

This morning, I am in the fifth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "Meeting Jesus." I am making my way through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning, we are going to be in Luke 4:31-43, looking at Jesus and his interactions with the sick and demon-possessed.

Luke 4:31–43 - Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people.³² They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.³³ In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice,³⁴ "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"³⁵ "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "**Come out of him!**" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.³⁶ All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!"³⁷ And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.³⁸ Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they **asked Jesus to help her.**³⁹ So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.⁴⁰ At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.⁴¹ Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.⁴² At daybreak, **Jesus went out to a solitary place.** The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.⁴³ But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

This passage will be one of many in Luke's gospel where Jesus heals the sick and the demon-possessed. I want to highlight three things from this passage:

1) Jesus has authority over all evil and disease, and has compassion for those who are suffering

Healing and casting out demons is an integral part of Jesus' ministry because not only does he have authority over all evil and disease, but he has compassion for those who are suffering. First of all, notice that the people observing Jesus are amazed by his authority.

Luke 4:32 - They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

And he healed and cast out demons with authority.

Luke 4:36 - All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!”

Luke 4:39 - So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her.

Notice that Jesus does not need to quote others or call upon any other powers, for he has all authority in Himself. He isn't just some good teacher or inspirational leader; He does not need some magic formula; he just tells the demons or the sickness what to do and it obeys. Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, as the demons declare. He has come to defeat the devil and take authority over every kind of evil.

1 John 3:8 - The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Colossians 2:13–15 - When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Jesus heals not only because He has the authority to do so, but because he has compassion on those who are suffering.

Luke 4:40 - At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

Notice that he does not just wave his hands and give a blanket healing; he lays his hands on each person who comes to him for healing, a very personal and intimate expression of compassion. As Matthew put it:

Matthew 9:35–36 - Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease

and sickness.³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

If you've ever seen The Chosen, this is one of the things it does well, is communicate the love and compassion that Jesus has for those who are suffering from sickness and demon oppression or possession. Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and has all authority over evil, over demons, over sickness, over nature. As He goes about His ministry, He demonstrates this by healing the sick and casting out demons.

George Ladd states, "Our Lord's ministry and announcement of the good news of the kingdom were characterized by healing and, most notably, by casting out demons. He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, and he demonstrated the good news of the kingdom of God by delivering men from the bondage of Satan."

Or, as Jesus put it:

Matthew 12:28 – "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Know that Jesus has authority over all evil and disease, and that He has compassion for those who are suffering. He is not unable, and He is not uncaring towards your suffering.

2) Jesus' priority is proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God

Luke 4:42-43 - At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.⁴³ But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

It must have been hard to leave. Jesus was full of compassion, and there were still many people in need of healing. He was drawing a crowd that appreciated and desired to experience more of His authoritative teaching and compassionate healing. And yet he left to go elsewhere. As he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

While Jesus had many facets to His mission, His priority is proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Listen: God loves you, He is compassionate towards your suffering, and he wants wholeness for his people. But the reality is that even if your back or your cancer or your depression is healed, you will get sick again, and eventually you will die. But if your deeper sickness of sin is healed, if you hear the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God, that if you trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, then you can be right with God and have eternal life, then that healing is forever. And on that day when you are with Him in the new heavens and new earth, there will be no more suffering or sickness or death.

Revelation 21:1–5 - Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

The reality is that, as important as physical healing is, salvation from sin is infinitely more important. And sometimes, in the mysterious wisdom of God, this will mean a no answer to healing. Joni Eareckson Tada was paralyzed as a teenager in a diving accident, and despite many fervent prayers for healing, was never healed of her paralysis. But over time, she came to realize that her sin, her spiritual ailments, were worse than her physical ailments, and that God had been using her experience with paralysis to cure her of her pride, her anger, and her self-righteousness. She gave a fantastic talk entitled “A Deeper Healing,” and in that talk, Joni Eareckson Tada said, “The same God who healed eyes and hands also said gouge out your eye if it causes you to sin. Cut off your hand if it leads you into sin.”

