

Sermon: Jesus' Healing Ministry: From Compassion to Controversy

Text: Luke 5:12-26

Gary L. Wackler

June 14, 2009

Introduction: There is preparation needed for ministry! We read before:

Luke 4:42-44 (NIV) ⁴²At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. ⁴³But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." ⁴⁴And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

"The life of Jesus illustrates this pattern of seeking significant time to be alone with the Father (**Luke 5:16; Mark 1:35; 6:31**) so that he would have the inner power and poise to deal with the outward pressures imposed upon him by his friends and enemies." -Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, p. 270

Luke 5:16 (NIV) ¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Jesus had just finished calling his first disciples and now he invites them to look, listen and learn what will also be expected of them. After Jesus begins gathering disciples and his popularity skyrockets, a rhythm and pattern to his ministry emerges. Jesus requires time alone in prayer and worship to recharge and focus on the mission. Even though this is the Creator, Mary's son is still fully human. With no preparation and spiritual foundation for the days ahead this Messiah would have ended up like all the others, but Jesus was different. He was/is truly "God with us" (Emmanuel), the great "I Am" as John portrays him.

There is great counsel in Bonhoeffer's words from his book *Life Together*: "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community....Let him who is not in community beware of being alone." - quoted in *Conformed to His Image*, p. 87

Much of what Luke provides us is exemplary. He certainly could not have recorded every healing or miracle. What he does give us is not chronological, but theological. Everything that is written is to reveal God to us in Jesus Christ, and we listen in on conversations that were meant to instruct the early disciples - and now us!

Let's look at two miracles - two lessons, if you will:

I. Jesus Is Able to Heal the Physical.

Luke 5:12-15 (NIV) ¹²While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." ¹³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." ¹⁵Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

Jesus is developing quite a reputation as a healer. There are people waiting in line to have just a moment or touch from the Master.

This miracle of healing with the leper is quite extraordinary. Leprosy was a generalized term that could apply to anything from mildew in one's home to a rash or even what is called Hansen's disease. It appears from the context that this man who came for healing was a desperate and very diseased individual.

In Barclay's commentary on Matthew (p. 300) he quotes E. W. Masterman:

"No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck." it might begin with little nodules which go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge; the eyebrows fall out; the eyes become staring; the vocal chords become ulcerated, and the voice becomes hoarse, and the breath wheezes. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma and ultimately death. Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body; the nerve trunks are affected; the muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follow ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which a man dies by inches.

People like this were social, religious outcasts and were sometimes seen at a distance with their clothing torn, hair uncombed, and their hand covering their upper lip. They were required to cry out "unclean, unclean."

Anyone who came into even incidental contact with these poor individuals was also deemed unclean!

The leper was desperate. Even though it was against the law he felt Jesus was able to help. The question was: would he be willing? Jesus responds to the man's plea:

A. Jesus touches the leper.

We know today that “touch” can be very therapeutic. It can make the difference in neo-natal intensive care units or in the early development of babies. Touch can reduce pain or improve symptoms of those suffering from dementia (see article by Margaret Chuong-Kim on DrBenKim.com).

Touch demonstrates caring and concern for another. “By touching the man, Jesus entered into the man's isolation and shame.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 71

Over the years we have seen the stigma of people with Polio, Small Pox, T.B., and AIDS. There is another condition that sometimes feels like this: old age. Many times what will make the difference for our elderly sick is human contact.

So that this man can enter back into society and also be a witness that the Kingdom of God and the Messiah is here:

B. Jesus heals the leper.

Instead of Jesus becoming unclean, he heals the leper. This healing is unprecedented in human memory. The text says literally the man was “full” of leprosy. It is the kind of remark you sometimes hear after exploratory surgery and the doctor says the person was full of cancer.

So out of this kind of prognosis and hopeless condition, Jesus provides a complete cure. It is like that for us who were lost in our sin and alienated from God. We had a death sentence hanging over our heads. But Jesus healed us and set us free from any fear of death.

“Since only two cases of healing were on record ([Num. 12:9-15](#); and [II Kings 5:1-14](#)), the rabbis taught that only God could heal leprosy ([II Kings 5:7](#)).” - Donald G. Miller, *The Layman's Bible Commentary, Luke*, p. 69

Was Jesus saying he was God? It looked like it.

C. Jesus expects obedience from the leper.

Jesus asks the now-cured leper to do two things:

1. Don't tell anyone
2. Show yourself to the priest and offer sacrifices

Mark tells us the healed leper blabs, and who could blame him?

