

The Memoirs of Peter

Divine Healing

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On Sunday evening we've been studying together the Gospel of Mark, and last Sunday night we saw Jesus' first healings in Mark's gospel. In verses 30 and 31 his mother-in-law of a fever, a high fever we don't know exactly what the illness was, but then in verse 34 of chapter 1, He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and Matthew adds He healed all who were ill; Jesus the Healer. Since Mark introduced us to that issue last week, I want to take tonight, and I knew we'd have a little bit shorter time together. And I wanted to take tonight and look at the issue of sickness and healing a little more thoroughly and practically. So many people have so many misunderstandings about sickness, physical sickness and divine healing. So tonight, we're going to take a little aside if you will. We'll be back in Mark's gospel, Lord willing, as early as next week. But I just want you to see this and to think about this as Jesus begins His ministry with healing.

If you go back in history, the issue of physical healing is a fascinating one. And often the practices we would look back on today and consider absolutely barbaric. I've done a little bit of reading on this and in one ancient city for example, in the city of Pergamum there was a facility for those who were sick. And leading to the facility was a long-arched hallway and in that arched hallway, ostensibly to give the light there were these skylights. But as the patients, the would-be patients, were arriving at this medical facility and were walking down this hallway to get to the hospital, if you will, they would dump cold water as kind of a shock therapy on the patients as they arrived. That's quite the welcoming committee in the hospital.

At the same place there at the shrines, the healing shrines in Pergamum, those who were sick with a high fever were then told after their shock therapy, they were told to bathe several times in an ice-cold river and then to run a mile at full speed. You might want to file that one away the next time you have a high fever. Many believed that illnesses, all illnesses were a result of an imbalance of the four humors of the body, blood, phlem, yellow bile, and black bile. And I'm not even going to go into the details relating to all of that.

The doctors connected with Ephesus believed that there were only three possible diseases. There were, there was excessive dryness, there was excessive humidity, and an imbalance of the humors. And there were various treatments to alleviate these problems, but by far the most common ancient prescription for almost every physical problem was letting blood, or bleeding. This was such a problem that some in the medical community believed that at times in the ancient past, almost as many people died from the cure as from the disease.

When it comes to sickness and healing in the Christian, there is just as much confusion, and there is advice that is at best unhelpful and at worst may be actually harmful. So, we want to look at this a little more carefully as to what the Bible has to say. Here are a few of the common misunderstanding I think that Christians have about sickness and health.

Sickness, some believe, is always God's chastening for a pattern of sin in your life. Some people when they get sick immediately assume it must mean that this is God's chastening hand upon me. Others think if you have enough faith, whatever you have, whatever sickness you're involved in at the time, you will be healed if you just have enough faith. Others teach (and I've heard these teachings) that all troubles come from Satan. So you should simply rebuke your sickness, just as you would or should they say rebuke Satan. So, fever be gone I suppose or something similar. Because God wants every Christian to be well, others would say don't ever pray that God's will would be done when it comes to illness, simply pray in faith, essentially demand of God what He should do. Those are just a few; and there are many others. Perhaps you can think of a few yourself. But the question is what does the Bible say?

I want to begin tonight by recommending a very helpful book to you that some of the information I'm going to share with you comes from. It's a book by Dr. Richard Mayhew called *The Healing Promise*. If you or someone you know is locked in a battle with illness and sickness, it's a great resource and a very real encouragement to people. So, I would encourage you to get that.

I want to begin tonight by looking at a very brief theology of sickness and disease. I'm not going to give you a comprehensive study; I don't have time to do that tonight. But I do want to kind of fly across the top and help you to think biblically about illness and disease. Now first of all, when we talk about disease or illness (there according to the medical community) there are a number of categories into which that falls. There is infection, there is degenerative diseases, such as muscular dystrophy or Alzheimer's or osteoporosis. There are nutritional disorders, like scurvy or rickets, things like that. Metabolic disorders, now where there is a disruption of the reaction involved in cellular metabolism, such as diabetes, gout, hormonal issues, etc... There are immune disorders, relating to the immune system; either it's under active or deficient with such things as AIDS, or it is overactive with some inherited things such as rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis and lupus. And then finally, there is a category called neoplasm's which have to do with new growth which refers to cancers and all the other tumors. Those are the categories into which all illness falls.

