

5. Discipling the Sick (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

Biblical material: Isa. 53:4, Matt. 8:17, 15:30, 31; Mark 2:1–12, Phil. 4:4–9, 1 John 3:20–22, John 11:37–44.

Quotes

- The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares. *Henri Nouwen*
- The greatest healing therapy is friendship and love. *Hubert H. Humphrey*
- The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world. *Marianne Williamson*
- Part of the healing process is sharing with other people who care. *Jerry Cantrell*
- Healing is a moral thing to do. *Jay Inslee*
- Of one thing I am certain, the body is not the measure of healing, peace is the measure. *Phyllis McGinley*

Questions

Why did Jesus stress healing aspects in his ministry? How do we as his disciples continue this? Is it enough to say we run hospitals? Why are healing concepts better than legal ones? How do we achieve healing? How do we best demonstrate the gift of healing that comes from the divine Physician?

Bible summary

How do we understand Isa. 53:4? Was God punishing his Son? Matt. 8:16, 17 records that “When evening came they brought many who were demon-possessed to Jesus. He made the spirits leave at his command, and he healed all those who were sick. This fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah said: ‘He healed our diseases, and freed us from our illnesses.’” Huge crowds of the sick came to Jesus and he healed them all (15:30, 31). Mark 2:1-12 reveals Jesus as focused on healing, in contrast to the Pharisees’ false system. Phil. 4:4-9 is an inspiring passage encouraging us to be happy and to take all our problems to God, similarly 1 John 3:20-22. In the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:37-44), we see the compassion of Jesus who wept, even though he knew he was about to bring Lazarus back to life.

Comment

This lesson focuses on healing, and healing is one of the best metaphors to describe God’s salvation. When it comes to discipleship, Matthew 10:8 FBV is very relevant here: “Heal those who are sick. Resurrect the dead. Cure the lepers. Drive out demons. You received freely, so give freely!” This verse if taken as definitive of discipleship should challenge us, if we’re reading and understanding! Have you carried out all four aspects of your discipleship this week? Clearly discipleship has changed over time, and that is not necessarily good or bad...

But the real issue is not in miraculous signs, but in demonstrating God as he truly is. The gospels cite Jesus’ compassion. Why did Jesus heal people? Because he cared so deeply about them. Even when he knew that he would raise Lazarus, Jesus still wept

along with everyone else there. Every miracle is to help us, and the side aspect of “vindicating God” is just that—not the primary motive.

Of course, people would not have come to Jesus in the numbers that they did without the miracles. But when Jesus saw they were following just for miracles, and when they wanted to make him king as a result, he stopped. And the people left him. His compassion continued, but to heal everyone clouded the mission, in an odd sense. God does want to save and heal everyone—but he wants more than just healing from a particular problem or disease. He wants to salvation-heal us, and do so eternally.

We as his disciples must have the same perspective. People may ask for miracles, like raising someone from the dead. But why? To prove something? To demonstrate might and power? To make us look good? To bring someone back to this life so they can die again?

It’s interesting that Jesus is only recorded as performing resurrections three times, while the miracles of healing were countless. Why? Not so much because it’s harder for God to do, but because of what it meant for the person concerned. Even resurrection isn’t a cure-all! You still get sick, you still suffer, you still die, and you experience this sinful world once again. Not such a great deal, maybe...

Our role is to respond just as Jesus did—with compassion. We truly care for those around us—which is the exact opposite of the selfishness of sin. In whatever way we can, we try to help, we share the grief and we sympathize. Like Jesus who came and lived among us, we are living here in this world as a spectacle to the universe, to angels and to human beings, of what God is really like. That’s our role, one that we cannot and dare not fake.

Consider a couple of stories Jesus told. First the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Why does Jesus tell this parable, especially with the way it’s been so badly misunderstood? It’s to make the point of what is really valuable, and what true compassion is all about. Ultimately, truly uncaring people wouldn’t even respond to resurrected prophets, says Jesus.

In the story of the Pharisee and publican (Luke 18:9-14), Jesus points to the right attitude that makes us right! It’s not about status or ritual observance, but of recognizing our need, and coming to God for all the good gifts he wants to give.

Ultimately, salvation is healing—healing from the broken relationship of sin, restoring us enemies back to God as his true friends.

Ellen White Comments

Jesus, when he was found in fashion as a man, had a realizing sense of the world's needs, and he employed his human, God-given powers for the benefit of men, while in every act of mercy and healing he drew upon the divine power, even the power that made the worlds. The Lord Jesus is all ready to impart the very same aid to all who will consecrate their powers to his service, who feel the need of the impartation of his grace. To all who desire to be recipients of his Spirit, the virtue flows out from Christ. And it is in this way that the character of God, the perfection of Christ and the Father, is brought before the world. The human agent is complete in Christ. Learning in the school of Christ, daily studying his life, we become one with him, and reflect the virtues of his character. {RH, October 14, 1902}