

Christian Educational Ministries

Does God Heal Today?

by: Ronald L. Dart

Does God heal today? I think most people believe He does. I know that in your services here, you ask in prayer for God's healing. That He would touch the lives of people who are sick. I think most people believe in prayer and they believe in miracles. But if we're going to be honest, I think most people believe they don't happen all that often, and they also believe that healing is really an answer to prayer or just another miracle. There's no distinct meaning to them in healing. In other words, there's no particular thing about healing that is different from walking on the water or getting somebody a job. It is (if I may say it this way) just another miracle.

I think it's possible, though, that many people are troubled by the alternate question with this. Since God certainly can heal, why does He do so rarely? Why is it that it's such an uncommon thing, when God answers prayer and heals a sick person? Because for every wonderful healing in answer to prayer (and there are many of them that we can all testify to) there are also many that go unanswered and many people that we have loved and we have prayed for have died. You have to say that if you're going to be honest about it. And there seems to be no way to account for the arbitrary way in which these healings take place or in which they don't. Because when we thank God because one person has gotten better, do we then turn around and blame God for another person who did not? And we oftentimes find these questions posed back at us by people who, when we're praising God because He has saved our loved one, we find someone hurt because their loved one, for whom we also prayed, has died.

It's a difficult question. Now I know that some of the reasons for all this are obvious. And for one thing, everyone has to die eventually. You know, the fact that someone dies is in and of itself not very remarkable because it's going to happen to every single one of us in this room. We're going to live our lives and, unless Christ comes back, we're going to die. It is a question of what age it's finally going to come upon us. Remember even from the Bible that great prophet Elisha, who had a double portion of the spirit of Elijah (which was something all by itself). There came a time when the Bible says Elisha fell sick of the sickness whereof he died. So death is out there. And in one sense of the word, why should we be so surprised that when we have prayed for someone, that they wouldn't die, that they do. What is it that's going on with divine healing that we don't understand?

Because it seems evident to me that there is something, perhaps a great deal, that we don't understand. One of the most striking things about this question, though, we you pose it, is that you could have asked precisely the same question of Jesus when He was walking the streets of Jerusalem or Capernaum. You might very well have gone up to Jesus and said, "I don't understand this. You have the power to heal. That is evident. Why is it that you do not always heal?" Because, in fact, this is the remarkable fact about Jesus. Not so much that He healed (as great a question as that it, as important as that is). The bigger question mark is, "When He didn't, why didn't He do so?" Let me put it to you this way: You have the gift of healing so that if you laid hands on a sick person they would get well. Could you go to a veteran's hospital and make your way through the wards and only heal one, two, three, four people and then leave? Could

you do that? Or wouldn't you have to empty the place? I don't think I could do it. I don't think I could heal some people and turn other people down. Now I see this as a normal human reaction to having the power to heal the sick, having the compassion to care for the sick, why I would not heal all sick people. I have to ask the question then, "Why didn't Jesus?"

That takes me to Matthew 13:54, an occasion in Jesus' ministry. It says that that when He came into His own country, went back home to Nazareth, Capernaum, the regions around there where He had grown up and where He had actually been a workmen, a carpenter in those areas, doing His job. He taught in the synagogue and everyone was astonished saying, "Where does He get this stuff?" Because Jesus was, I have very little doubt, a charismatic person. He was a very persuasive person and yet people were disturbed by some of the things He was saying, and they were saying:

⁵⁴ [...] Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?

⁵⁵ Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?

⁵⁶ And His sisters, are they not all with us?

As a trivia question for you, by the way, how many children did Mary have as a minimum? Answer: seven. She may have had more girls, that would have given us more children, but He at least had two sisters.

He's grown up right here in our community, where does He get all this stuff.

So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them,

⁵⁷ A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.

⁵⁸ Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Now there is a simple fact given to us in scripture. In Capernaum, in Nazareth, in that environment where He had grown up, where they knew His father, His mother, and all the kids He had grown up with, He did not do many mighty works there. And the reason for it was because of their unbelief. Now here's the question we must ask at this point, "Was this a choice that Jesus made?" Did Jesus say, "These people don't believe me. I'm not going to heal them. Because they don't believe me, this attitude is here, listen to what's they're saying. I'm just not going to bother healing anybody in this town."?