What does the Bible say about all of those categories of illness? Well, it's very important to understand first and foremost that God takes ultimate responsibility for all forms of sickness. God takes ultimate responsibility. What about those issues that are in the genes? Well listen to what God tells Moses in Exodus 4. Moses said, you know I can't talk well, I'm slow of speech, I'm slow of tongue. The Lord said to him, and this is a verse you ought to mark and memorize. ... "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"

The Lord, for His own purposes, is behind these things, and He takes absolute, unequivocal full responsibility for them. You don't need to try to get God off the hook for these problems. We may not understand His purposes, we may not understand His ways, but He is certainly in charge. What about when it comes, not to congenital issues but to diseases and illnesses? Well in Deuteronomy 32:39, "See now that I, I am He, [And] there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."

God says I hold the power of life and death, I hold the power of illness and disease, as well as health. I am responsible, God says. In Job 5 you see the same point,

“Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty, for He inflicts pain.” [Job says,] “and gives relief, He wounds and His hands *also* heal.” [Job, as he contemplated his situation, and the pain and suffering that he was enduring makes it clear that God is ultimately responsible.]

Isaiah 45:7, I am ... “The One forming light,” [God says,] “and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.”

Lamentations 3:37,

Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the LORD has commanded *it*? *Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?
Of course, in the context of Lamentations it was the disaster that was following the city of Jerusalem.

What I want you to see is that when illness and disease, congenital issues, every category of illness that I just shared with you; ultimately God takes full responsibility. Now there is great comfort in that because God is not capricious. God isn't just having fun with us when we get these various problems. God has a great eternal plan and whatever happens to us falls within that plan, and so knowing that He is in charge that He takes the responsibility is a great sense of comfort. As I've often talked with people at the hospital, I don't see how people who aren't believers face the kind of diagnosis that are often given and that Christians receive, without the Lord. Without knowing that He is ultimately responsible and that we can rest in His goodness. So, register it. God takes ultimate responsibility for all forms of sickness.

Number two in our little list here of our brief theology. Satan may sometimes be the immediate cause. Not the ultimate cause, God is the ultimate cause but the immediate cause. There are

several passages that point this up. Luke 13:11, in the ministry of Jesus we're told there was a woman who for eighteen years had a sickness caused by a spirit, and she was bent double, and she could not straighten up at all. And Jesus heals her. Paul says the same thing if you believe, in fact, that his thorn in the flesh was a physical problem, and I know there's a lot of debate about that. But he says,

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!”

Now let me be very clear here, God takes the ultimate responsibility. Satan is never free to act in our lives without God's consent. And Satan brings these things for evil in our lives, but God intends them for good. Let me show you an illustration of this. Turn with me to Job 2. Job 2, you of course, remember Job's life and situation. Some of you are studying this I know in your Sunday school class. But I just want to remind you that Job at this point loses his health here in chapter 2. [And]

The LORD ... [says] to Satan” [in verse 2,] “Where ... [do] you come from?” ... Satan answer[s] the LORD and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” The LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause.” Satan answered the LORD and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. “However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.” So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”

What you have here is a glimpse into what happens in God giving permission to Satan. Satan cannot operate on his own, he is as Luther used to describe him, God's devil, he is on a leash, and he can only go as far as God permits him to go. And here he is seeking permission from

God. Notice though, what Satan says, Satan says, verse 5, "... put forth Your hand ..." He's talking to God, God, You affect him, You touch his bone and his flesh. So, the LORD then says, "... he is in your power, only spare his life." So, God here is still the ultimate cause behind this problem in Job's life, and Satan is the immediate cause. Satan meant it for evil, to destroy him as we learn at the end of the book and through the flow of the book of Job, God meant it for good in Job's life.

Third principle in our little theology of sickness and disease is that God uses all forms of sicknesses for His own purposes. God uses all form forms of sicknesses for His own purposes. These reasons are as varied as divine providence is varied. And God's providence, by the way, let me just tell you something that that I hope will help you. God's providence is never simple. Sometimes when we go through troubles in our lives you know what we find ourselves asking, we get the diagnosis, and we ask ourselves, why, what is God doing? What is the thing God is trying to do in my life? When we ask that question, we're really thinking very simplistic and we're thinking like human beings, like creatures. God is never ever doing one thing. God's providence is multi-layered and complex. God is doing many things in your life, in the lives in the people you touch.

