

Healing For a Diseased World

December 13, 2020

Various texts

As we continue our series intended to help us focus on our annual celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, I remind you that our lens through which we approach the topic is that Jesus came to give precisely what our world needs in times like these. He came as our Savior, meaning we needed and still need saving. He came to bring to us exactly what we needed to solve our deepest problems. He came to bring light, peace, healing, life, salvation and hope. Those are our topics.

So this morning, our focus is on Jesus bringing the gift of healing. He came to heal this world from its diseases. Now, in order to understand this perspective, we must be willing to think, deeply. You will completely miss the point if you are satisfied to think on a surface level. You must be willing to see the issue of disease and healing as a truth and yet a picture. It is not one or the other, it is both.

Jesus literally and truly came to heal people from their diseases. People were healed by Him of a variety of ailments: blindness, crippling, deafness, leprosy, internal bleeding, etc. He miraculously healed from all of those things. And yet, such healing is not the limit, the extent of His healing gift. Healing is used in Scripture as a metaphor for something more, something larger. The fact is that every person that Jesus healed of their diseases eventually died. None of those healed are still living among us some 2,000 years later. So, the healing in their case was only temporary. It was done to make a point, to show who He was and what was the extent of His power and purpose. The healing was a picture of His identity and mission.

I direct your attention to my theme verse this morning, Isaiah 53:5,

But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.

Wow! You could almost use this verse as the theme verse for our whole series! Peace, salvation, healing, they're all there. But our focus this morning is on the last phrase, "with His wounds we are healed."

Main point: Jesus came to bring healing for our wounds, our diseases.

This ministry was intentional, planned by God. Jesus came as the Great Healer. He came to heal disease, restore health, bind up the broken hearted, take away our fear of disease and death. This was the plan...and He fulfilled that which He set out to do.

So, where does this leave us? In a totally different world. We need not fear disease, ailments, physical abnormalities or injuries. Our confidence in the face of such things ought to extend even to death, for His ability to heal extended even to those who had died. Do you remember that? Someone is sick, they send for Jesus. He is delayed. The person dies. Jesus finally gets there. They tell Him He is too late, that the person had already died. If only He had been there in time! What did Jesus do? He calls forth the sick, no dead little girl, bringing her back to life. (Mark 5) He stops a funeral procession and brings the corpse back to life on the stretcher (Luke 7). He calls Lazarus from the grave where he had been for three days! (John 11) No, Jesus' ability to heal went even beyond death. He was and is the Great Healer!

I hope you can already see the relevance for this point. If there ever was a time when a whole WORLD felt powerless against a merciless disease, it would be right now. Such things have power over us. We can barely understand them, let alone cure them. We all wonder when or if it will all be over. But then we remember that God can and does have such power, He does such things. And this truth was made most clear when He sent His Son to bring this gift to mankind. He IS Jehovah-Rapha, Yahweh heals. (3 parts)

I. Our world is filled with wounds, diseases, uncleanness.

Not only is this true, but this is how God describes our world. He describes it as broken, unclean, corrupted, under a plague or curse. Ever since sin entered this world, we have lived in a diseased environment with the inevitable results thereof.

When we think of the Garden of Eden, what comes to mind in this regard? It was perfect, pristine, pure, without blemish. It was a perfect environment. And, it had a reminder that it was designed as an environment where man could live forever. The tree of life was right in the middle of the garden. The man could freely eat from the tree of life. But also in that garden was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It too had fruit, good looking fruit on it, enticing fruit, fruit that looked like it offered good things kept from mankind. And so, when man and woman both ate from that tree, the consequences of living in a fallen world kicked in. Mortality, death was now an issue, access to the tree of life was greatly restrained, man and his environment had been corrupted, diseased, made unclean, broken, fallen, choose your term. Ever since that day, mankind has struggled against diseases of various kinds.

Then we see that in those earliest days, mankind lived much longer than we do today, many times longer, hundreds of years longer. But as time went on,

mankind and his world kept getting worse, and worse, and worse. Eventually God determined to pour out judgment upon the earth, cleanse the earth of the people, animals, even the vegetation and start again. But we also see that the situation had not changed, the first people off the ark were themselves corrupted. Man nor his environment had been purified. There was still corruption, disease, wounds and injuries. And God set a lower limit or standard for the length of man's life. Abraham is described in Genesis as a really, really old man, who lived for 175 years. But that would have been only a fraction of the ages to which his ancestors lived.