Mark 6

⁵ [...] except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

⁶ And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

Why, then, did He do this? Could He have done miracles but decided not to do so because of their unbelief? Is this what's going on? It doesn't feel right. Neither side of this question feels right, and we need to deal with it. We need to ask ourselves why this happened.

Mark 6

² And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! [...]

Now this is the same story, but there is something in this story that was not in the other one.

³ [...] Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” And they were offended at Him.

⁴ But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.”

⁵ Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

Now you have two different account of this. Matthew leaves it open to us as to the reason why Jesus did not do it, but Mark does not. The wording, the choice of words, the Greek construction, basically says it was not possible for him to do a mighty work in this area because of their unbelief. In fact, a strict construction of the Greek says that He was “powerless” to heal in this area because of their unbelief. Now I know that runs contrary to what we think Jesus could or might have done, or how He thought, or what He did. But the very idea that Jesus was somehow powerless on an issue is a little hard to deal with. But is it any harder to deal with than the idea that because they didn’t believe him that He would refuse to heal many people and would only lay hands on a few sick folk and make them well. It’s one way or the other. We’ve got to deal with this issue on one side of it. Either it was not possible or He didn’t want to or decided not to, and that’s strange. Now it does seem to me that even though the unbelief, the skepticism, the disbelief of human beings is a barrier to many mighty works being done among a people, it does seem to me as though God has an override switch. That is to say that He can do a miracle any time He wants to, wherever He wants to.

That said, we still have our problem. In the normal course of events, it is not a good thing for God to do a healing in the face of settled unbelief. In the face of settled unbelief, it’s just not a good thing. It’s not going to work out for the best, and there even seems to be a power issue involved somehow in what we’re talking about here. Now there’s something that, I think, we haven’t really grasped as we might. And for some of the people out there in different ministries that have “name it and claim it” and this idea of “let loose your faith” where the whole blame and responsibility in on your shoulders because you don’t have enough faith, enough belief, and so forth. And if you did God would be moving mountains, and plucking up trees, and healing people, and all this kinds of stuff, there is another story that I want to take you to. This one is in Mark 9. And this one is, I think, very important.

Mark 9

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them.

¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him.

¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, “What are you discussing with them?”

¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit.

¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”

Now we are in a very difficult situation here.

Mark 9

¹⁹ He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?”

Now this is really interesting. On more than one occasion, He upbraided His disciples because of their lack of belief and their lack of faith which, to me, says, if you’re going to upbraid someone for something you have a reason to expect better of them, right? There’s hardly any point in blaming your dog for barking when a car comes down. That’s what dogs do. For Jesus to upbraid His disciples for something they couldn’t help makes no sense at all. I think He expected more faith and greater belief out of them than they had.

¹⁹ [...H]ow long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?”

²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood.

²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

“If you can do anything.” Now this is not a guy who came to Jesus with absolute, total faith, complete, solid belief in Jesus saying, “I know you can heal him Lord. Please heal him. If you say the word, he’ll be better. I know it will be so.” He didn’t say that. He said, “If you can do anything.”

²³ Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

Now I really believe this fellow is in the same frame of mind that most of us are in most of the time. We really believe God can heal, and yet we have our doubt, our uncertainties, our wonderings, our puzzlements, our lack of understanding, our lack of grasp. And we pray and we pray and we hope, and yet down inside of us there is this desperate wondering, “Is anything going to happen. Is God going to do this or is He not?” And this poor fellow with tears running down his face. He has every reason to cry. Look at what his boy is going through. He says,

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” I understand him. I know exactly how he felt. He believed. He just wasn’t sure. I think there is a distinction between settled unbelief, which makes miracles impossible, and the doubts and fears that beset all of us time to time which do not make miracles impossible.

Unbelief, as the Bible uses the term, is not the same thing as uncertainty. Unbelief, as the Bible uses it is more like our expression of disbelief. We just flat don’t believe it. It’s not that we doubt or we wonder. It is not a wavering on the inside, it is outright disbelief. I’m not certain that God will heal me when I pray. That does not make me an unbeliever nor does it mean that I lack faith. It means that I’m not certain of God’s plan. I’m not certain of His intent. I’m not certain of what’s best for me. But if I am placing my trust in Him, no matter the outcome, that’s faith. This is the thing that some of us may have had guilty feelings in the past about prayer unanswered. Feeling that “I just didn’t have the faith, and if I had the faith maybe my kid would still be alive. If I just had faith, my mother would still be alive. If I just had faith this wouldn’t have happened.” And we torment ourselves feeling that it was our fault, that we didn’t have enough faith. And yet this man says, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” “If you can do anything.” He had his doubts. He didn’t know. He couldn’t be certain, but he was doing one thing and that thing was very important. He was committing it to Christ. And that’s what we do. We go to Him and we say, “Lord. I frankly have no idea what’s best for me. I have no idea what’s best for my wife. I no idea what’s best for anybody. All I know is that I want to put this in your hands. I trust you.” That is faith. And the ability to put that trust in him, when everything seems to go against it, is very strong faith indeed.

