

“The Greatest Physician”

Matthew 8:1-17

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When Jeff Moore was 13, his feet began to hurt - a lot. Doctors were not exactly sure why, but the pain gradually became so great that Jeff was confined to a wheelchair. Over the next few years, he had countless doctor appointments, physical therapy, acupuncture, and five different surgeries, but nothing really changed. There was still too much pain for Jeff to even stand up, much less walk.

Almost every Sunday Jeff's parents would wheel him into the church they attended in the Calf Bay area. Jeff certainly believed in the Lord but could not understand why God allowed him to suffer as he did. He tried not to be bitter or complain, but life was not easy.

Then one Sunday when Jeff was 19, his family came to church without the wheelchair. Jeff walked down the aisle with apparent ease. As the service started, the pastor said Jeff's mom had something to share. She stood up, reported how Jeff had gone to a healing service at another church in the area, and God had miraculously healed him. The pain was gone from his feet. He was able to walk without any difficulty.

A few years later, Christian journalist, Tim Stafford who had been at the church that day when Jeff's healing had been announced, interviewed him. Jeff was still walking without any pain. He seemed hesitant to talk much about either his years in a wheelchair or the remarkable healing he had experienced. Jeff said he was just grateful he could walk, and thankful for how his family had supported him during those difficult teenage years.

Friends, what is your reaction to that story? What do you think about reports of seemingly miraculous, physical healing? Some folks get very excited, even euphoric, when they hear of someone being healed by God. Others are quite skeptical and point to fraudulent claims of certain faith healers of healing ministries. For example, it has been reported that one faith healer asks some of the people who walk into his meeting to sit in one of a hundred wheelchairs he has at the back of the auditorium. Then, when the alter call

is given, these folks are to get up out of the wheelchairs and walk forward as testimony to what God has done in their lives.

The validity of miraculous healing continues to be a controversial issue within Christianity. I remember hearing of a Baptist church where the pastor's wife, who had cancer, went to a faith healing service. She and her husband publicly claimed the Lord had healed her, but she then died a few weeks later. There was a lot of discussion and division in that congregation over whether or not it was right to claim this type of healing.

Now, when it comes to controversial topics, the easy thing for a pastor to do, some would say the smart thing, is to just ignore the topic, to not talk about it. Yet, it is difficult to ignore the topic of healing when doing a series through the gospel of Matthew.

Today the text we will explore is Matthew 8:1-17. In the first 15 verses of this passage Jesus heals three different people. Then in verse 16, we are told that many people were brought to Jesus, “and He healed all who were sick.” Though there are numerous lessons to learn from this passage, the main question that keeps coming up is this: “Does Jesus still heal people today? If I am sick will Jesus heal me?”

These are not easy questions, but as your pastor, the Lord has called me to help you see what the Bible says about questions you may have. I would encourage all of us to ask the Lord, by His Word and through His Spirit, to give us a fresh and clear perspective on the truth about healing. Let's pause and pray that would happen.

The first individual we meet in Matthew 8 is a man with leprosy who in **Matthew 8:2 came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”** Then a remarkable thing happens. **8:3 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.**

Matthew then tells us what happened in Capernaum, a village on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. A centurion, who was a Roman officer in charge of about 100 soldiers, comes to Jesus and says, **8:6,7 Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.** And Jesus said to him, **“I will come and heal him.”** Apparently, this soldier knows about Jesus, his faith is strong. He says, **“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.”** Then in verse **8:13 To the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.**

Matthew then turns his focus to an event which happens within Jesus’ immediate circle. **8:14, 15 And when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.** We don’t know exactly what type of relationship Peter had with his mother-in-law, but he seems thrilled to have her back in good health.

We are not going to spend anymore time analyzing these texts today. I want you to note that these are just three of the numerous times, that Jesus miraculously heals someone of disease of physical disability in Matthew’s gospel. He is the greatest physician one could ever imagine.

In recent decades we have seen remarkable advances in medicine. It is not too long ago that doctors were using leeches to suck out the bad blood of people who had certain diseases. 120 years ago, most in the medical community refused to believe surgery could be done using a local anesthetic. So, one doctor, seeking to prove it would work, took out his own appendix under local anesthesia, because he could find no one else to volunteer for the procedure.

