

Series: "The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus"

The Healing Ministry

Matthew 4:23-25

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Matthew tells us that Jesus went about teaching, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing. A few chapters later, he gives another summary of Jesus' ministry followed by a section that shows the disciples, and the Church, carrying on Jesus' mission. Jesus tells the disciples to pray for more workers to be sent to the harvest. Then he sends them as workers into the harvest (9:35-10:8). The mission of Jesus was to preach, teach and heal. Someone has said that missionaries, when they travel anywhere in the world, build three types of buildings—churches, schools, and hospitals. That's one way the mission of Jesus is still being lived out in the life of Christians 2000 years later (Arden Autry, by way of Cletus Hull on Facebook).

Wherever we are, the Church has the ministry of teaching, preaching/proclaiming/sharing the gospel, and healing. The gospel of the kingdom is the message. Jesus proclaimed it, calling people to repent because the kingdom is available. Jesus taught about the kingdom, drawing on the Hebrew Scriptures and telling stories that illustrate the kingdom's present and future aspects. Jesus demonstrated the kingdom's power and authority and availability through healing and other deeds of power. The main features of Jesus' ministry and mission still inform our mission and ministry today.

We announce the kingdom of God and we submit to God's rule and authority. We are authorized as agents and representatives of God's kingdom. Jesus had compassion when he saw people without guidance and in need. Trusting his compassionate character, we bring our needs to Jesus and we are motivated by the compassion we see in him. Jesus commissioned the Twelve to go and preach and heal. That's very similar to the later "Great Commission" Jesus gives his followers, including us. We are called to continue representing Jesus as he is with us and works through us. No one of us is Jesus, but together we are the Body of Christ. The kind of

ministry he did back then he continues to do through all of us together. The group Casting Crowns, in one of their songs, asks:

If we are the body,
Why aren't His arms reaching?
Why aren't His hands healing?
Why aren't His words teaching?
And if we are the body
Why aren't His feet going?
Why is His love not showing them there is a way?
(Mark Hall, album *Casting Crowns* 2003)

Let's look at the kind of ministry Jesus did then and see what it says to us now. Between these two summaries of Jesus' ministry is a section that includes some of Jesus' words and deeds of power. Throughout this section we see the authority of Jesus and we are called to submit to his authority. The teaching section in chapters 5-7 is what we call the "Sermon on the Mount." Then, in chapters 8 and 9 we see ten healing miracles. I want to take a quick look at each of those and then move on to look at how Jesus continues to heal today.

8:1-3—A man with leprosy bravely approaches Jesus. Those with leprosy were segregated, kept away from society, so they wouldn't contaminate others. The man recognizes that Jesus has the power to heal him and leaves the decision up to Jesus: "If you are willing, you can make me clean." The prayer "if you are willing" shows not lack of faith, but respect for God's authority. Jesus touches one who was untouchable. Jesus is willing to heal. Jesus speaks a word of command: "Be clean!" And immediately the man was cleansed of his leprosy. Jesus sends him to the priests so they can examine him and so his healing will be a witness to them.

8:5-13—A centurion, a Roman soldier and commander, comes to Jesus and tells about his servant who is ill and suffering. Jesus offers to come and heal the servant. The centurion recognizes the authority Jesus has and

recognizes his own unworthiness for Jesus to come to his house. He says to Jesus, "If you'll just say the word, my servant will be healed." And Jesus is amazed at the centurion's faith. After commenting on the man's faith, Jesus does speak the word and the servant is healed. We can recognize the authority of Jesus and trust him. We can also see that there is no distance in prayer. Jesus can be present with healing power with anyone we pray for.

8:14-15—Jesus comes to Peter's house and finds Peter's mother-in-law ill. He touches her, the fever leaves her, and she begins to serve. Jesus heals us for a purpose—so we can serve.

