

Healing the Sick
DWJD - Week 5
Matthew 4
10/9/22

Introduction

Matthew 4.

Halfway point in series - exploring this reality that as disciples we're called to ***Do What Jesus Did***.

We have got some work cut out for us over the next 2 weeks. We are wading into some incredibly complex and rich practices.

We'll start tonight with - **healing the sick**.

Before we begin if you want to dive deeper into this stuff I would highly recommend the book ***Practicing the Power*** - Sam Storms.

30k feet and heady → land really applicable.

Pray.

Barriers to Healing

Now before even get into this practice, I know that just thinking about stepping into a practice like miraculous healing can bring all sorts of red flags and uncertainty within us.

Maybe over the past few weeks you've been tracking with what Jesus did that we're called to do:

- Eating & Drinking
- Preaching the Gospel
- Teaching the Way

Difficult things - take time, effort, intentionality, and yet seem understandable, grabbable, doable.

But this one? Miraculous healings in the name of Jesus. Count me out. This practice is not for me.

And I think there's a number of reasons for that:

Worldview:

We'll get into this a lot more next week, but we live in a secular society that doesn't have categories for the spiritual, the miraculous - we live lives that are governed by what is rational and what we can measure with science and technology and medicine.

So if someone is sick - they should go to a doctor. Have a headache? Take some tylenol. We have science and technology and medicine - what's the issue?

A few weeks ago while on vacation I hurt my left knee jumping into a pool. And it's gotten worse, not better and so finally on Friday I called and made a doctors appointment. I kid you not, I hang up the phone from scheduling my appointment and Harper, our 2 year old asks - "What are you doing dada?" "Making a doctor's appointment." "You hurt?" "Well my knee hurts yeah."

And she comes over, touches my knee, looks me dead in my eyes with all seriousness and says - "Don't worry dada. God will heal you."

And my thought is not - "Yes - a prophetic word. Faith like a child. Let's pray right now for healing."

No I'm thinking - "aww that's so cute...And I'm going to see the doctor next week."

Theology:

Maybe you're not sure if you theologically agree miraculous healings should occur today. Or maybe you agree theologically, but you don't know how to practice it in a Biblically faithful way.

For some of us, we've seen miraculous healing get misused and abused. We were told that we weren't healed because we didn't have enough faith. We've watched as church leaders get rich promising God's healing over people's lives if they would just give more money to the ministry.

Experiences:

And still also for a lot of us I think a large barrier is our lived experience.

We know firsthand the pain of prayers for healing that seemed or still seem to be left unanswered, or answered differently than how we want them to be.

My Experience:

I was in elementary school when I found out my grandfather had cancer. And I remember when the diagnosis came how much we prayed for God to heal. He was only in his 60s, we were hopeful he had a lot of life still in front of him. But he never recovered. In fact it seemed like no time at all before he was gone.

And then a few years later, one of my friend's moms and a beloved teacher at our school received her own cancer diagnosis. And again we prayed. And she was miraculously healed. The cancer is still in remission almost 20 years later.

And I was so excited for her and for my friend, but I remember even as a 12 year old wrestling with questions like - did we have more faith this time around? Were more people praying? What was different about our prayers for healing this time than last time? If God *can* heal, why doesn't he *always* heal?

And maybe you have your own experience of that, your own questions, your own doubt that rises to the surface - why was your friend healed but not you? It seems like every time Jesus is approached by a sick person they're healed instantly, why is it not that way today?

And so rather than try to move into this complex, beautiful and rich mystery with faith we shrink back from the invitation of Jesus into this practice.

But I want to invite us this evening to wade into this together with faith as we examine the Scriptures.

Healing in the Ministry of Jesus

Because, and this is abundantly clear as you read through the New Testament - Healing was a prominent part of the ministry of Jesus and of the early Church.

In Matthew 4 we read about the beginning of Jesus' ministry here on earth. It's a summary of what so much of His ministry comes to be about during his 3 years traveling and ministering to those in need before heading to the cross.

Matthew 4:23-25

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. 24 So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. 25 And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Jesus travels from town to town in the summarizing words of Matthew - **Teaching, Preaching and Healing every disease and every affliction among the people.**

And this becomes a regular part of Jesus' life and ministry. Over the course of His time on earth Jesus healed hundreds, if not thousands, of people.

