

## Part 1 - Our Commission to Heal

### Introduction

We all know that God has the power to heal. But we often question if it is His desire to heal. We know that God wants us to persevere through suffering and assume therefore that through sickness we can grow more Christ like. This leads to uncertainty – “God may want to heal, but He may have loving reasons not to heal”. So when we pray for God’s healing, we pray our best prayer and then trust the outcome to God’s sovereignty.

But is this right? Is it sometimes God’s will for us to be sick?

I hope to be able to show you that in Jesus’ preaching, the Kingdom of God and healing always went together. Healing was both a consequence of and the evidence of the presence of the Kingdom. Likewise, in Jesus’ teaching, sickness is always associated with the kingdom of darkness which Jesus came to overthrow. Sickness was always seen as an expression of evil and something to be overcome by the healing power of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus wants us to have confidence that God will heal sickness and that healing should always accompany the preaching of the Gospel.

### Does God sometimes want us to be sick?

In the creation and in heaven, disease, destruction and death are absent. They came in with the fall and represent the presence of evil in the world. But “Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil” (**1Jn 3:8**) and trained His disciples to continue His work until He returns. Jesus healed the sick and told his followers to do the same. The obvious and natural conclusion is that God desires all peoples to live in freedom from evil and enjoy good health.

But what about Jacob who met God healthy, and was sent away with a limp?

What about Paul who pleaded with God three times for healing<sup>1</sup>, but God refused?

What about poor Job who suffered so terribly by God’s permission?

What about Jesus who said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (**Jn 16:33**)

What about people whose sickness God has used to great benefit for others?

Can we say that sickness is always evil?

We will look at some of these questions later, but are we to conclude that it is sometimes God’s will to let us suffer sickness? Could we sometimes be fighting against God when we seek healing either in prayer or from a doctor?

Let us start by looking at the biblical evidence.

Jesus Himself said, “The Son of man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (**Lk 9:56**) and John says, “Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.” (**1Jn 3:8**)

“Yes, of course!” We say. God is good, the Devil is bad.

So how did Jesus demonstrate that goodness? What did He do to save men and oppose the devil? Did He take each case on its merit and say to one, “You’ve had a rotten time, I will heal you” and to another, “You could benefit from some suffering, so I’ll make you sick”?

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<sup>1</sup> I do not think that the “thorn” was sickness. Paul refers to all kinds of troubles as infirmities, (2Cor 11:23-30) and qualifies sickness as “physical infirmity” (Gal 4:13). The OT law spoke of enemies being a “thorn in the side” by harassing Israel (Num 33:55). It seems more likely he was referring to the constant stirring up of persecution wherever he went, which he described as “a messenger of Satan, to harass me” (RSV).

Where did the idea come from that God's will is sometimes that we become or remain sick? – The Devil!

Was there ever one who came to Jesus healthy and went home sick because that was God's will for them? Jesus did ever lay hands on anyone to make them sick so they could grow in godliness through suffering. Why not? Was Jesus too soft? Did He not know or agree with His Father that sickness was good for some people?

Luke says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (**Ac 10:38**)

Jesus *healed all* who were oppressed by the Devil, for *God was with Him*.

This tells us plainly that when God acts for good, opposing the Devil, He heals sickness. God does not bring sickness, He brings healing. Just because God can turn a situation round for His glory does not mean God brought that situation to being.

Jesus healed *all* the sick who came to Him. This is what the Gospels tell us: "When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and *healed all the sick*." (**Mt 8:16**)

"And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside— they placed the sick in the market-places. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and *all who touched him were healed*." (**Mk 6:56**)

"A great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and *healing them all*." (**Lu 6:17-20**)

Jesus healed the sick because it was God's will. Lest there be any doubt, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (**Jn 5:19**).

After Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath he said "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" (**Lk 6:9**).

Jesus calls sickness destructive evil and healing saving goodness. How is it that we now blame God for the very things for which Jesus blamed the Devil? When God's spirit comes in power healing always comes, no one ever gets sick under God's anointing.