8:16-17—People bring to Jesus many who are demon-possessed. He drives out the evil spirits with a word and heals all the sick who come to him. Whatever we might think about the demonic, Jesus assumes that it's real and he deals with it. He has authority over the forces of evil that seek to possess and destroy human life. In his healing ministry, Jesus fulfills what the prophet Isaiah saw the Servant of the Lord doing.

8:28-34—Crossing the lake, Jesus encounters two demon-possessed men who had become so violent that they threatened everyone who tried to pass by where they were. They recognize Jesus as the Son of God. The demons acknowledge his authority and beg him to let them enter a herd of pigs, which he does. Those tending the pigs run into town and report what happened. The townspeople come to meet Jesus then beg him to leave. What an odd story. But in it we see something of Jesus' power and authority.

9:1-8—Back in Capernaum, some men bring to Jesus a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. Jesus sees *their* faith. We are not alone in coming to Jesus and believing in him. We help each other in faith. The church has responsibility to bring people to Jesus in faith. When we feel like we can't pray for ourselves, we have brothers and sisters who pray for us. Who is your "stretcher-bearer"? Who are you a stretcher-bearer for? Jesus tells the paralyzed man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven!" There can be a

connection between guilt and shame and physical illness. Jesus first gets to the heart of the matter. The religious authorities think he is blaspheming because he claims to forgive sin. Jesus then demonstrates his authority to forgive by showing his power to heal. The man gets up and goes home. The crowd is filled with awe and praises God, who “had given such authority to human beings.”

9:18-26—This is a two-part healing story. A synagogue leader comes to Jesus and asks him to come restore the life of his daughter who has just died. Jesus and his disciples go with the man. On the way, a woman with a bleeding problem comes up behind Jesus in the crowd and touches the edge of his cloak. There was faith in that touch. Jesus notices her and assures her that she is healed. Are you willing to reach out in faith to touch Jesus? Arriving at the synagogue leader’s house, Jesus sends the crowd and the professional mourners away, telling them the girl is just asleep. They laugh at Jesus, but he goes to the girl, takes her by the hand, and she gets up. The authority of Jesus extends even over death. Even when we’re not able to reach out to Jesus with faith, he is able to come to us and restore life.

9:27-31—As Jesus goes on, two blind men follow him and call out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” “Son of David” is a term for the Messiah, so these blind men “see” something true about Jesus. Jesus asks the men, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” Do we believe that Jesus is able? “Yes, Lord,” they reply. Then Jesus touches their eyes and says, “According to your faith let it be done to you.” And their sight is restored.

9:32-34—As Jesus leaves the house, a demon-possessed man who couldn’t talk is brought to him. Jesus drives out the demon and the man speaks. The crowd is amazed, but the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being in league with the ruler of the demons.

As we talk about healing, we’re dealing with some mystery. We don’t know why some people apparently are healed instantly and some are not.

But we do trust the God of compassion revealed in Jesus. And we affirm with the Psalm-writer, "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:2-3). Jim Buskirk says that there's a point of healing—sometimes our prayers for healing are answered almost immediately. There's also a process of healing—often healing comes through prayer and medical treatment and a variety of means. There's the promise of healing—the ultimate healing will come in the resurrection at the last day.

Dr. Buskirk is a contemporary example of healing. When he was a young pastor in Mississippi, he started going blind. He was afraid for his church to find out. He says they didn't know how to pray for healing because he hadn't taught them. Not wanting them to realize anything was wrong, he would memorize Scripture readings and how many steps he needed to take to the chancel and pulpit and communion table so he could fake his way through worship services.

There was a woman named "Miss Virginia" in that church. She knew about prayer and led a group of ladies in Bible study and prayer. Her group kind of bugged Jim. They invited him one time to give the devotion for their group. During his talk he said, "If you ladies would put legs on your prayers, I'd believe in your praying more."

Miss Virginia replied, "Brother Jimmy, if you'd learn how to pray, you'd stop running your legs off."