Mark 9

²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!”

²⁶ Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.”

²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”

²⁹ So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”

The King James Version says “prayer and fasting” but the best old manuscripts do not have the word “fasting” in that location. It just says “this kind cannot come forth by anything except by prayer.” And I don’t know why anyone should be terribly surprised that Jesus could do something that the disciples couldn’t do. After all, He’s Jesus and they’re not. But it does seem to me that He really expected them to be able to handle that. The reason they hadn’t had to do with prayer. The role of faith really does seem to be extremely important in healing. It’s almost impossible to separate it from divine healing. In Mark chapter 7, there’s an example of this I think is very striking. In Mark 7:24, Jesus finally decided, I guess, to take a vacation because He left Israel entirely and went up to the borders of Tyre and Sidon into a house and He didn’t want anyone to know that He was there. He was in an inn somewhere up on the coast.

Mark 7

²⁴ [...] but He could not be hidden.

25 For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.

26 The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Now this is really interesting to read, because we know categorically that Jesus was capable of doing it, don't we? We know that intuitively going in. We sure know it by the time the story is over.

27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

What a callous thing to say! This poor woman is here, whose child is demon-possessed and she is going to be just as desperate as that man down in Judea who came to him about his little boy and said, "Lord, I believe. Help mine unbelief." But what Jesus is saying here is that He has to do His thing first with the Jews. The expression is "the Jew first and then the Gentile." He came to His own and only to His own and He made this expression which may not have been as offensive to the women as it is to us, hard to say at this time. One thing we can say is that while she might have been offended, she made a conscious decision not to be, and that decision made all the difference.

28 And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

29 Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

30 And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

Now the lesson to be learned in here (There may be more than one. It's staggering to consider all that is in this thing.), but the realization that Jesus could heal but wasn't going to is something you're going to have to deal with. He, on some occasions, made a conscious decision not to heal people even though He may have been moved with compassion, even though He may have wanted to do this or that. He made a conscious decision not to do that. Sometimes you have to live with that, but in this particular case this woman didn't accept that. She argued with him. She reasoned with him. She took the only tack she could think of to reach Jesus and say, "What you say is true, Lord, but I'm just asking for a crumb, just asking for one thing to be done in this situation." And it was her faith that Jesus saw that made all the difference. So faith makes the difference, doesn't it? Faith makes the difference. Persistence makes a difference. Not giving up makes a difference. Arguing with God makes a difference. All the things we encounter in here we understand about "that deep", but we better understand at least "that deep" about what He is telling us here. That faith, putting our trust in him is crucial. That without it He cannot do many mighty works for whatever reason. Whether it is contrary to plan, a blockage somehow; whether it's not good if He does it. It's hard to say. Whether it's impossible or what have you. But it is there and it has to be dealt with.

It's an example of persistence that you could compare to the parable of the unjust judge. Here's this unjust judge who has no care for this women. He doesn't give a fig about her or her problem, but because she keeps coming back he says, "Get rid of this women. Give her what she wants. If I don't give her what she wants, I'll never be rid of her." And Jesus uses that as an example of how you and I are to persist with God in prayer. I don't know what to tell you. Except that you better that lesson from this, that praying once and giving up may not make it. Sometimes you have to keep on praying until the answer comes. And sometimes that may be longer that you would like. Now we know all this, don't we? All this stuff we know.