And let me even add this complication factor; God isn't just doing what He's doing for your life and the people living today. God in His providence is shaping the next generation and the following generation. God may be doing something in your life that He intends to have a ripple and ramification effect generations from now. God's providence is absolutely complex. So, understand that when you think about God's purposes, so when we say He uses it for His own purposes don't think I've got to pick the one that God's doing. God's never just doing one thing.

But here are a few examples of what God does through illness. Sometimes He punishes sin. David in the Psalm we read this morning; Psalm 32 refers to that. He speaks to the fact that when he was unrepentant in his sin, there was a nine-month period when David was living in unrepentant sin before Nathan came and confronted him. And he describes that period in this way, he says,

When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. [Why?] “For day and night Your hand [God] was heavy upon me; My vitality” [Literally in the Hebrew it says “my life juices”] ... [were] ... drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer.

David says there was a link between my physical condition, my sin, and God’s chastening hand in my life.

In Psalm 38 he says it a little differently,

There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin.

In James 5 you remember there’s an admonition that if someone is sick and particularly, as we’ll see in a moment, believes that there is sin involved, he is to call the elders of the church and have them pray over him because sometimes God uses sickness as a way to chasten and to punish. Chastening would actually be a better expression than punish here, but you get the idea.

Secondly, God uses sickness to allow the consequences of sin and the curse to run its course. In Romans 8, you remember he talks about that. The whole world has been subjected to vanity, and guess what that’s true in Christian’s lives, that’s true in your life. Let me put it a little more specifically in 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul puts it like this, “... we do not lose heart, ... though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”

You know what Paul was saying? He was saying, what’s true for every sinner is also true for me as Christ’s apostle, my outer man is decaying, and I’m getting various illnesses and problems, physical problems, why? Because it’s part of the curse, so God is simply allowing the consequences of the fall and the curse to run its course in human life and existence. That’s why some of us are entering what’s called the period: baldness, bifocals, and bulge. It’s part of the consequences of sin and the curse. Sometimes that’s one of the causes of illness. It is simply the reality that we live in a fallen sin-cursed world. Salvation does not cancel out the results and

consequences of sin. The same is true with illness and disease. We live in a fallen, sin-cursed world and because of that Christians get sick, and God allows the consequences of sin in the world, the consequences of the curse to run its course in our lives just as He allows it to run its course in the lives of others. All Christians even great Christians get sick, and they die.

Another purpose of God is to humble us and keep us dependant. Second Corinthians 12, you remember that passage of Paul, he says, I have this thorn in the flesh to keep me from exalting myself. In light of all of the visions he had, the vision of heaven itself, so he was sick for the purpose of humbling him, keeping him from exalting himself. To keep him dependent on God, and we'll look at that passage a little more in a few minutes. To strengthen our endurance and build our hope, James talks about all trials, including illness and he says in James 1, "The testing of your faith produces endurance."

I love that word endurance; the Greek word is a word which literally means to remain under. It's the idea of a weightlifter. In the Olympics we just saw some of them, perhaps that wasn't your favorite sport in the Olympics, maybe you didn't see them. Some of us did, and the weightlifter would take the weight, and he had to thrust it above his head, and that bar is literally bending under the weight as he holds it up, and his whole body begins to shake. That's the picture of endurance. It's remaining under the trial, holding it up if you will. Staying under it and yet not buckling. The testing of your faith produces that kind of endurance, and when endurance has its perfect result, it makes us perfect and complete and lacking in nothing. So, God uses all kinds of trials, including sickness for this end; and certainly, to bring glory to His name.

In John 9, you remember when Jesus and His disciples encounter the blind man, they want to know whether this man sinned who is blind or his parents. And Jesus said, "... *It* was neither ... this man that sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Sometimes there is sickness, and one of the primary purposes is for the glory of God. That's always one of God's purposes; everything He does is to that end. But sometimes it's the front

and center purpose as it was in this healing. So, those are just a few of the purposes God has when sickness runs its course in our lives or the lives of those we love.

So, God takes ultimate responsibility, don't ever lose sight of that. If you forget everything else I say tonight, remember that God takes ultimate responsibility for every category of sickness. Now that doesn't excuse the human sin that's sometimes involved and certain kinds of communicable diseases and other things. God isn't responsible for that sin, but he uses that for His own ends and purposes in the lives of those who have sinned.