Luke says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and *healing all* who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (**Ac 10:38**)

There is a great difference between God allowing people or cultures to suffer the consequences of their sin and God making people sick. Reaping and sowing is how sin and suffering comes. If we sow sin and unbelief we will reap sickness, if we sow faith and trust we will reap health.

Does God sometimes want us to be sick? Surely, the only sane conclusion we can come to is that God does not want sickness, but the church allows it. We are the product of a culture of highly developed unbelief. In God's kingdom, darkness is driven out by light and sickness by healing. God delights in His Kingdom and wants us to share in it.

"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (**Lk 12:32**)

## The Gospel and healing

The Gospel connects forgiveness and healing – both are part of the Kingdom of God.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (**Lk 4:18-19**)

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” (**Mt 11:4-5**)

Jesus clearly saw healing the sick as an essential part of the Gospel. If there is no display of power there is no good news – that is what Jesus modelled. He said, “You question my teaching, then look at its results – see the mighty works, see the healings.”

Jesus was bold in pointing to healing as evidence for the authenticity of His message and so were the apostles. We are on safe ground if we do the same.

“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.” (**Jn 14:11**)

## The Disciples Commission to Heal

Healing was not limited to Jesus. He commissioned the disciples to do the same.

**Lk 9:1** When Jesus had called the Twelve together, **he gave them power and authority** to drive out all demons and **to cure diseases**, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ... <sup>6</sup> So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

**Lk 10:1** After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go ... <sup>9</sup> **Heal the sick** who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ <sup>17</sup> “The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven!”

Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to His disciples, saying:

“Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (**Jn 20:21**)

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (**Ac 1:4,8**)

Jesus did not take healing miracles with Him to Heaven. He assured them that in the power of the Holy Spirit they were to continue preaching the gospel and healing the sick just as He had taught them.

## Continuation of healing in the church

The apostles understood that the Gospel should continue to be proclaimed with healing of the sick as an integral and essential part:

“Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.” (**Ac 2:43**)

“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” (**Acts 3:6**)

“You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.” (**Acts 3:15-16**)

“Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and *all of them were healed.*” (**Acts 5:16**)

“The chief official’s 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. When this had happened, *the rest of the sick on the island of Malta came and were cured.*” (**Ac 28:8-9**)

## The apostles preached the Gospel with Power

The apostles were adamant that the gospel was accompanied with demonstrations of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power:

“for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the holy spirit and with full conviction.” (**1Th 1:5**)

“The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.” (**2Co 12:12**)

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive **words**, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” (**1Co 2:4-5**)

“I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.” (**Ro 15:18-19**)

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.” (**1Co 4:20**)

The apostles were not consumed with doubt about Jesus’ promises. They boldly boasted in the power and presence of the risen Christ.

## Our Commission to Heal

Looking forward to all who believe, Jesus said,

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” (**Jn 14:12-14**)

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; **they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.**” (**Mk 16:15-18**)

There is no room for doubt that Jesus intended that the Gospel should continue to be proclaimed with healing of the sick as an integral and essential part. Note that Jesus did not say, “Pray for healing” He said “Heal the sick”. He gave us the authority to go and heal in His name. We do not need to petition the Father, we need to go and do His will.

When John sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was the expected Messiah, He pointed to the healings and deliverance as proof (**Lk 7:18-23**). If the church does not heal, how will people know that the power of God is still present in the world? How can people give glory to God if the people of God are not doing His works? (**Matt 5:16**). The world declares that God is dead because it can see no practical effects of the present reality of God in those who claim to be His people.

We need to take the healing gospel out into the community and demonstrate the present reality of the power and glory of God.

## Study Questions

What are the causes of sickness?

What/who is the ultimate cause of sickness?

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, is it possible that sickness could be God’s answer?

What are the implications of saying “God has allowed this sickness in order to make me more Christ like”?

What is the difference between suffering as a direct result of your faithfulness to God (e.g. through persecution) and suffering as a result of sickness?

Look at the scriptures you can find that speak about growing or glorifying God through suffering. Do any refer to suffering sickness?