Mark 1:45 (NIV) ⁴⁵Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

If you have been healed after being wrote off as a lost cause, who wouldn't be talking, bragging on the doctor? It should be that way spiritually, too. When we were brought from death to life and came to appreciate God's grace and mercy that was extended to us, how could a person help himself?

Jesus had broken the law as had the leper in touching each other. Jesus was not anti-law; he was simply "pro" people. Jesus had come to be a physician to those who recognized they were sick.

Again, not to read too much into Jesus' request, this *well* man was to see the priest to fulfill the Law (**Leviticus 14**). This also would help raise the possibility for the priest that Jesus was more than just the latest faith healer.

Where this account of healing may only hint at Jesus' divinity, the next story is clear:
II. Jesus Is Able to Heal the Spiritual.

Luke 5:17-25 (NIV) ¹⁷One 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. ¹⁸Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹When 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. ²⁰When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." ²¹The 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?" ²²Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴But 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." ²⁵Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

A. Jesus responds to faith.

I imagine at first these friends and the paralytic must have been disappointed. They had come to receive a healing. They had carried the man on his mat probably up some outside stairs, removed tile and mud and roof debris creating a hole large enough to lower the man down in front of Jesus.

²⁰When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

Notice the personal pronouns here!

Isn't it wonderful that there were people who cared about this man's condition and had enough faith to involve themselves in his life?

It was not that Jesus would not or could not heal the man, he was willing and able, AND DOES - but first:

B. Jesus forgives sins.

It may be that the man's condition was caused by sin in his life, and that needs to be removed before Jesus heals him. Although this is unlikely.

Some say that this was a psychosomatic illness. While that sort of condition does exist, Jesus was performing a miracle not counseling.

Jesus in two separate acts that are not cause and effect situations makes this man whole.

Q. Why did Jesus forgive - then heal this man?

A. Because the most important thing in a person's life is to be forgiven.

The Apostle Paul and his protege, Timothy, both suffered from physical maladies that were never healed. It had nothing to do with the power of faith or prayer, but God's will.

There were certainly other sinners in the room at the time, but the paralytic was one who realized his need of divine help.

Finally Jesus forgives the man first because he knows what the reaction will be:

Luke 5:21 (NIV) ²¹The 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?”

The Pharisees tied sin and sickness together, so if the physical problem disappeared, that was an indication that the sin had been removed. If that is the case, Jesus is here identifying himself as the Son of man, the Messiah and God because there is no other valid explanation.

Two word studies: As I was going through these two accounts of healing, I noticed a subtle, but important, change in wording.

In the first account (with the leper) the Greek words are καθαρίζω which means “to cleanse” (cathartic) and is used three times in four verses, and θεραπεύω (therapy, etc.) which means “to heal, treat and restore” (BAG, p. 359) is used:

Luke 5:15 (NIV) ¹⁵Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

In the second account the word that is used (ἰαομαι) is a broader word that means to heal or cure sickness, but also sin. We see it introducing the second account of healing:

Luke 5:17 (NIV) ¹⁷One 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.

Luke is saying here that there are worse things than stigma, isolation and disease. The forgiveness of sin is the reason for the gospel message being shared.

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus says in Matthew’s gospel: **Matthew 13:15 (NIV)** ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

And James would say: **James 5:16 (NIV)** ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

One of the reasons Jesus prayed was for power.

C. Not everyone sees the same way.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law had come out from Jerusalem and every little village, too, to check on this Jesus. They were so sure they knew how the Messiah would act that even sitting in the same room, they did not recognize God!

The Pharisees should have been helping people come to Jesus, the Messiah, but they were blocking people from being saved with their attitudes. I pray we never are a hindrance to people putting their faith in Jesus!

“Luke is preaching the gospel, but also letting us look at some who could not say ‘Yes’ to Jesus....After all, something about Jesus’ person and work got him killed, and for twenty centuries many of his followers have paid the same price.” - Craddock, Luke, p. 73

Conclusion: The proper response for any kind of healing by Jesus is praise/worship. **Luke 5:26 (NIV)** ²⁶Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

Jesus will later commission his disciples also to heal in his name. Luke makes it quite clear that faith in Jesus both heals and saves.

Luke 7:50 (NIV) ⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Luke 8:48 (NIV) ⁴⁸Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

Both these accounts use the same Greek word (σωζω) which is translated saved and healed. It is so closely linked that in Acts (written by Luke) we hear the Greek word translated both ways again:

Acts 4:9, 12 (NIV) ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

The people in our two stories came with different attitudes about how they would deal with Jesus. Some would accept him as Lord and bow down and worship; others could only cling to their pride and position.

I hope that if you are crippled because of sin and you do not know Jesus as your Savior, that today you will change your condition. Put your faith in Jesus, and he will make you whole (well).