Now, if you go to the hospital today, you will see all sorts of marvelous equipment, from ultrasound machines that allow you to see a baby inside the mother’s uterus, to handheld scanners that can detect certain cancerous cells in a body. I remember watching Star Trek 50 years ago and being fascinated by their depictions of what medicine would be like in the future. I always liked how Dr. McCoy could give shots without

injecting a needle and thought, “Boy, wouldn’t it be great if doctors could do that now.” Yet even science fiction doctors are light years behind Jesus. He simply speaks and people are completely healed. He is, without question, the greatest physician.

Okay, now we turn to our big question. Does Jesus still heal people today? Does God miraculously and directly heal folks that doctors cannot help? My answer to this question has two parts. The first part of the answer is “Yes, the Lord still heals people today.”

Some of my friends say, “No Dan, the purpose of Jesus’ healing ministry was to prove His deity, to prove He was God.” They also say the apostle’s ability to heal, such as in Acts 3 when, instead of giving a crippled beggar money, they heal him so he can walk, that was a sign of their unique authority as Jesus’ representatives. Thus, they say, the healing God did through Jesus and the apostles had a very specific purpose. It makes sense that God would not do the same thing through other Christians. So, there is no reason to expect miraculous healing today.

Now, part of that argument is correct. Miraculous healings were indeed signs that identified Jesus as God’s Son and identified the apostles as His representatives. Yet, concluding that Jesus and His apostles are the only one’s capable of experiencing or performing miraculous healing is unwarranted. Nothing in the New Testament indicates that God would only heal people this way in the first century. If you know of a verse that says that, please let me know, but I don’t think there is one. There are other reasons why a miraculous healing may occur besides being a sign of authority.

Let’s look at **Matthew 8:16,17 that evening (after Jesus had healed Peter’s mother-in-law) 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. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”** There are other possible interpretations, but I think this means that one benefit Christians receive from the death of Jesus on the cross is physical healing. Not only are our sins forgiven because Jesus died for us, but also

our diseases will be healed. The salvation we receive through Jesus Christ means not just that our soul will be saved, but that our body will be made whole. Cancer, diabetes, backaches, and near sightedness, will all be eliminated. Maybe you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, that sounds a bit radical," but I would maintain that throughout the centuries, every believer in Jesus will be free from all diseases, sickness, and pain. The only question has been, when will this happen? That brings me to the second part of my answer.

Does Jesus still heal people today? Yes, but... People don't always experience physical healing in this life. Not everyone will be healed when they want to be. There is nothing wrong with a desire for healing. It is appropriate to pray for physical healing. But it is not necessarily God's will to heal you or anyone at any particular time. And if it is not God's will to perform a miraculous healing, it will not occur.

I know some folks say, "If we had more faith, no one would ever be sick." That is just not true. Let me remind you of a number of cases of New Testament illnesses that apparently were not cured by faith and prayer.

In 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul leaves Trophimus behind because he is ill. Why didn't Paul just heal him? In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul tells Timothy to drink wine for the stomach ailment he has. Again, why not just pray for healing. In Philippians 2:27, Paul talks about how God does not answer his prayer to remove "a thorn in the flesh," which almost certainly was a physical problem of some type.

Not every Christian who got sick in the New Testament was miraculously healed. If they were, some of them might be alive today. Thus, we should not be surprised that not every Christian who gets sick today, will be healed at this time, no matter how much faith that person has or how many prayers are directed toward that end.

However, one day there will be total physical healing for every believer in Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15, God makes it clear that we each receive a new, glorified, immortal, disease proof body when Jesus returns, and the resurrection occurs. In Revelations 21, we are told that in the New Jerusalem, our eternal home, we will experience no more pain. There is nothing wrong

with asking God to heal you now, but you must realize that you may have to wait, even wait until heaven, before you receive this healing. Folks, today you and I live in an in-between time. Jesus' kingdom began when He was on this planet 2000 years ago. Yet, His kingdom will not be complete until Jesus, The King, returns to earth to rule. We are part of the "already, but not yet, Kingdom."

The analogy often used to explain is taken from World War 2, the European theater, D-Day and VE Day. When the Allied troops successfully landed on the beaches of Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 1944, it spelled the defeat of Nazi Germany. The Allies were going to win the war. Yet, it would be months, almost a year, before that victory would be complete. Germany would not surrender until May of 1945. Between D-Day and VE-Day, victory was already, but not yet. And during that in between time, many Allied soldiers lost their lives. In a similar way, when Jesus established His kingdom 2000 years ago, as He died on the cross and rose from the dead, the defeat of evil. The evil one and all the consequences of evil, including sickness, was assured. Yet, freedom from sickness and pain will not be complete for Christian until Jesus returns.