Now, let's go, secondly, to a biblical perspective of divine healing. If that's sickness and disease, what about healing? Well, first of all, the first principle I would have you note is that God is the only One who heals. Sometimes somebody will ask me if I believe God still heals. And I know what they mean. What they mean is does God still miraculously heal people today? But they really aren't asking the right question because if there's any healing, God is healing. God is the only One who heals, He's always been the only One to heal, and if anyone is getting over a disease or a sickness or congenital disabilities, it is because God is healing them.

God even calls Himself that. In Exodus 15:26, talking to the children of Israel, and again I'll come back to this verse because it's a controversial one, but God says, "... I, the LORD, am your Healer." I am Yahweh, Raffa. I am your Healer. In Exodus 4, the passage we looked at before, God said, "I make people to see, and I will fix your mouth and enable you to speak, Moses." Deuteronomy 32:39, He says, "... it is I who heal...."

And so, there's no question but what God takes that responsibility. Psalm 103, God is called the One who heals all your diseases. That doesn't mean that God heals every disease you get, it means that when you are healed, it is always God who does it. Isaiah 45, "He is the One who causes wellbeing."

And you remember the traveling companion and co-worker of Paul, Epaphroditus, in Philippians 2, we read, "For indeed, ... [Epaphroditus] was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him." [In other words, that's shorthand for God healed him] "... and not only did He have mercy

on him, but He had mercy on me also;” [Paul says,] “... so that I wouldn’t have sorrow upon sorrow.” if Epaphroditus had died. God healed him, that’s what he is saying.

Every time, listen carefully, God not only takes responsibility for every time you have ever been sick. He is the ultimate cause behind it, sometimes the immediate cause is your own sin or the work of Satan. But God also takes full responsibility for all healing, every time. Think for a moment about the problems you’ve had physically in your life. Every time you had any kind of disease or illness that I listed before and you have come through that, you have recovered, it is God who healed you. It’s so important that we understand that.

A second principle on divine healing; not only is God the only One who heals, but secondly God does not promise to heal everyone. There are a lot of biblical examples here, okay those who teach that God wants every Christian well, have a hard time reconciling that with so many passages. Let me give you just a couple of examples. Let’s take Jacob for example he wrestles with according to Hosea he wrestles with the Angel of the Lord. That is, he wrestles with the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, and He touches his hip, and Jacob limps away and as far as the Scripture leads us to believe, based on the practice of Israel after that, he limps the rest of his life.

Epaphroditus got sick, God didn’t promise to heal him early on in his sickness he came almost to the brink of death itself, and only then did God step in and heal him. God had chosen for him to be deathly sick. Trophimus, Paul had to leave him, because he was sick, 2 Timothy 4:20. Timothy got sick, and Paul’s giving him some medicinal advice. Paul had a serious problem according to Galatians 4:13, and he had a thorn in the flesh, may or not be the same thing according to 2 Corinthians 12:7.

So, God doesn’t promise to heal everyone. Now I need to touch on a couple of passages that always come up when you say this, because the faith healers use a couple of passages. The first one is Exodus 15:26 that I quoted earlier. Let me show you the entire verse. Here’s what the verse says, ... “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your Healer.”

Now the last part of that is absolutely right. The Lord is the healer; He is always the One who heals. The question is, is this an absolute promise not only to the children of Israel in that day, but to us that we won't be sick which is what many in the faith healing movement say.

Understand that this is part of the blessings and curses on the nation Israel. It is a conditional promise. Do you see that? If you do this, then this will be true. And it possibly was true only for the exodus itself. The indication in the Old Testament seemed to indicate that it didn't even extend into their time in the land. It was just as they were traveling to the nation, to the land that they were to have.

Another problem with taking this view is nobody claims the other promises that were made to Israel. For example, here's a good one what about Exodus 16:1-21? Daily quail and manna, none of the faith healers say if you're really living and honoring God, you're going to have manna fall on your yard every day. Or here's another Deuteronomy 29:5, neither your clothes nor your shoes will wear out. That would be great. I'd never have to go to the mall. But that's not a promise for me. These were specific promises made to the nation Israel at a time and point in history. There's another problem, if you want this blessing of none of the diseases of Egypt, then you're going to have to get in line for the curses as well because guess what, they're there also. If you disobey, here's what I'll do God says. So folks, it is a misuse of this verse to make it a universal promise without any time restraints to all Christians of health.