So people lived, got sick, had accidents, carried wounds and then they died. From time to time, God makes His presence known by sending disease, pestilence, plagues. He reminds fallen man who is in charge of the health of His people and their environment.

I find it interesting how the law of Moses fits into this. Among the 900+ laws of Moses, there are many that deal with diseases, purity, cleansing. Isn't that interesting? There is laid out in the law procedures for those who get sick, have injuries, lose blood. There are rules about the types of animals that can be eaten or not eaten, how to cook them. There are many rules in the area of cleanliness. Then notice that there is a great concern that those who enter into the worship space do so clean. You wash your hands before you worship. You spend some time in purification before you come into the presence of God. Wow! It almost seems like God was preparing them for pandemic!

And yet, we also know that it was not effective. As is made clear in Scripture, the problem was that the efforts to purify were only external, on the surface. The problem is that diseases go deeper than that. The problem goes all the way to the heart. It was diseased, desperately wicked. And no purification ritual is able to fix an impure heart. What is needed is a whole new heart, a heart transplant. And that heart could not be transplanted from someone who's heart was just as diseased. Are you getting the picture? God is spelling out the human condition in terms taken from the medical realm that we still can relate to thousands of years later.

And yet, I hope it is equally clear that the issue in this world, the issues addressed in the law, the solutions offered from mankind were not just physical, and they were not effective in solving the problem. The heart in Scripture is not just an organ that pumps blood, it is the center, the core of a person. You ALWAYS follow your heart, so if your heart is wicked or unclean you will always end up doing bad things.

No, the problem with disease goes to our core and there is no human solution to fix it. No ritual will cure you from your disease. So God had to provide a solution. God had to reveal Himself as Jehovah-Rapha, Yahweh heals.

II. Jesus came as the incarnation of Jehovah-Rapha, Yahweh heals.

If you know anything about the life and ministry of Jesus, you know that Jesus performed miracles, and many of them were in the realm of healing. In other words, sometimes He calmed the seas, or multiplied the food supply. But more often He healed people of their diseases. It seems clear to me that this was an intentional effort. He was making a point.

To understand this, I go back to the Old Testament for a few verses to give us reference. I start with Psalm 103. This is one of my favorite psalms on a variety of levels, and it certainly fits here. The psalmist preaches to himself in difficult times, reminding himself that now is the time to worship Yahweh, even when it hurts or doesn't make sense. Listen to his words to himself in Psalm 103:1-3. Of particular note for our purposes this morning is why he can praise God in the midst of his struggles.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

He goes on from there but you get the point. In the middle of trying times, we must remind ourselves to continue to praise God. Why? Because we know that He is Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals. Our hope is that He heals. Our hope is that our God is Master even over the diseases that plague. Clearly that is one of the points of the plagues upon Egypt in Moses' day. Our God can turn on and turn off diseases, plagues, supernatural events.

And so, our reason to hope in the midst of strife is that our God heals, stops, protects, cleanses. Again, I remind you of our theme verse, Isaiah 53:5. "with His wounds we are healed." Then we notice that it costs Him to do so. He has to take the consequences of this state of uncleanness upon Himself. He will transfer those wounds to Himself. We generally recognize this as describing the beatings He endured before crucifixion. But surely it includes all the injuries and injustice He endured up to and including His death. The coming Messiah would pay the price of our sickness.

So, let's move to the New Testament. Once more, notice how the story of Jesus highlights this healing aspect. I am choosing intentionally to quote from the book of Luke, you know Luke the Physician. He writes with medical terminology and emphasis. One of the first events of Jesus' adult ministry is recorded in Luke 4. There, the text describes Jesus going into the synagogue on the Sabbath. They gave Him a scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read, and He chose to read this passage from Isaiah 61. (Luke 4:18-19)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is how you would know that the Messiah has come. He will do these things, and among them is healing from disease or infirmity. Jesus then goes on to proclaim that this text was fulfilled among them that day. They doubt Him,

so he quotes a proverb to them, “Physician heal yourself!” Let the healing start with you. In other words, even doctors die. If you are the Messiah, you ought to be able to cure your own diseases.

