

HEALINGS—THEN AND NOW

“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.”

Matthew 8:16

“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.” Acts 5:16

“For to the one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

There is no question that an important part of both the ministry of Jesus and his Apostles was the healing of diseases. Since we are to be followers of Christ, to what extent should this practice be carried on by Christians today? To what extent should the faithful follower of the Master expect alleviation of his physical distresses through divine healing? Upon these questions revolve an active dialog and discussion amongst many Christians today.

SOME IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS

There are a number of observations that can be made regarding the miraculous healings of Jesus and his followers at his first advent which may help us find the answers to these questions.

FIRST, Although there were many, probably in the hundreds, who had been healed of various diseases by Jesus, there were untold thousands more whom he did not heal. Therefore it is obvious that the function of his healing ministry was not, in any massive degree, to solve the sickness problems of the world.

SECOND, All of those whom he did heal, including the ones whom he raised from the dead, eventually fell ill again and died once more. For this reason we can assume that these healings were not associated with any permanent removal of the death curse upon the human race.

THIRD, None of the healings which were performed were for his Apostles or disciples. Exceptions which might be here cited include the raising of his friend Lazarus and the healing of the fever of Peter’s mother-in-law. While dealing with obvious personal acquaintances, it cannot be demonstrated positively that these were in-fact disciples themselves of the Master. The only other exception is the case of Dorcas, recorded in

Acts 9:36-43. However, in this case, inasmuch as she was dead, she obviously did not request her own resuscitation, but it was sought for her by her friends.

FOURTH, the direct teachings of Jesus would seem to conflict with their being healed of physical infirmities. We cite a few passages to illustrate this point:

MARK 8:35 – “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”

1 JOHN 3:16 – “Herby perceive we the love of god, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

The concept of losing one’s life by deliberately laying it down in self-sacrifice for others seems diametrically opposed to the thought of seeking to preserve one’s life by seeking divine intervention to overcome the diseases to which it falls prey.

OUR HEALTH AS A STEWARDSHIP

On the other hand, the Apostle Paul distinctly informs us that our bodies are “the temple of God,” and that the maintenance of the bodies is our stewardship. In a very practical application of this principle, on one occasion, Paul wrote to Timothy to “use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” 1 Timothy 5:23

This reasoning suggests the utter reasonableness of resorting to the medical profession when beset by physical distress. If then, one might argue, it is proper to consult the best of physicians for relief from a physical problem, is it not better to consult the “Great Physician” who has an answer to every malady.

Perhaps the best answer to this enigma is to realize exactly what is the nature of a Christian. Outwardly he is no different from any other human being. His flesh and blood undergo no change when he begins to follow Christ. Yet a miraculous transformation does take place. It is not physical. It is mental. Paul states it simply in 2 Corinthians 5:17—

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

Speaking further of this duality of natures, Paul elaborates further in 1 Corinthians 15:44 by informing us that “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

The natural body is of the earth, earthly. It has been pledged to die, as an offering for sin. Being earthly, its care and preservation are under the direction of earthly doctors. But the “new creature,” being spiritual, is under the care of the great spiritual practitioner—Jehovah God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the united testimony of precept and example in the New Testament is that, while healings may happen as a part of the Lord's providential overruling in one's Christian life, they are not to be sought after nor requested, for the fleshly body is due to be replaced with a spiritual body.

WHY DID JESUS HEAL?

Perhaps the simplest answer to this question can be found in an episode recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. John the Baptist, the cousin and forerunner of our Lord, had been imprisoned. Discouraged and depressed, he wondered if he had been following a dream. For his own assurance, as well as that of his followers, he sent two of them to Jesus with a question—"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Jesus' answer is found in Matthew 11:4, 5—

"Jesus answered and said unto them, God and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind received their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Four of the six signs which Jesus gave to answer John's inquiry related to healing, and the fifth, the raising of the dead, was closely related.

Notice that the healings are here induced, not to show that the present is the time for physical healings and the removal of all mankind from the death curse, but to demonstrate the power of his Messiahship.

In other words, the healings were not an end in themselves, but only signs that pointed to a larger reality. As the Messiah, the power which he used in a small degree to affect the lives of a small portion of the human race, would be available to help all who have ever lived in that kingdom which formed the center of all his teachings.

This kingdom, for which Christians have continually prayed, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," is based on the grand promise given centuries ago to the patriarch Abraham.

The Apostle Paul, in fact, calls it "the Gospel, preached before to Abraham" (Gal 3:8). It is summed up beautifully in the words spoken by God to that faithful man of old. "In thee and thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

GREATER WORKS THAN THOSE OF JESUS

It is the scope of this larger work of Christ's second advent and kingdom which gives a deeper meaning to the words of John 14:12—

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”

Considering the magnitude of Jesus’ work, including even, on three occasions, the raising of the dead, to what greater works could he refer?

The answer is simple if we rightly divide the Word of God into its appropriate time periods. The work of Jesus at the first advent, far from intending to heal all diseases, was only to illustrate the power of the future kingdom guaranteed by the work at that time.