One day she came into Jim's office and asked what was wrong with him. The Lord had been waking her up in the middle of the night to pray for him and she felt like she deserved to know why. He told her he had a cold. She didn't believe him. So he decided to just dump it on her and said, "I'm losing my sight. The doctor says I'll be blind in six months." She said, "I don't know about that. Let's pray." And she started praying for him in his office. She said, "Lord, we thank you that you always heal your own" (and he thought, "I don't believe that. I've known good people who died"). But her prayer was, "We thank you that you always heal your own—sometimes now and sometimes in the resurrection. We're not telling you what to do or how to do it. That's your program and your calendar. But I just pray that you will help Brother Jimmy to trust your fantastic love so much that he can

accept the healing already in process. Lord, we just praise you." She promised that she would be in the sanctuary on a certain day each week praying for him.

Then she walked out and left him shut up in his office with God. He had been begging God to restore his sight and let him keep his ministry. He felt the need to surrender his eyes and his ministry to God. And he tried, but he just didn't seem to be able to let go.

As he was out making calls one day, he saw Virginia's car at the church. He thought, "I bet she's not really praying. She's probably just in there reading or something." He went into the building, walked as quietly as he could and just cracked open the door to the sanctuary. She was looking right at him. She said, "Come on in! Let's pray!" She put her hands on him and started praying. He felt warmth come from her hands and go into his eyes. He thought she had a hand warmer like hunters use. But she had no idea what that was.

One day Jim's parents came to visit. His dad came to see him in his office. His dad was also a Methodist pastor. Though Jim and his father were close, he could communicate better with his mom. And, growing up, Jim knew that his dad wanted him to preach, but he was determined not to be a preacher unless his *Heavenly* Father called him—not his earthly father. So there was some distance between them.

But his dad came into the office alone that day and said, "Mother's down at the house."

"Great, let's go."

"No. I left her there for a reason. I wanted to come here alone. I want to talk to you and I don't want any answer except 'yes.' I just have one year left in ministry before I retire and you have your whole lifetime in front of you. I want you to call the doctor in Memphis and tell him we will come anytime he says. Tell him I want him to take my eyes and put them in your head. And I want him to give me your eyes. You have peripheral vision and that's enough for me to see to get around. With my eyes you can continue your ministry."

Jim said he started coming apart. A transplant wouldn't work for him, but the fact that his dad wanted to give him his eyes was more that he

could handle. He asked his dad to let him be alone for a while. He realized that if his earthly father loved him enough to give him his eyes, he could trust whatever God would do for him. He didn't just pray, "Lord, I give you my ministry," he really did surrender it to God.

Over time, Jim's vision began to return. He went to see his specialist and after examining him he said, "You know, we've been concerned about your other eye going fast, but the eye we'd given up on is being restored." Then he had him read the eye chart backward.

Jim said, "Do you want me to read those little numbers by the side?"

The doctor said, "Can you see those? That takes better than 20-20 vision!"

"How do you explain this?"

"You're a preacher and you're asking me? God and I have been in business together for years. I treat and God heals. The medicine I gave you may have arrested the infection, but whatever sight you have, the Great Physician gave you."

Jim drove home and stopped at Miss Virginia's house. He ran to the door and knocked. When she came to the door, he said, "We've been praying for the left eye to be healed and had about given up on the right eye, but it's being restored!"

She said, "I thought we were praying for the right eye!"

He said, "You crazy coot, you don't even know which eye to pray for."

She said, "You ungrateful cuss, the Lord ought to let you go blind!"

Eventually his vision was totally restored. And he gives thanks to God for that every day.

Where in your life do you need God's healing power? Can you trust God's compassion and believe in God's power and authority to heal? Can you surrender to God and let God determine the best time and method of healing?

We want to pray for healing and wholeness of our spirits, minds, emotions, bodies, relationships, and whatever else God wants to give. You may want prayer for a need in your life. You may want to pray for someone else. We'd like to pray for you and anoint you with oil as a sign of God's presence and power to heal and make whole.