Sometimes when Jesus responds to our prayers and heals an illness, we get a taste of the "already" part of that victory. Yet because part of this victory is not yet, there will be times when we pray for healing, and it will seem that God does not answer. A 45-year-old man who really loves the Lord, gets cancer. Many Christians are praying God will heal him. Yet, six months later he dies. That happens during the "not yet." And there are certain diseases and disabilities, Down's Syndrome for example, that never seem to be healed. That is part of the kingdom that is not yet.

However, because part of the kingdom of Jesus is truly present in us through the Holy Spirit, there will be times when someone is very sick, when doctors say there is nothing they can do, when friends and family give up hope, that God will then work in a marvelous and miraculous way and will heal her. The Lord heals that woman, just as He healed the Leper, the Centurion's servant, and Peter's mother-in-law in our text today.

Friends, I realize some of you may disagree with some of what I have said about healing. Perhaps

you are still convinced that everyone who has enough faith will be healed of any illness. Or perhaps you think miraculous healing is not something that happens anymore.

Well, you are certainly free to disagree with me. But I do challenge you to search the scriptures to check out what the Bible says. And see if what you believe is true. It is the Bible, not our opinions, not our experiences, that is our authority as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Now. Let me mention three things we need to keep in mind as we think about healing.

#1 – The fact that Jesus still heals people is not a reason for us to avoid doctors and medication. If I become sick, I think the first thing I should do is pray and ask God to heal that illness. The story of King Asa in 2 Chronicles 16, reminds us it is wrong to seek the help of physicians, but ignore the Lord.

Yet, after we pray, it is appropriate to seek medical treatment. Doctors and medication are part of God's common grace that are given for our benefit. To demand that God perform a miraculous healing rather than use medical treatment He has provided, is testing the Lord. Just as the devil tempted Jesus to jump off the top of the temple and then expect God's angels to rescue Him, people today are sometimes tempted to test the Lord by refusing available medical help.

Most tragic is when children are denied medical treatment and die, because their parents think prayer is the only appropriate treatment. Though we must not allow confidence in doctors to replace faith in God, we ought to use the resources the Lord gives. A Christian who prays that God will meet his financial needs should not quit his job and wait for God to stick a check in the mailbox. A Christian who asks God to provide physical healing still needs to use physicians and medicine.

#2 – Remember, the Bible does give us instructions on what to do when we are sick. They are found in **James 5:14, 15** **Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has**

committed sins, he will be forgiven. Now. I don't mean to pick on faith healing ministries, but it doesn't seem that is the Biblical pattern.

Instead, it is in the context of the local church that healing is to be received. Sick people are to ask the elders, the leaders of the church to meet with and pray for them.

Now I suspect the part of anointing with oil sounds a little weird to some of you. When I first read these verses, I thought of 5W-30 motor oil and it seemed very strange. Yet, the oil, usually olive oil, is not magical. It is a symbol of God's healing power. And this is not a fancy ceremony. It is a simple private gathering, that the Bible says God often uses to bring physical healing to His people. I want to make sure everyone in this room is aware that if you are sick, whether it is a serious illness or not so serious, the Deacons and Pastors of Chisholm Baptist church would be glad to get together with you and pray for healing for your body.

#3 – Remember, though physical healing can be a marvelous blessing from the Lord, it is only a shadow of what God offers us in Jesus Christ. Sickness of the soul can be far more painful and far more deadly than any physical disease. When we turn to Jesus, He promises to help free us from the bitterness, the shame, the lust or the jealousy that are cancers of the soul. And most importantly, through His death on the cross, Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin. The very real guilt that all of us have because of our rebellion against God has been wiped clean. If by God's grace you will turn to Jesus Christ, put your trust in Him, you will experience free and full forgiveness. The relationship with God our Creator, that had been severed because of our sin, is healed and God becomes not just our Creator, but our Father.

He is our Father who loves us today, meets our needs, will sometimes heal our bodies in marvelous ways, but who most importantly promises to never leave or forsake us. And He will bring us to our tetanal home in heaven, where there will be no more death, crying, or pain or sickness.

That, folks, is the hope every believer in Jesus has. It is your hope when you are enjoying excellent health. It is your hope when you are dealing with the intense pain of an abscessed tooth. It is your

hope when you are lying in hospital bed,
unconscious, and the doctor says it won't be long.

Let's celebrate our hope in life and death as we
close with that song.