There are numerous references in the gospels to specific stories and people:

- The Nobleman's Son (John 4).
- Peter's Mother-in-Law (Matt 8).
- The Centurion's Servant (Luke 7)
- Lazarus (John 11:11)

There's also summary statements that talk about healing as an ongoing and regular part of Jesus' ministry:

So Matthew 4, which we just read, but also...

Matthew 15:29-31 - 29 Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, 31 so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

Mark 1:33-34 - 33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door. 34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

John 6:1-2 - 1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

Healing was a consistent and constant practice in the ministry of Jesus.

But it did not stop there.

It was also a prominent part of the ministry He sent His first disciples/followers to go do...

After being with Him and becoming more and more like Him, Jesus sends out His disciples to go do what He did.

And he has specific instructions for them, look at this from Luke 9 and 10:

Luke 9:1-2 - 1 “And [Jesus] called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”

Luke 10:1, 8-9 - 1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go... 8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

Jesus gives them power and sends them out to do what? The very things He had been doing – Preach and teach, and heal.

And it doesn't stop there. This trajectory of ministry continues into the life of the early church...

Acts 2 - When the Holy Spirit descends onto followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, the first thing that happens is Peter gets up and preaches the gospel and 5,000 people get saved. Incredible.

But the very next thing that is recorded, Acts 3, is Peter and John healing a man who was paralyzed from birth.

And this preaching and healing continue throughout the book:

- The apostles are recorded doing many signs and wonders of healing in Acts 5
- Philip, a deacon, is shown preaching and healing in Samaria in Acts 8
- Saul (who becomes Paul) is healed miraculously by Ananias as part of his conversion story in Acts 9
- He then turns around and heals a man named Aeneas in the town of Lydda
- And later raises a man named Eutychus from the dead in Acts 20

And it doesn't even stop there. It continues on throughout church history as something that was a normal part of the life of the church.

Amanda Porterfield in her book *Healing in the History of Christianity* writes, **“Healing has persisted over time and across cultural spaces as a defining element of Christianity and a major contributor to Christianity’s endurance, expansion, and success.”**

In other words - healing is a regular part of Jesus’ ministry, and the disciples’ ministry, and the ministry of the early church, and the ministry of Christians for the past 2,000 years.

And it should be a regular part of our ministry as Christ followers as well.

But to understand that, we have to get our minds around these two kingdom realities – How Jesus healed and why Jesus healed.

How Jesus Healed

Let’s first talk about **how** Jesus healed.

One of the things I often hear from folks when I talk about the practice of healing in the life of the Christian is what I like to call - “The Jesus Excuse”.

It sounds something like - well I get that healing was a prominent part of Jesus’ ministry, but that’s because He was Jesus. But I’m not Jesus. Which, just for the record in case anyone is confused, is true. You are not Jesus.

But we don't make that excuse with other parts of Jesus' life, do we?

- Well Jesus ate and drank with people far from God, but I'm not Jesus...
- Well Jesus preached the gospel, but I'm not Jesus...

But to say that not being Jesus excludes you from the practice of healing, is a misunderstanding of how Jesus heals.

Look at Acts 10 with me. Let me show you this from the Scriptures...

Acts 10:37-38 - 37 you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

Stick with me here - when Jesus enters into the world, He does not give up his divinity - he doesn't cease to be God. He who was fully God, also becomes fully man. If you want the theological term for it it is called "the hypostatic union" - it means Christ had two natures - human nature and divine nature that were joined in the one person of Jesus Christ.

Creed of Chalcedon (AD 451) - This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably united.

And as a human, though fully God, He is indwelt with the Holy Spirit starting with his baptism recorded in the gospels.

So what Peter is saying is that while Jesus was fully God, the miraculous healings He performed were not because He was God, but rather were performed **through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

17th Century Puritan John Owen says it like this - **"The Holy Spirit, in a peculiar manner, anointed him with all those extraordinary powers and gifts which were necessary for the exercise and discharging of his office on the earth."**

Jesus miraculously heals not because He is God (although He is) but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, does Jesus have a uniquely successful healing ministry? Yes, absolutely.

- He was sinless, so his prayers for healing were not hindered like ours are.
- He knew the perfect will of the Father such that He healed in line with God's providential plan.

So there is a uniqueness to the frequency and success of it - but this point still remains - Jesus healed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The very same Holy Spirit who, if you are a Christian, now lives inside of you.

So the fact that Jesus has a perfect healing record and you don't shouldn't keep you from stepping into obedience in this practice.