What is it, though, about healing that is different from other miracles? Jesus turned water into wine. That was a miracle. Healing, though, is different from that. He walked on the water. That was a miracle. But healing is different that that. I hadn't thought of it until someone pointed it out to me years ago, healing involves the restoration of something that has gone wrong. There was nothing wrong when Jesus walked on the water. I mean, He just walked on the water. There was nothing wrong when Jesus turned water into wine, except they didn't have enough wine. That's no big deal. They could have done without. But where healing is concerned, where a man is born blind, something has gone wrong because people aren't supposed to be born blind. Where a man is been a paralytic lying on a pallet all of his life down by the Pool of Bethesda year after year after year. That is not what God had in mind for that man from time immemorial. God did not intend that man be sick, that man be lame. He did not intend that man be born blind. God did not want man to be that way. So something has gone wrong when we need to come to God for healing. And this is the distinct difference in every one of the instances of healing you read about in the Bible. God created man perfect, but something has gone terribly wrong.

Now I noted that Jesus did not always heal. Let me take the question a step further. Since He didn't have to heal to accomplish His mission, why did He heal at all? Why did He heal anybody, anytime? Because He could have come and preached the Gospel without doing any of that, couldn't he? Told the same stories, told the same parables, given the same truths, and never have healed a single person in all of His ministry. Some people think it's a kind of divine advertising. It's a gimmick. It's like they put the loss leaders out in the supermarket to get you to come into the store and buy this cheap product so that while you're there you'll buy these other products that they raise the prices on. That's the whole idea of loss leader advertising. Get you in the store to buy their other stuff at full price. So what Jesus would come into an area and find this poor, old guy who was blind and lame and crippled. He would heal this guy and the guy would jump up and go running around screaming, praising God, and then a whole bunch of people would come together and Jesus would be able to preach to them. What a cruel thing to say, that that's why He did it. Because what that implies is that if there hadn't been a crowd to evangelize Jesus would have left a man crippled, who had been crippled all of his life, would have walked right by him and left him there forever. That's what we're dealing with if we think that healing in the Bible was just a matter of divine advertising, a PR stunt, to get a crowd to Jesus so that He could preach to them. I think it terribly cheapens what Jesus is doing when He heals people. Alright, then why did He if that's not the reason?

Luke chapter 5 tells us another story. We've gone from story to story. Here's another one.

Luke 5

¹⁷ Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

Now this is interesting. What can you infer from this statement? What can you grab from that last statement? If this was a college class, I'd stand here and wait a minute until one of you stuck your hand up. It's obvious and yet sometimes we don't notice the obvious. What's obvious is that the power of the Lord might not have been present to heal them, and if it hadn't been there would have been no healings taking place. Luke makes notice that the power of God was present to heal on this occasion.

¹⁸ Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him.

¹⁹ And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

²⁰ When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

This thing is so loaded! Here's Jesus in the house. It's so crowded you can't get in the door. He's sitting there talking to these people and all of a sudden dust starts falling from the ceiling, and they look up and tiles start coming off, and in comes a man being let down by cords. When it says "He saw their faith" what did He see? He saw persistence. He saw urgency. He saw the fact that they felt if they could just get this man in front of Jesus Christ it will make a difference. That's faith. He didn't have to read their minds. It was written in what they were doing in that particular place. He says, "Your sins are forgiven you," and to everybody present (and probably you, as well, if you hadn't already seen this) it comes like a bolt from the blue, clean out of left field. "What do you mean, 'his sins are forgiven him?'" We didn't bring him here to get his sins forgiven; we brought him in here to get his disease healed!"

²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²² But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?"

²³ Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?"

Do you realize what He has just said here? He has equated the forgiveness of sin and the healing of the man's palsy. I could say one or I could say the other. It is to the same end, so I am basically saying the same thing.

²⁴ "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." ²⁵ Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

I assume he did not have to climb back out through the roof.

This is really something. Forgiveness is a real grace, and it's a wonderful thing. But how can we know we are forgiven if nothing changes. You Jesus could have walked through streets saying

“Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven.” How does anyone know that He has the power to forgive sins? They know it because He heals. You have to, at this point, make a nexus between sin and sickness. You can’t get away from it. And between the forgiveness of sin and the healing of sickness and the healing of diseases that a person might have. And this is something that people have got to come to understand. Now this is clear enough in the law, that there is this connection. You’ll find it in Deuteronomy 7. This is a promise that God made to the people way back when.

Deuteronomy 7

¹² Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers.

¹³ And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you.

¹⁴ You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock.

Everything’s going to work if you just keep my laws, He said.

¹⁵ And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you.