When I was in high school, someone gave me a book called *None of These Diseases* which was essentially promising just that. That is not what this passage is promising. And in its context, that's clear. What about Isaiah 53? Some would say well wait a minute, Isaiah 53 says in the Hebrew text, "... our sicknesses He Himself bore, and our pains, He carried."

Many faith healers use this verse to claim that Jesus purchased physical healing for every Christian in the atonement. Is that what this is teaching? Is there healing in the atonement? The answer is no. The context makes that clear again. If you look at the context of this statement, every other expression in the passage is about what? Human sin, human sin. So, why does he mention healing? Why does Isaiah then refer to healing? Well look at Isaiah 1, look at Isaiah 1.

I just want you to see these trouble troublesome passages because you'll hear them used like this.
Isaiah 1:4,

“Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers,
Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, ... despised the Holy
One of Israel, ... turned away from Him.” [He’s talking about their sin.] “Where
will you be stricken again, As you continue in *your* rebellion?” [Now watch how
he describes their sinfulness.] “The whole head is sick and the whole heart is
faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it, *Only*
bruises, welts and raw wounds, Not pressed out or bandaged, Nor softened with
oil.”

You see what God is doing; He’s describing their sin as this terrible loathsome disease which is
destroying them. The same thing by the way is true in Jeremiah 17:9. Listen to Jeremiah, “The
heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick....” He didn’t mean physically sick.
He was talking about spiritual sickness; sin as this debilitating disease that destroys the person.
That’s what Isaiah meant when he says in Isaiah 53:4, “... our sicknesses He Himself bore, and
our pains, He carried....”

It’s in the context of dealing with our sin and sickness is merely an image, a picture of human
sinfulness. Instead of saying there’s healing in the atonement, which implies that Jesus ensured
every Christians health by His death, it’s better to say that there is healing through the
atonement. What do I mean by that? Every time God does good to you and me, every time
some non-believer gets well; Jesus bought that act of goodness that act of common grace at the
cross. God vindicated His justice according to Romans 3 when Jesus died; that He could do
good to His enemies. So, there is a very real sense in which Jesus’ death purchased our health,
but not in a sense they mean.

One more important principle that we need to know about divine healing and that is health is
guaranteed in the eternal state only. Romans 8 talks about our, the redemption of our bodies,
we’re waiting for, we’re groaning for a new body like unto His glorious body. Revelation 21

puts it like this, when that time comes God will wipe away everything connected to mourning or crying or pain and death, all decay, every kind of disease will be gone. Only then will perfect health be guaranteed for all believers.” Let me hurry along.

The next principle of divine healing is that God most frequently uses means to heal. God most frequently uses means to heal. In fact, many medicines are used by God to heal us. Let me give you a list though of things God uses to bring healing, the means He uses to heal. First of all, the body’s immune system. This is by far the most common way God chooses to heal. You know we talk about getting better, we act as if God has nothing to do with that. You remember, He’s ultimately the only One who heals. God is the One who gave your body, who put a system together in your body that enables you to get better. Many of the medicines you and I take are designed to do one thing and that’s simply to hide symptoms until the system God put in place in our bodies causes us to heal and get better. The immune system does its work. God uses our body’s immune system that He created.

Secondly, He uses doctors. God uses doctors. Loraine Boettner writes, “We have no more reason to believe that our sicknesses and diseases will be cured without means than we have to believe that if we fail to plow and plant, we will nevertheless be given food. Surely, faith feeding is quite as rational as faith healing, and if diseases are to be cured by faith, then why may not death which is simply the result of disease or injury also be eliminated in the same way?” He’s saying listen God uses means in every other area of life, why wouldn’t He use means to heal us. And He does use doctors; doctors are a tool of God. You see this throughout the Scriptures; you see it in the Old Testament. If we were to go to Leviticus 13, you would see that the Levitical priests functioned as health officers among the people of God in Old Testament times. Paul, according to Colossians 4:14, traveled with a personal physician. Jesus gave a tacit recognition of the role of doctors even as He affirmed His own ministry to people’s souls. Matthew 9 says, “... it is not the healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.” Speaking of His ministry, but a but a tacit recognition of their place and role, the same thing in Luke 10.

