

# A Solitary Healing

## *Four Bible Puzzles:*

John 5:1-15

April 3, 2005

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Dwight L. Moody was one of the most fruitful 19<sup>th</sup> Century American evangelists, leading multitudes to faith in Jesus Christ. He enlisted people to pray for him while he preached, and he depended upon them. There are stories of him stomping on the floor to signal his intercessors to pray harder. Despite those prayers, he faced hecklers. In the final service of one campaign, an usher handed him a note as he entered the auditorium. It was from an atheist who had been giving Moody trouble. The evangelist, however, thought it was an announcement. He quieted the audience and opened the folded paper. Scrawled in large print was only one word: "Fool!" A thought came to Moody and probably a grin. He announced:

*I have just been handed a memo which contains the single word -- 'Fool'. This is most unusual. I've often heard of those who have written letters and forgotten to sign their names, but this is the first time I've ever heard of anyone who signed his name and then forgot to write the letter!*

Moody, recognizing the hand of God in the memo, changed his sermon text to Psalm 14:1 ***"The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God!'"*** D.L. Moody was not superhuman. Although God wove into Moody some of his wit and rhetorical ability, his use of those gifts depended upon grace and his faith in that grace. Similarly, God's love and call for is no less significant or phenomenal. The question is do we have faith?

Over the last two months, I've shared puzzling Scriptures that explode some of our biases and help us look at God as he really is. One of the most puzzling Scriptures is when Jesus entered Jerusalem and walked into its local hospital. It was not St. Mary's or Methodist

Hospital, but crowds of sick people – blind, lame or paralyzed – lay in the shade of covered porches around the pool of Bethesda. The place was a regional center, perhaps, even a national center for people with these problems. When other therapies failed, when other treatments proved ineffective, people came to Bethesda to await a touch from God. The people believed an angel would come and stir the water, and the first one in the pool would be healed. This belief is recorded as John 5:4 in a few ancient manuscripts of the gospel as if it was fact. (It is footnoted in the pew Bible.) All at Bethesda were awaiting a touch from God, and had specific expectations. So here comes Jesus early in his ministry. Now in Capernaum he healed all the sick who came to him (Matthew 8:16). Later, to avoid a death plot by Pharisees, Jesus left a Galilean synagogue but healed all the sick that followed him out (Matthew 12:15). When Jesus arrived at Gennesaret, people brought the sick from the surrounding countryside and all who touched Jesus clothing were healed (Matthew 14:36). In fact, Mark reports the Gennesaret ministry this way:

***When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went-into villages, towns or countryside-they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.*** (Mark 6:53-56, NIV)

Now, in these settings Jesus healed indiscriminately. He healed all who came to him, and everyone who touched his cloak. If Jesus healed people because he was divine, then couldn't he have healed everyone at Bethesda? Couldn't he heal everyone at that hospital? They all sought healing. They all sought healing from God. Instead, Jesus entered that hospital area and focused on one man. Somehow Jesus learned that this man had been paralyzed for 38 years. He went up to him and asked if he would like to get well. The man had no faith in Jesus. He just explained that he had no help to beat others into the pool when it was stirred. The man had an

idea of how his healing should occur, and Jesus could help if he would fit into the script. However, Jesus didn't fit his script. He did something utterly unexpected and unconventional. He told the paralytic to stand up, pick up his sleeping mat and walk. When the man did that, he was surrounded by astonished people; and Jesus slipped into anonymity.

One doesn't slip into anonymity by healing others. One gains notoriety that way. Thus, it would make no sense for Jesus to remain unknown to the paralytic or religious leaders if he had healed anybody else in that hospital setting. Only later after Jesus confronted the man with his need to stop sinning, did the former paralytic or anybody else know who healed him.

When that knowledge became public, Jesus was accosted by religious teachers as a Sabbath-breaker because he healed on the Sabbath. Here is Jesus' explanation:

***I assure you, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.*** (John 5:19, NLT)

The Bible reveals that Jesus just didn't go out and heal people on his own power. In truth, Paul states that Jesus emptied himself of divine power:

***Being in very nature God, (Jesus) did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!***  
(Philippians 2:6-8, NIV)

Jesus lived as the first human being fully connected to God since Adam's fall into sin. Adam and Eve tried to attain the knowledge and likeness of God; in contrast, Jesus lived as an obedient servant of God who relied on God. Every work of Jesus flowed from his relationship with God. The relationship was intimate because of Jesus' communion with the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus received direction from his heavenly Father and in the Holy Spirit's presence was the power to heal humanity's deepest and most desperate afflictions.

Since Jesus healed people as a human being fully connected to God rather than as God himself, since Jesus healed and acted as a human being directed and empowered by God's Spirit, he commissioned other human beings to operate in the same relationship and work. Thus as the resurrected Christ he declares:

***“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*** (John 20:21-22, NIV)

In this prophetic act, Jesus breathed on his disciples and commissioned them (and all of us as well) to the same relationship and work he embraced.

So, are you healing people? Why not? Don't you understand Jesus' claim that he is the way for you, the truth for you, the life for you? Jesus wasn't interested in just being a hero or an object of prayer. Jesus said:

***Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. 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...*** (John 14:11-12, NIV)

Jesus truly intends for resurrection life and power to advance through you. He is a lot higher on your and my potential in partnering with the Father than we are. Jesus calls us to believe. He pleads with us to believe. Satan sows a lot of doubt and unbelief. Doubt and unbelief leads us to give up, give in and give out when we are challenged or tempted. Faith moves us to ask, seek, and knock until answers come. Faith moves us to pray and fast and step out of our comfort zone. Faith moves us to not settle for our past experience of God's love and power, but pursue what is promised. It calls us to believe greater things than we've seen, and it equips us to walk with the same dependence on the Holy Spirit that Jesus exhibited. In this way, we too can make an impact in the midst of overwhelming need.

Do you actually believe Jesus? Will you embrace his call on your life?