So health, long life, fertility, the whole nine yard, is connected to what? Obedience to the law. Doing what God says. And therefore you can infer the reverse: that sickness, disease, and illness enters the world because of sin. And you can see it so often. And, in fact, this was the presumption that the disciples of Jesus had. Everybody realized that sickness and disease were in the world because of sin, because God did not create man to be sick. So everybody knew this. That’s why the disciples, walking along with Jesus one day, see a man sitting there who had been born blind, never seen a thing in all of his life. You’ll find this story in John chapter 9.

John 9

¹ Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.

² And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

Now what I think Jesus is saying here is, “Look, folks. Who sinned is not the point. This man is here for this that the works of God should be manifest.” The disciples made the mistake of assuming that the nexus between sin and disease is necessarily personal. You understand what I’m saying by this? They’re assuming there is a personal connection between sin and disease.

I've had people talk to me this way when they were sick and asking me to pray for them. They would say to me, "I don't know what I've done wrong. I don't know where my mistake was. I don't know why I'm sick." They'd go through this rigmarole because they feel guilty. Guilt seems to be one on the natural states of human beings. And they were worried about this. But the fact is that there is not a personal nexus between sin and disease. It isn't necessarily something you have done that is the reason you have cancer. It may be something some corporation somewhere has done. It may be something some scientist has done, and he didn't do it knowingly. He did it stupidly, or carelessly, or ignorantly. We have no idea why we suffer most of the diseases, sicknesses, cold, flues, and pneumonias that we go through, do we? We don't know where they come from. The nexus is not personal but the nexus is there. Between sin and sickness and disease it is inescapable. For example, James wrote to people in chapter 5, verse 14 and said this:

James 5

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 sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Now there's no earthly reason why this should be here, except that everyone knew that sickness and disease were in the world because of sin. They knew that all of us are sinners. We may be suffering because of our own sin. We may be suffering because of someone else's sin. Nevertheless, we are suffering and sin in is the picture. This is why, whenever someone calls me and I take a little olive oil and anoint them and pray with them. I now only pray that God would heal them, I pray that God would forgive their sins, because that is part of the equation that is given to us on this occasion. I think it's pretty important that we not lose the connection here and we understand that when Jesus walked up and down the streets of Galilee and Jerusalem and healed sick people here and there He was not doing it to get a crowd. He was not doing it just because He felt sorry for them. I think He didn't heal some people that He did feel sorry for. There was a point in all of Jesus' healing, and it was this message: "that you may know that the Son of Man has power on Earth to forgive sins." He may not always take away your pain, may not always take away your illness. He may not always give you back your missing arm, may not always solve all the problems that you pray about. But He will always forgive you. He always has the power to forgive you. Your sickness or your disease may be for another purpose. He may have something else in mind.

1 Peter 2

²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps[.]

Well, well, well. What he just said here is that we should follow in Christ's steps and, the implication is, in suffering. The first thing we want when we're hurting and we ask for prayer is for God to take away the pain. We want some natural sleep that's free from this pain, ache, and fever. We want our body made right again. And yet the example we are given is to follow in His steps, and His included suffering. That means you and I are going to have to endure some pain between here and there. I wish I could tell you otherwise, but it should be obvious, by now, to all of us. I don't care what Christian faith you are or what set of Christian beliefs you believe. None

of us get from here to thee without pain, without some suffering. Now here's what's important:

22 “Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;
23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;
24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

On that terribly night in which Jesus was betrayed, they strung him up to a post and laid stripes on him that none of us can possibly imagine. We can't imagine the pain, the suffering, how close to death He probably came before morning in going through this ordeal. It is by those stripes, Peter said, that we are healed. Now I don't know why people do this, but some people want to step back from this and say, “Well, it's spiritual healing He's talking about, not physical healing.” I can't make that connection. Jesus didn't suffer spiritually, He suffered in the body. He suffered spiritually, too. He suffered in the heart. He suffered in the mind. He suffered in the spirit, but He also suffered in the body. The stripes were laid, not on His mind, but on His body. Peter said that by those stripes we are healed and:

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Like sheep going astray, now coming back. Where did he get that? Did Peter pull this from the atmosphere somewhere, or did God just inspire him in the moment? If you know your Bible, you know he got it out of Isaiah 53. It is a prophecy that all Christians recognize as a prophecy about a messiah. You know it. It's in Handel's *Messiah*, and it's one of the most powerful choruses in the entire *Messiah*.

Isaiah 53

³ He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief [...]