Jesus healed by the power of the Holy Spirit, and so can we who follow Him.

And don't take my word for it, listen to Jesus Himself in John 14 - this is a shocking verse:

John 14:12-14 - 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

So we can step into this confidently and humbly, knowing the very same Spirit that empowered Jesus is now living inside of us. We can wade into the uncertain waters of praying for healing - asking God to do miraculous things by the power of His Spirit.

Why Jesus Healed

But you have to not only understand how Jesus healed, but why Jesus healed.

All the way back in Genesis 1 and 2 - the beginning of the created world - God had an original design that was different from the world we experience today. The original creation was not simply ok, or passable, or good enough. According to God, the Creator - the original design for the world was "Mehod-Tove" - very good. Exactly right and as it should be.

And that “very goodness” was not **only** our spiritual state before God, but also our physical state. There was no sickness, physical pain, or death - those were not a part of God’s original creation design.

But if you know the story you know things go bad in a hurry. Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman rebel against God - sin, not as an idea but as a reality - enters the world.

And because of their sin everything is now broken - everything in creation has started to break down and decay - including the physical bodies of humans. Because of sin, we now experience spiritual decay and death **and** physical decay and death.

But it was not a part of God’s original design. Which means:

Sickness is an enemy of God.

God has never, is never, and will never be glorified in sickness. He’s glorified in how we respond as His followers in sickness - when we trust Him, cling to Him, glorify Him even in our pain and suffering - but God is not glorified in the sickness itself.

Sickness is not “natural”.

Meaning - it’s not how the world was designed to work.

Grandmother - “natural”. I remember a few months ago when my grandmother passed away. I was up in Minnesota at the funeral and I remember one of my cousins trying to encourage and console my mom, so sweet - “Grandma lived a full life. This is part of life - death is a natural part of life that happens to us all.”

And my first thought was - but it’s not. Sickness and death are not natural. They are not the state of mankind’s design. That’s why sickness and death are so painful - because they are a part of a broken world that is not as it should be.

But because sickness is an enemy of God and is not a natural part of His design, doing away with sickness and death is a part of God’s redemptive purposes and plan as His Kingdom comes to earth.

God's plan in his kingdom, which is here in part and one day to arrive in full, is to restore what is broken within us spiritually, but also to restore what is broken physically.

Our bodies being healed are a part of the redemption story of God!

For some people that means miraculous healing in an instantaneous moment.

For others, it is just as miraculous of healing over a period of time through prayer, medical treatment and care.

And still for others healing won't come until they stand face to face with Jesus in a resurrected body.

But for all who trust in Jesus - healing is a part of the redemption of God.

So because this is a part of the redemption story of God, when Jesus heals in the gospels, he does so as a demonstration of what He has been preaching - that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Jesus heals as a direct confrontation and assault on all that is evil and broken - showing us that with the arrival of God's Kingdom comes the arrival of healing - for souls and for bodies.

In other words - when Jesus heals, he is accelerating the bigger story of God. He is bringing the future victory into the present. He is bringing the entirety of the story of God and what's to come for all who trust in Jesus - into one person's life in that one moment in time.

“When Jesus expels demons and heals the sick, he is driving out of creation the powers of destruction, and is healing and restoring created beings who are hurt and sick. The lordship of God, to which the healings witness, restores sick creation to health. Jesus' healings are not supernatural miracles in a natural world. They are the only truly 'natural' thing in a world that is unnatural, demonized and wounded.” —

Jurgen Moltmann

So while the gospel is the message of the Kingdom of God, miraculous healings are the embodiment of it.

The kingdom of God is at hand - can't you see what is on offer to all who believe - healing and redemption and restoration.

Healing that will one day in eternity be true for all who trust in Christ - is now made manifest in this one individual's life as the kingdom of God comes to bear in their healing here and now.

Our Invitation

And that's why we step into this.

Because Jesus came healing those who were sick as a signpost to the arriving kingdom of God → But that kingdom is still among us today. We are living in that already but not yet kingdom. God is still spreading his rule and reign out over the earth - which means as His followers, as His disciples - we have a role to play in that.

We want to see God's Kingdom come to bear more and more on the earth. We want to join His redemptive purposes - and just like we want to see people spiritually healed, we also want to see them physically healed as well.

We don't just step out in faith preaching the gospel - proclaiming the kingdom is here - we also step out in faith demonstrating the kingdom.