Matthew 5:29–30 – “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

We have to keep this in the proper perspective. As important as physical healing is, salvation from sin is more important, because it is healing from an eternal sickness and eternal death. This is Jesus' priority, and it must be ours as well.

3) We should pray in faith for healing and deliverance while recognizing that the kingdom of God is here already but not yet in its fullness

So how should we, as Jesus' followers, approach healing and deliverance? When it comes to praying for healing, we need to avoid the extremes on this subject. On one end are those who teach and believe that God does not heal miraculously today, or that the demonic is not real, so we should not pray for healing or against our spiritual enemy. Some believe that such miracles stopped with the time of the apostles. Others believe that there aren't such things as miracles or spiritual evil.

For example, the late John MacArthur, in his sermon "A Case for Cessationism," said, "We mean that the Spirit no longer sovereignly gives individual believers the miraculous spiritual gifts that are listed in the Scripture and that were present in the first-century church. It is neither the Spirit's plan, nor His normal pattern to distribute miraculous spiritual gifts to Christians and churches today as He did in the times of the Apostles. Those gifts ceased as normative with the apostles."

But the Bible does list these gifts as the some of the gifts of the Spirit, without qualifying that they are only for the apostles:

1 Corinthians 12:7–11 - Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who teach and believe that as long as you have enough faith, you will be healed every time, that the truly faithful person will never get sick.

As Kenneth Copeland put it, "God intends for every believer to live completely free from sickness and disease. It is up to you to decide whether or not you will."

But the Biblical truth is somewhere in the middle. The Bible does not declare that there is no absolute causality between faith and healing, that those who have enough faith will be healed every time. Sometimes people were sick.

2 Timothy 4:20 - Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

1 Timothy 5:23 - Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

Notice that Paul does not rebuke Timothy for his lack of faith and tell him to claim the healing that is his. He tells him to drink wine for his stomach and illness. On the subject of faith, Hebrews 11 can be instructive for us. The writer of Hebrews records those who were faithful; after 35 verses of the great things God did for the faithful, there is a turn:

Hebrews 11:35–40 - Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ **the world was not worthy of them.** They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

The Biblical reality on healing is in the middle, not on the extremes. We should pray boldly and in faith for God to heal, believing that he desires our wholeness. But we also pray humbly, recognizing that we live in the already/not yet of the kingdom of God. In Christ's death and resurrection, the kingdom of God has broken into this world and defeated the devil. But until he comes again, the devil and his demons are still at work, and this world is still broken. People still get sick and not every disease is healed.

Romans 8:22–23 - We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

And as pastor and theologian Thomas Smail said, “We are to remember that besides faith, there is hope. Hope has to do with God's promises that are still future and hidden. Just as faith has to do with God's promises that are here and now. To the person who has believed for today but has not seen the answer come today, there comes the call to hope. Hope says, ‘Tomorrow also is God's. Enough has happened already to assure you that the rest is on the way.’”

We live in the reality of God's kingdom today as we await the consummation of that reality when He returns. Nevertheless, we are called to pray in faith for healing and deliverance out of a Christlike compassion for others and out of a desire to see God give us a glimpse of the new heavens and new earth.

Luke 9:1–2 - When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Matthew 10:7–8 – “As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”

Mark 6:12–13 - They went out and preached that people should repent.¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

And lest we think these instructions were only for the apostles, do not forget this amazing promise:

John 14:12 - Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

So how do we pray for healing? Jesus healed primarily by command, because He had authority over sickness and evil. Sometimes the apostles also healed by command:

Acts 3:6 - Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”

Other times they prayed to God for Him to heal.

Acts 9:40 - Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

Acts 28:8 - His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him.

And these words from James:

James 5:14–15 - Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

We believe that God can heal, and that He desires wholeness. As followers of Jesus, we are to possess the same compassion for those who are sick or in pain. We must be willing to take the risk to pray for healing, knowing that the answer may be no. We recognize that healing is a mystery, not some name it claim it formula. But let us commit ourselves to proclaiming the kingdom reign of our compassionate God, not only through preaching the gospel, but through praying for healing and praying against the enemy.