Then, many had literal sight restored; but, in his kingdom, all men with not only see with their literal eyes, but also with the eyes of their understanding. Then crippled ones once again walked under their own power; but, in that kingdom, even more lameness will undergo a great cure. The deaf ears that heard then are only a small portion of those who will eventually hear, not only natural sounds, but spiritual truths as well. The natural lepers will find their larger counterpart when the masses of humanity are once and for all time cured from the leprosy of sin. The three dead whom Jesus then raised from the grave, will be multiplied millions of times over when “all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the son of God and come forth.” (See John 5:28, 29)

HIS CHURCH –CO-WORKERS

It is in that kingdom work that not only Christ, but his Church as well, will work out these untold millions of miracles for the physical, mental and moral uplift of the human race. In harmony with this Paul writes– “If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” 2 Timothy 2:12.

Returning to our text in Matthew 11:4, note the climactic miracle, the one which holds the final place in the list of six—**“And the poor have the gospel preached to them.”**

The presentation of the Gospel message with its uplifting power is not only to the elite of mankind, or a select few, but to all, including the poor of the people. It is placed in the position of being the greatest miracle of them all.

This feature of Jesus’ ministry predominated over all other phases, and how often it got him into positions of hot debate with the Pharisees, the religious rulers of his day. In the larger miracles of his kingdom, the same will be true. Note the harmony of this with the words of 1 Timothy 2:4, where we are assured that God **“will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”**

Note that they are saved **before** they “come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

The salvation here referred to is, therefore, not their full salvation and everlasting life, but their initial resuscitation from the graves. Man comes back from the grave exactly as he

goes into it. The Scriptures put it poetically, “as a tree falleth, so shall it lie.”
(Ecclesiastes 11:3)

The major work of the Kingdom of Christ will be the education in the laws and precepts of God, so that the new life may be maintained by perfect obedience to those laws. We read of this in Isaiah 26:9—

“When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”

It is in this kingdom, then, as man grows closer and closer to God and his holiness, that they will also grow more and more healthy and closer and closer to that perfect physical image which was last perfectly seen in their first progenitor, Adam.

{ A LESSON IN ATTITUDES

“And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us; and we forbad him. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.

For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.”

MARK 9:38-42}

WHEN MIRACLES CEASE

Without question, members of the early Christian church were given special gifts that enabled them to do such miraculous things as speak foreign languages without learning them and perform various physical healings. But how long did such powers continue with the church? Are they still available today? When did they cease?

A careful reading of the Book of Acts, which is the only inspired historical record we have of the early church, does not reveal any miracles being accomplished by anyone other than an Apostle, or one to whom one of the Apostles had specifically delegated such powers by the laying on of hands.

This observation, in itself, would indicate that such miracles must cease within one generation after the Apostles' deaths. Yet, some contend, the Scriptural historical record

ends before the second generation after the Apostles, therefore perhaps healings continued to be passed on from generation to generation.

One text that specifically relates to this question is found in 1Corinthians 13:8-12—

“Charity never faileth, but whether they be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

The key phrase here is found in verse 10 – **“When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”**

On the basis of this some argue that when the church is complete, then **“That which is perfect”** shall have come. Therefore we are to expect those miracles, which admittedly are “in part,” to cease.

However, it is well to note that the word translated “perfect,” the Greek word *teleios*, has, as its primary meaning, “to be adult, full-grown, mature or ripe.” This is further emphasized in verse 11 by the contrast of being **“a child”** and becoming **“a man.”**

We would like to suggest that the term “that which is perfect” in this text refers not to the glorification of the Christian, but to the completion of the organization of his Church with the finishing of the work of the twelve apostles, particularly the completion of the writing of the New Testament.

Against this conclusion, some hold that the comparisons of verse 12 only seem appropriate with the concept of glorification. However, if we follow the flow of verse 11 through 12 we note that imperfect perceptions described in verse 12 are those of a “child’s” mind—the incomplete rush to judgment that is so characteristic of children. In contrast, with the completion of the New Testament, we know and are known by an insight into the character of the other person. In fact, our perception of the gracious character of God and Christ are through the writings of the Apostles as found in the New Testament.

On the basis of these reasonings, we feel that the logical conclusion is that the miraculous gifts passed away when the Bible—**“that which is perfect”**—came into being, and the Apostles fell asleep in death.

{“We advocate no general rejection of healings and miracles as being Satanic; but a careful scrutiny of every person or system seeking to establish itself by miracles.” The New Creation, Page 638}

“LIKE AS A FATHER PITIETH”

The night is so dark and the way seems so long,
As we sadly and wearily struggle along;
So often we stumble, so frequently fall,
And the fear oft assails us, “shall we fail after all?”

Poor hearts! We forget that the Master above
Ever watcheth each step in his infinite love,
And like as a father doth pity, the Lord
Ever pities all those who do trust in his Word.

No tear ever falls, when the heart’s wound is sore,
But the Lord’s tender heart keenly suffered the more;
No cup his hand pours, which he fills to the brim,
But his own loving lips were pressed first to its rim.

No night can be darker than that which he knew,
And no waters be deeper than those he passed through.
As, then, when the cross seems too heavy to bear,
Oh, remember thy Lord doth know, pity and care!!