Now, while doctors are a tool that God uses, a means that God uses remember there are two crucial caveats. First of all, doctors don't know everything. Unfortunately, there are some doctors that would like you to think they do; that we have arrived at the apex of knowledge. Let me tell you something. When they were bleeding people, they thought they had arrived at the apex of knowledge, too. So, understand that, keep it in perspective. You see this in the ministry of Jesus, Mark 5, you remember the woman He healed, "... [she] had endured much ..." Mark writes, "... at the hand[s] of many physicians, and she had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse...." That happens sometimes, they can be a great help, but they don't know everything that's going on in the human body or in our world.

And secondly, don't put your trust in doctors instead of God. There's a powerful passage in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles 16 where God chastens King Asa, it says that in his old age he got a disease in his feet. But then God says this, "... even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians." He wasn't saying he shouldn't have gone to the doctors, what was the point, where was his trust, where was his confidence? Is your confidence in the doctor that you have or in the pills you take?

God uses means, the body's immune system, doctors. He also uses various medical aids. You can see these in the Old Testament, things like sanitation, sterilization, quarantine, hygiene and yes diet. God also uses medicine, you see this implied in 1 Timothy 5:23 when Paul says to Timothy, I want you to no longer drink water exclusively, but I want you to use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. Paul is under inspiration encouraging Timothy to use a product outside of himself that God will use to help his health; and in so doing shows that God uses the means even of medicine.

There's one final thing that God uses, and that is men with the gift of healing. I'm not going to spend a lot of time here, but it's important that you understand that this was primarily only during 3 periods of history: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and the Apostles. In fact, out of somewhere between 6 and 10,000 years of history, human history, most of the miracles recorded in Scripture occurred in periods totaling 150 years. So, out of 6 to 10,000 years most of the miracles you read occurred within 150 years. So, God was not always working

miracles at the same level and the same pace. There was a specific emphasis in each of these cases.

For Jesus, it was, as we've studied already, to validate His teaching to confirm His authority; and He gave some in the first century a miraculous gift of healing, and there're several passages that list that miraculous gift. We've looked at these before, and I'm not going to go there now except to remind you that they were to these miraculous gifts served one primary purpose, what were they? What was it rather? To confirm the word of the apostles. You can see that in these passages, to confirm the word of the apostles; these miraculous gifts confirmed their word and gradually faded even during the New Testament era.

You say well what about all the faith healing they talk about today, you saying that those miraculous gifts of healing are gone today? What what's going on when they say that's happening? Well, there's a great little list in Dick Mayhew's book that I would recommend to you, and he develops these. I'm not going to develop them. You want to know what's going on, there're various explanations; medical treatment that the person was on worked, healing capacity of the body, spontaneous remission, emotionally induced illness can be easily emotionally reversed, a misdiagnosis, the person just doesn't have what they were diagnosed as having, and so they're declared healed. And so, a misleading report, a placebo effect which has been proven. Peer pressure, mass hysteria, deliberate deceit in some cases like Peter Popoff and others who just were deceiving people, and certainly satanic involvement, those are a few of the explanations for modern miraculous healing.

One last way God heals: He can do it directly without the use of means. He does it for Paul in Acts 14, when Paul is stoned at Lystra, you remember the story, Paul is stoned. Now folks, stoning was not throwing pebbles at him from a distance, okay? They got large rocks intended to crush his bones and body. And they stoned him from close distance, and it says after the stoning they go back into the city confident they have done their business for the day, and Paul gets up and walks back with the disciples into the city. God directly without means, healed him. And in Acts 28, you remember, he's picking up wood serving these people that are shipwrecked, and he's picking up wood for the fire and out of the out of the wood comes a poisonous snake and

attaches to his hand, and he shakes it off, and God superintends that process and heals his body from the venom that would have destroyed him.

I believe God still does this by the way, I have several friends who were diagnosed, who have x-rays or various other tests that show their bodies wracked with a certain disease, and a short time thereafter those tests are done again, and it's gone. The doctors have no explanation. I think God still does this, but He does it on His own without means.

Very quickly, how should you respond when you get sick? Whether it's one of those irritating I have to stay at home and not do what I really want to be doing kinds of sicknesses, or whether it's the other extreme when you're diagnosed with a terrible terminal disease. How does a Christian respond? Let me give you a couple of thoughts here. This is practical for all of us. We all find ourselves here at some point or other.

Number one, remind yourself of God's sovereignty in health and in sickness. Remind yourself that God is in control. Exodus 4, He makes death and seeing and blind is it not I, the LORD, he says. Deuteronomy 32, I wound, I heal, take confidence in the sovereignty of God.

