on the cross, where He was pierced for our transgressions and wounded for our healing.
- Some commentators who agree with my view that Matthew 8:17 applies to both the healing ministry and atoning death of Christ:
 - Morris, commenting on Matthew's usage of Isaiah 53: *"There may be the thought that Jesus in some way took on himself the ailments he cured; healing is at cost. There is certainly the thought that the final answer to sickness is in the cross. As Gundry puts it, 'The healings anticipate the passion in that they begin to roll back the effects of the sins for which Jesus came to die.'"*
 - Keener: *"Matthew cites Isaiah 53:4 to demonstrate that Jesus' mission of healing fulfills the character of the mission of the servant, who at the ultimate cost of his own life would reveal God's concern for broken humanity."*

--I believe this passage teaches that "healing is in the atonement."

--One downside of saying, "healing is in the atonement," is that faith healers have equated forgiveness with outward healing, as though we experience them the same way. Based on the atonement, they teach that everyone who has faith is healed, just as everyone who has faith is forgiven. The negative corollary to that is that if you aren't healed, it's because you lack faith. While this is sometimes true, the matter is not so simple. I've tried to demonstrate this above through biblical examples of folks who were not healed despite their obvious faith.

--Despite this downside, I don't mind saying that "healing is in the atonement," because I don't think the Bible neatly divides the benefits of Calvary. I agree that sin and forgiveness are central features of Christ's atoning work, but I view the Cross as a kaleidoscope of benefits, which come to us by faith - some in this age, and some in the age to come.

--D.A. Carson offers a helpful comment: *"This text and others clearly teach that there is healing in the Atonement; but similarly there is the promise of a resurrection body in the Atonement, even if believers do not inherit it until the Parousia (Christ's return). From the perspectives of the NT writers, the Cross is the basis for all the benefits that accrue to believers; but this does not mean that all such benefits can be secured at the present time on demand, any more than we have the right and power to demand our resurrection bodies."*