Now - does that mean everyone we pray for will be saved? No. We are in the already, but not yet kingdom. God has reasons and purposes beyond what we can understand.

We trust God to do his work. We trust that God will heal - and we trust him with the "when" of that - now, soon, or in eternity - and yet the invitation for us is to step into this practice, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, with expectant faith.

And pray for those who are sick, asking God to do the immediately miraculous.

Practicals

So I know that was a lot. As much as possible let me help bring this down to earth for us and talk about what this might look like.

Practice this week - **PRAYING FOR HEALING**.

This is all on our practice guide for this week available on the sermon series page - citizenscharlotte.com.

But I just want to talk through practical steps you might take if you want to pray for healing for someone in our church family, your community group, etc.

When it comes to healing, I find this charge from Sam Storms so helpful:

We must leave room for mystery in God's ways. Some things will always remain unexplained. Why God does or does not choose to heal is ultimately subject to his wisdom and sovereign purposes. Why God chooses to heal in part or in whole, now or later, this person but not that one, is often beyond our capacity to understand. Resist the tendency to replace divine mystery with human formulas. - Sam Storms

We want to resist a step by step formula. Meaning it's not an A+B will guarantee C sort of reality - if I just say the right things in the right way with the right amount of faith then God will definitely heal. That's not how it works.

But I do think it's helpful to have some parameters and helpful steps of what this practice might look like for us.

And so I want to spend our last few minutes just helping give us some guidelines for what the practice of *healing the sick* might look like for us as the people of God today.

Most of this comes directly out of James 5:14-16, which says - **14 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. 15 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. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.**

This is something pastors have a unique role in, but James says we all wade into - pray for one another, that you may be healed. So obviously we pray continuously and from afar, but this is what it might look like to take an intentional time to sit someone down and pray for them as a group:

Steps to praying for healing:

1. Gather

Gather together with the person who is physically sick, as well as a group of like-minded Christians who have faith God can heal. It is best to set aside enough time to adequately pray for the individual. Make sure that all participants are on the same page of why you are gathering together and what the following steps might entail.

2. Conversation

Take some time to ask the individual some pointed questions. The group is trying to discern as many specifics about the situation as possible.

Some questions you can ask include:

- What specifically hurts?
- How long have you struggled with this?
- Have you seen a medical professional? What did they say?
- How can we help and pray specifically?
- Do you have any sins you need to confess?
- Are there other problems you have not shared about?

The goal is to discern what specifically you need to pray for and how the group can direct their prayers for healing.

3. Discernment

As much as possible, discern what could be causing this ailment and if there are any outside factors besides the physical sickness itself.

It could include:

- Unconfessed and unresolved sins
- Family history
- Stress and pressures of daily life

Be careful not to draw direct cause and effect conclusions. Sometimes we simply don't know the cause of the affliction, and that does not make the option of healing any less available.

Anxiety + Life Changes.

4. Prayer

Gather around them in a circle. Appropriately lay hands on them. If a pastor is present, have them anoint the individual with oil. This is an act that sets them apart for this sacred moment.

Then begin to pray. You can have individuals take turns praying aloud while others pray silently, or you can have everyone pray aloud together.

It is best to have the individual receiving prayer keep their eyes closed to focus, while those who are praying should have their eyes open, looking for any signs from the individual (twitching, straightening up, etc).

Folks in the group can pray to God, asking Him to heal in specific ways. They can also pray from God, meaning Spirit-empowered commands of faith, like “In the name of Jesus, be healed!”

Be patient in this step. Do not rush, but give space for the Holy Spirit to speak and to work.

5. Follow Up

After prayer, immediately ask the individual how they are feeling and what they are thinking.

If the individual was healed, take time to thank the Lord and celebrate as a community.

If the individual was not healed, take a few moments to encourage them and care for them. Never suggest or imply or state that the lack of healing was due to a lack of faith in the individual. It could be your lack of faith. It could be the sovereignty of God. The Bible is full of examples of folks with incredible faith and God said “no” to their healing.

Encourage the entire group not to grow disheartened or disillusioned if the response is not what they were hoping for or seeking. Don't be afraid to pray again for the individual at a later date. There is nothing wrong with going to the Lord continually as a group or as individuals asking Him for healing. He delights in our persistence.

Whether or not the individual was healed, encourage continued humility and obedience from

them and the group.

Communion.