

The Best Explanation

Healing Then & Now:

Matthew 10:5-8

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John Wimber had never been part of a church. He knew nothing about Christianity. He was deep into the music industry, especially rock-and-roll. He and his wife had been invited to a Bible Study. As John and Carol got acquainted with the Jesus described by the gospels, something happened to their souls. John had not made a commitment to Jesus, but he had a thirst to know Christ. It was so overwhelming, such a tug on his heart, that he refused to miss the Bible Study, and the Beatles had to ask someone else to produce their first tour in America.

When God opened John's eyes to his sinfulness and he called upon Jesus to save him, he experienced a great release from guilt and in-flow of love. He was excited to go to church. The anticipation was intense. After worship ended, he approached the pastor and asked, "When do we get to do the stuff?" "The stuff?" the preacher asked. "Yah, the stuff that Jesus did!" John answered. Do you recall this passage from John 14, verse 12? (It's a promise worthy memorizing.)

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.
(John 14:12, NIV)

If you look at that text, beginning at verse 10, you will be convinced that Jesus is saying, "Anyone who has faith in me will do the miraculous things I've been doing." Having not been indoctrinated by any group that explains away their lack of miraculous works, John was expecting an exciting adventure as an apprentice disciple of Jesus.

Do you know what we experience in third world countries where we just drop the Bible in people's laps and they don't have an experience of our Western-trained Christian community? The readers end up expecting the same thing as John did. In fact, Western sociologists studying the rapid growth of the Christian church in third world countries observed that it grows where experiences of healing and miracles are witnessed. In other words, these people actually try to do what Jesus promised they would do. Again, the sociologists found that slowest growing churches had leaders taught by Western missionaries who are skeptical and hold to our "scientific" mindset. In other words, we westerners have been trained to see a world of matter and not of spirit. We always look for material causes and material cures because we think and see life as materialists.

Certainly, we are blessed with some gifts through scientific or critical thinking. We avoid some dangerous superstitions. However, I wonder with our materialistic view if we don't, on occasion, trade one damaging superstition for another. Regardless, we embrace with difficulty the descriptions of Jesus' work and call to us. I remind you that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. How sad that, because of the way we've been taught to look at life, we often gloss over or dismiss Jesus' words.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sent his twelve disciples with these instructions:

As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:7-8, NIV)

Like most Bible teachers in Europe and America, I failed to see the relevance of Jesus' healing ministry or his commands to his disciples about healing. The focus of church life and mission was quite different. If John Wimber would have asked me, "when do we get to do the

stuff,” I would have pulled back thinking he’s either naïve or a flake. Only when I left Rochester in 1985 for a little church on the outer bands of the Twin Cities, did his question become reasonable and the words of Jesus exciting.

I’ve shared with you over the years several stories that shook my way of thinking. I ran smack dab into about a dozen parishioners who believed they carried the authority of Jesus to heal. They didn’t just pray for healing. They commanded healing to occur. They didn’t just ask God to take the pain away. They rebuked pain. They called out demons. They believed they were to heal in the name of Jesus. They read in Matthew 10:1:

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. (Matthew 10:1, NIV)

Since these parishioners were also called to be disciples of Jesus and were given the same spirit, they believed they possessed the authority to heal. They worked at exercising that authority, and they chided their fellow United Methodist members for failing to recognize and exercise their authority. Indeed, they were very upset at how we pastors taught the Bible.

We had a prayer and share time at every worship service. Often they would stand up and give thanks for instantaneous or progressive healings that occurred. Then they would exhort us to recognize and use our authority. As they pressed the issue, the congregation suffered a lot of resentment and fear. At the same time, I witnessed the healings. They were on to something.

I began to reread the gospels and the book of Acts with eyes of faith. I read just about every book on Christian healing I could put my hands on. I’ve come to believe that like the twelve and also the seventy-two followers that Jesus later sent out, we do have authority to heal. Everyone who has faith in Jesus has authority to heal. **We have both authority to heal and the responsibility to heal.**

As I say that, I'm concerned about false assumptions and conclusions we might draw. First, *it does not follow that, because we have both the authority of Jesus to heal and the responsibility, healing will automatically come.*

In the gospels, despite their authority, the disciples failed to heal a little boy, not because it was the will of God for the boy to remain sick, but because they lacked faith and the preparation of prayer and fasting. Jesus also didn't heal everybody. The gospels tell us that his ministry was greatly limited by the unbelief in his hometown Nazareth. There is a violent clash between two kingdoms which affects our exercise of authority. Therefore, Jesus approached the healing of people so differently, not unlike the variety of ways a doctor will handle physical conditions or a psychologist addresses emotional concerns. Jesus, on occasion, changed the atmosphere or took people out of an area to minister healing.

In the Scriptures, the disciples did not raise their colleagues James and Stephen from the dead. Paul left his companion Trophimus sick on an island although he raised the young boy Eutychus from the dead. We are in a war, and eventually all of us will have to relinquish our bodies to death until Jesus returns to finally vanquish sin and death.

Jesus told some theological opponents:

If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matthew 12:28, NIV)

In healing, we evict the rule of God's enemies over humanity. Our work signals the kingdom Jesus has established. Therefore, we heal and proclaim that the kingdom of God has arrived.

Second, *our authority and responsibility to heal is not divorced from medicine.* We are not in competition with medicine. **God has given us one gift for healing!** God has given us one and only one gift for healing, his perfect son, Jesus Christ. In the cross of Jesus, in his

ascension to the throne room of heaven, and in his spiritual presence with people on earth, we have the gift from heaven, the bread of life. Medicine, psychiatry, psychology are not gifts from God. Jesus is the gift. The Spirit of Jesus mercifully opens eyes of people who have faith to pursue cures for God's beloved, human family. The New Testament teaches that the Spirit of Jesus was active in the world long before he became flesh and one of us. Researchers and practitioners can't even find a pair of socks in their drawers without help from God. Medicine is not the gift. It is an outgrowth of the gift, the gift of Jesus. The Bible implies that we wouldn't be made if it weren't for Jesus. He was chosen before the creation of the world. He is the lamb that was slain before creation. He is the gift for healing and brings revelation to humanity.

Third, *our authority to heal is not magical*. There is mystery, partly because we are such a fantastic work by an infinitely great creator. We have memories. We have spirit. We have soul and body. The evil that rebels against God afflicts people in those different areas. Some people are broken today because of evil afflicting their memories, some because of spiritual issues. Some today have wounds in their soul where they think, feel and make choices. They are sick because of those wounds. Some suffer from evil afflicting a body part. We may think that illness and injury are not personal, but for God they are very personal. Every single affliction you suffer is an attack on the God who loves you. The corruption and suffering of his creation are personal and painful attacks because he loves us.

We, who carry the authority of Jesus, are to walk with him and grow in exercising his authority to dislodge the evil and bring the rule of heaven into the memories, spirit, soul and body of God's beloved people. We are Jesus' body, and there is so much for our minds to learn; but we don't learn until we begin to believe Jesus and act.

Today, let's repent from our unbelief. Let's acknowledge that we've often put more trust in tools that Jesus has given (like medicine, psychiatry) than in Jesus who opens eyes. Let's thank Jesus for sharing his authority with us and ask for the heart and mind to heal, proclaim and advance his kingdom.