So, then we have recorded incident after incident when Jesus did precisely that. He heals this man of this disease, that woman of that infirmity. In fact, He performs so many miraculous healings that Luke just lumps them together. Luke 4:40, “Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to Him, and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.” In fact, He did so many healings that when one is specifically mentioned, we are forced to ask ourselves why this one is mentioned? What made this particular healing noteworthy?

Then, one day, word got back to John the Baptist about all the things Jesus was doing. The situation is not told in as much detail as we would like, but we know that John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to confirm for them that Jesus was actually the Messiah. And this was His answer to them, (Luke 7:22-23)

And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Isn't that interesting? John could know for sure that Jesus was the Messiah because of the miraculous healings that were taking place. Jesus came to bring healing to this diseased world. He proved His sovereignty over the scientific, the medical world. Most notably, in a sense He did heal Himself when He Himself was raised from the dead. (Or more technically His Father raised Him from the dead.)

Jesus came to a world like this for times like these.

III. This healing is both physical and spiritual.

I would be remiss if I didn't make this point clear. And I know that there are those who would like to take a message like this in a specific direction: the gift of healing and its place in the Church of today. That is a different sermon for a different day. That is not where I am headed today. Do I believe God still miraculously heals? Of course He does. Has He gifted some to officiate or be a part of such healings? Yes, I believe He has. But that is not my point today.

Rather, I would like to make sure it is clear that Jesus' healing ministry was not just physical. The physical was simply an evidence, a sign, a proof of a healing that is much, much more important. As I suggested at the beginning, there is no evidence that any of the people Jesus healed avoided death. I think we would have heard of such stories in Scripture. All of them eventually died. Jesus' healing ministry in this regard was temporary...to make a point.

Instead, what was of even more concern for Jesus was the spiritual healing that was symbolized by the healing. I turn first to Luke 5, beginning at v.17, the healing of the paralytic. Listen as I read this whole story. I focus your attention on how Jesus uses the physical healing to make a larger point about spiritual healing. READ.

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. 18 Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." 21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who

speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

Did you see that? There He was healing the sick as He normally healed the sick. A test case is literally lowered in front of Him and He uses the occasion to make a larger point. As miraculous and marvelous as it is to bring life and stability to crippled legs, how much more important is it to forgive sins? The ability to do the one gives credibility to be able to do the other. The man’s real problem was not his inability to walk. His real problem was a heart issue. His heart was unclean, corrupted. He needed a clean heart, a new heart, the forgiveness of his sins. That was a much bigger issue. That was a much more impressive miracle. Jesus performed the one to convince us of His ability to do the other.

This point is made again and again. I think of the man born blind in John 9. There the people wanted to make the connection between the man’s blindness and the spiritual causes. They asked if the man’s lifelong condition was due to his sin or his parent’s sin. Jesus’ response? Neither, the man had this condition so that he would be perfectly positioned so that God’s glory could be revealed in the healing miracle of His Messiah. The physical healing was designed to lead people to a deeper spiritual truth.

If Jesus’ main role was to heal people, that is all He would have done. No, He had to hide Himself, disappear even to avoid the crowds. And even after He left this world, there were still crippled people who needed healing. We know this because the book of Acts tells us about His disciples carrying on this healing ministry. But He as the Great Physician did complete His ministry. He

did provide healing for His people. We have hope on this day because of the healing work that Jesus accomplished when He came. We fear no disease, no illness, no injury, no disease FROM wearing a mask nor NOT wearing a mask. We do not even fear death because of Jesus' work as the Great Physician.

We know that He can fix everything, He never gets there "too late." There is nothing too big, too microscopic, too hard, too widespread.

Yes, on this day let us celebrate the fact that the day of Jesus' coming brought us in the words of Malachi 4:2 "healing in its wings."

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will recognize that there will always be disease, injury, uncleanness, suffering and death in this world. It is corrupted.

2) We will use any such occasions to turn our attention to Jesus as the incarnation of Jehovah-Rapha, Yahweh heals.

3) We will fear only the One who is sovereign over all.

4) We will celebrate the healing role that Jesus plays in our life.