Secondly, confess any known sin. James 5 makes it clear that there can be, and we studied this at length when we went through James. If you missed that, you may want to go listen to that series at some point. But James makes it clear that there is or there can be a link between physical illness and sin in the life. And so, he urges us to confess our sins to one another and to confess our sins to God. Along with that, in the same passage, he says call for the elders if you suspect that your sickness is because of a pattern of unrepentant sin in your life. Call for the elders, and have them pray over you. If you think there may be a link between the sickness you have and a pattern of unrepentant sin in your life, then you call for the elders.

Number four, use the means God has provided in His common grace; doctors and medicines, use those means. But remember don't ever lose confidence in whom? In God. Don't be like Asa. Don't put your confidence in the doctors or in the medicine, keep your confidence in God the Healer.

Number five, pray for health and healing. Pray according to His sovereign will, and pray for what will most promote His glory. Even as you pray for healing, even as you pray for health, say God I want what You want for me, and I want what will most bring You glory, whatever that is. Follow the pattern of Hezekiah, you remember Hezekiah. He was told that he was going to die, and he says, “Oh Lord by these things men live and in all these is the life of my spirit oh restore me to health and let me live.” And God honored his prayer and gave him 15 additional years. Paul, you remember, Paul prayed 2 Corinthians 12:8, “... concerning this thorn in the flesh that I had I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.” Nothing wrong with praying and asking God for healing and for health. John in 3 John 2 says, “... beloved I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” There’s nothing wrong with praying that God would bring health and healing if it’s according to His sovereign will, and if it’s what will bring Him the greatest glory.

And finally, accept God’s providential plan. Do all of that and leave it in God’s hands. Let me show you two texts that make this crystal clear. Go back to Job for a moment, Job 2, you remember he was terribly affected by the disease verse 7 of Job 2 says,

... Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. [And he’s sitting down with a potsherd, a piece of broken pottery scraping his sores, sitting among the ashes.] Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

There was a parody a few years ago of the little bracelet WWJD, what would Jesus do? And it was it was like a Job packet that you could buy, again it was a parody making fun of some of those things in the Christian marketplace, and it was a CG I’m looking at the verse, CGAD, curse God and die. I mean this is terrible advice, this is what his wife is saying. Curse God and die, “but he said to her,” [here’s the attitude you should have] “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity?”

Do you know what Job was doing? He was accepting God's providential plan in his life. He was saying I know God is sovereign. I know He has brought this, and I trust Him, I don't understand, but I trust Him. And of course, God went on to teach him a lot more about himself and about his need to depend on God and to get his eyes on God and not on himself. But, from the beginning he understood that God had a plan and that he needed to accept that plan. Folks, when illness comes, what is the first thing we do? What is the first question we ask? Why me? Or why? Listen, do the things we've talked about, but in the end accept God's plan, God is in charge. He takes the ultimate responsibility. Don't chafe under His providential purpose in your life. You don't know all the purposes He has in mind, but don't fight them.

Turn to one other passage, 2 Corinthians 12. Here you see Paul dealing with the same thing, 2 Corinthians 12:7, he talks about this thorn in the flesh sent to keep him from exalting himself. Verse 8 he says I asked God to take it away, take it away, take it away three times I asked Him that He would do that,

And He has said to me" [verse 9,] "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties," [With everything in my life, I'm okay with it God] for when I am weak, then I am strong.

He is accepting God's providential purpose and plan in his life because he realizes that God has a plan and it's for good. And that brings us right back to the verse we usually go to but often don't take very seriously, Romans 8:28, "... God causes all things to work together for good to those who love ... [Him], to those who are called according to *His* purpose." Trust Him, accept His plan.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for the time that we've been able to spend together tonight. Thank You for how Your Word addresses even such a practical issue of our lives.

Lord, we realize that we live in a world affected by sin and the fall, a cursed world, and yet we're so grateful to know that illness and sickness and congenital problems don't come into our lives and the lives of those we love by accident, but rather all of them are ultimately directed by Your hand, even those for which there is human responsibility.

You use them and direct them for Your own purposes. Father, we thank You and praise You that You are such a great God, that You are so much in control. Help us to accept Your purpose and plan in our lives. May we fall down with Job and say, shall we accept good from the Lord and not evil? Father, help us to have that kind of spirit.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.