

## Talk 9: Does God heal today?

A friend of mine spent two days trying to fix his computer after it acquired a virus. Eventually up on his screen flashed this simple question: *Do you want to be healed?* He pressed: OK. Thirty seconds later his computer was “healed”...

Healing is a very personal experience. Of course, God heals through doctors and nurses. But I believe he also intervenes to directly heal people.

We want healing when things are going wrong, physically or emotionally.

Companies can be in need of healing, though we do not normally think of them in this way. Bringing in consultants is sometimes one way a business looks for healing.

All in all, in our human experience from day to day, if there is a problem, we try to heal it, whether it is a personal issue or a business one.

God is no different: he too is in the healing business.

Healing stories form 25% of the Gospels.

Interestingly enough, Jesus did not heal everyone in Israel. But healing was part of his normal day-to-day ministry.

Take a moment to see what Jesus' plan of action was. Matthew 4:23 says: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching (...), preaching (...) and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”

This is what Jesus did: he taught, preached and healed.

That statement introduces and summarises a whole section that then follows.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are the Sermon on the Mount. Teaching at its most perfect.

Chapters 8 and 9 are full of miracles. Amazing happenings in people's lives.

Chapter 9:35 is like 4:23, indeed is nearly an exact repeat of it. These two statements at either end of this long section of scripture are what scholars of the Bible call examples of an *inclusio*. The Gospel writer is by them underlining:

This is what Jesus did: he taught, preached and healed.

At the start of the section Matthew summarises what Jesus did. He then gives arresting examples of what Jesus did. Finally, he again summarises what Jesus did. These two “*inclusio*” statements sum up Jesus' ministry.

However, this plan of action that included healing was not confined to Jesus.

The disciples also healed people. Luke 9:1,2 says Jesus “gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases.”

OK, you may say, but the disciples are like the directors of a big company. They might be expected to do special things. They are not like us who are ordinary employees...

If we read Luke 10:1,9, we see that Jesus sent out 72 others to preach and heal.

OK, you may say, but the 72 were senior people, top-level trouble-shooters. Again, not you and me

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus tells his disciples to go to all the nations, (and that includes Edinburgh) and teach them (and that includes you and me) to do everything that he has commanded them to do (and that includes healing).

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Is there any evidence though of healings following Jesus departure from this earth?

In the account of the early church in Acts we see many instances of healing.

Later on, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in France in the 2nd century, recorded many healings.

Origen in the 3rd century did the same.

St Augustine of Hippo in the 4th century, in his book "The City of God", has pages and pages on healings. Blind people see; someone is dramatically healed of breast cancer. Augustine relates the case of Bishop Innocent who had fistula. These are infected glands filled with pus. Today you would have a sophisticated operation. The glands would be cut open and drained. It would mean being in hospital for 3 days, then off work for 6 weeks.

Bishop Innocent had many fistula intricately imbedded in his rectum. He nearly died during the first operation he underwent. His friends prayed for him and the power of their prayers threw him on the ground. Then Augustine records that the dreaded day of the second operation arrived. The surgeon got the frightful tools ready. The part was bared... The surgeon subjected the Bishop to every kind of scrutiny, but he was found to be completely healed. Not surprisingly, it is said of Innocent: "No words can describe the joy!" and that he gave himself to praise and thanksgiving.

There are cases of healing today.

Why? Perhaps the important point for a Christian is that one day we will have a perfect body and eternal life and that in healing we get just a glimpse of that time.

John Wimber, a Christian in our time with a healing gift, discovered, "When we prayed for no one to be healed, no one was healed. When we prayed for lots of people to be healed, quite a few were healed." He couldn't explain why healings don't always take place. But he noticed that even those who are not healed receive something good – notably a gift of peace and knowledge of a God who cares for them.

Anyone can pray for the sick. The guiding principle should be: pray out of love.

With love in your heart, you just pray a simple prayer. There is nothing funny, no special signs or words. After all, it is not our prayers but God's power that brings about change.

We might beforehand ask: "Where does it hurt?" "Why does it hurt?"

We then invoke the power of the Holy Spirit and pray for healing in the name of Jesus. We can get "impressions" from the Holy Spirit that help us to pray

It can be good to reassure the person being prayed for of God's love for them. We do not put a burden on anyone: if healing is not there and then apparent, it is not due to that person's lack of faith or fault. Jesus never implied that.

We can simply go on praying regularly for the person, because we take the long view of lives rooted in a healing community, the church. We don't allow ourselves to get discouraged. We go on praying for healing. And sometimes people get healed.

Jesus commanded us, so we do it.

In my life I have seen many examples of healing. There have been too many for me not to be convinced that God heals today. Here is a personal instance.

My wife was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer in January 1998. She was very unwell and given an 18% chance of surviving to 5 years. Treatment included chemotherapy followed by an operation, then more chemotherapy and then radio therapy, and finally another operation. The initial chemotherapy was very severe and made her desperately unwell. Despite feeling like death and hardly able to walk, she came with me to the Haddington pilgrimage in May. The ecumenical service included a time of healing and she said to me, "Shall I ask for prayer?" - as we had never really done anything like this before. I encouraged her and

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when the minister came to our row she put her hand up and explained to him what was wrong with her. He put a little oil on her forehead and prayed for healing.

Afterwards she said she felt a deep peace come upon her. For the first time since diagnosis 4 months earlier she felt there was hope and the possibility of a future. A week later tests showed that the tumour, to the doctors' surprise, had shrunk just enough to make an operation barely possible. There followed a year of great difficulty, pain, treatment and operations during which she received splendid care by the tremendous staff at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh. Nevertheless, she will tell you that it was from that moment in a packed church in Haddington that her healing began. Eighteen months after the initial diagnosis she returned to work as a Registered General Nurse and has been nursing full time ever since.

We worship a God who heals. But perhaps the greatest healing he brings about is when people come back into relationship with him and thereby have new life, becoming all that it is to be fully human – restored to full relationship with God.