In the Hebrew, they are talking about disease, pain, and anguish. He is a man who is acquainted with our sins, our pain, and our anguish.

³ [...] And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

As human beings we think, “Oh well, God caused that to happen. It's one of those things in

God's plan. He had to go through that." No. That's not what it was all about.

⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

When Jesus went up and down the streets of Galilee and Jerusalem and healed people, He was demonstrating that He had the power to forgive sins. No one then really knew, or could possibly understand, the price He was going to have to pay for that power. No one knew what He was going to have to suffer on that long night, but He did. No one understood that He was going to have to go through all that.

I used to wonder, as a young man. I would go to church, and take the Lord's Supper, and because of all the hymns we sang dealing with the blood of Christ, I had a profound sense that Jesus died for my sins. He shed His blood for my sins. I can distinctly remember wondering, while in prayer, why God didn't just let them kill him. Why they didn't just stick him with a sword that night in the garden and just kill him. Why did He have to go through that entire, long night of suffering between here and the next day? And the only possible answer you can come to was that it was not only necessary that Jesus die for our sins, it was necessary that Jesus suffer for our sins because our sins have not only brought about our death. They have brought about enormous suffering. Our sins have brought about suffering for ourselves. They bring about suffering for our children, for our grandchildren. They bring about suffering for our neighbors and people that we know. Our sins have created suffering beyond what you and I can imagine. And they will be bearing bigger fruit in the years and perhaps generations ahead that we haven't even heard of yet, because of the things we have done. Sin creates enormous suffering and so it was necessary that Jesus suffer for our sins. That's why Peter said, why Isaiah said, by His stripes we are healed. It was necessary that He go through that. I think it is also fascinating that Peter said we also have to suffer with Him. Whenever we go through our life and suffer, when we are sick, when we are diseased, when we are on our bed of pain, we need to realize something. This is not meaningless. This is not pointless, what we are going through. We can actually understand that we are suffering with Christ. Which, if He healed us every time we asked him, the moment we asked, the moment pain started and we say "Forgive me and heal me.", He took it away, there would never come a time when we could suffer with Christ.

We begin to look back then over the questions we asked to begin with. Why it is that while we know that God heals, He doesn't always heal on every occasion. While we know that Jesus had the power to heal, He didn't always heal in every circumstance. We know that He healed some people and left some people sick. And we know that it was not because of a failing on His part of a lack of compassion on His part. It had something to do with other things that were at work of which we know little or nothing. Years ago it came clear to me, when an old woman died that I had been praying for and I had to face up to the fact that she was old. The question really boiled down to, not so much "Why did she die?" but why did she have to suffer so long before she died. And it came to me very clearly. God is not in the business of the preservation and perpetuation of human flesh. Our aches and our pains are just not that important to Him. They're not as important to Him as they are to us. Or rather they're not important to Him in the *same* way as

they are to us. They are important to Him. They are important to Him because they are a part of the burning of character into our hearts and into our minds.

I've on occasion, in my life, asked myself when I've had to suffer some indignity from some other person, why I had to go through that. And the lesson, when the answer finally came to me was, "Well, Ron, in all of eternity you will never, ever do that to another person, will you? Because you know what it feels like." And I had to say, "Yes. That's right. I would never do that, because I know what it feels like." I can only conclude that God wants people in His family who know what it is like to suffer. They know what pain feels like. They know what it's like to have a fever. They know what it's like to lie in a hospital with tubes coming out of them. He wants people in His family who know what it's like to be betrayed by their friends. He wants people who know what it's like to be forsaken and left alone by all their friends. God wants people in His kingdom who have suffered along with Christ because of the lessons that we can learn, because of the ways in which we can grow, and the things which, ultimately, maybe we can do that He has in store for us to do. In the end, it seems to be that sickness and disease are the evidence of sin. They're the evidence, the earnest money of the ultimate penalty of sin, which is death, and healing is the earnest money of forgiveness and resurrection. God is saying, "Here's a down payment. You're not getting it yet. But this just shows you that I can forgive, will forgive, and I will heal."

Does God heal today? Let me ask it to you another way. Does God forgive today? Sure He does. Just like He always has, God forgives. He forgives. He heals. But in the grand sweep of things that God is doing, our flesh is of secondary importance. Our character and our faith are much more important to God. And the faith is tested when we will continue to trust Him through the pain. That's something that's worth learning.

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