

I spent five days this week down in Anchorage at pastors' meetings. Which meant that most of what regularly fills my calendar was canceled this week. Except that I still had a sermon to write. The presentations were great, and I paid attention, I really did. But it was a divided attention because many of my thoughts and notes were distracted by the stories of healing in the book of Matthew. So yes, I prepared a good portion of this message during pastors' meetings.

So, one day, when we stopped for lunch, my mind was still full of these healing stories. I turned my chair around to visit with another pastor. When I asked how things were going in his church he shared that there have been several recent deaths and that a few key church leaders have passed away. And he recently learned that the person he was eyeing to take the head elder position has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. I had spent the morning partially distracted and genuinely excited by considering these miraculous stories. Everyone Jesus touched was healed, demons were cast out, leprosy was cured, the dead were raised. My head space was charged up with these victorious ideas. Then over lunch I was trying to reconcile this triumphant healing power of Jesus with the reality of sickness and death and the sadness I was hearing in this other pastor's voice. At that lunch table we explored some of the questions that were in my mind. When the truth of Jesus' power to heal collides with the reality of believers not being healed, I have lots of questions.

What do these healing stories mean to the man with terminal cancer? How would he feel listening to this sermon about healing? What should my pastor friend say at the anointing service? What exactly should he pray for? How do we bring together faith in God's power and trusting acceptance of hard realities? Does God wish to heal this man? Is God just wanting that church to ask for healing? Faith cries out for healing and faith trusts God's goodness when it doesn't come. There is a faith that insists and a faith that accepts. But how do we know which expression of faith is most appropriate for the situation. There are lots of questions when it comes to sickness and healing and sometimes not being healed.

I invite you to take one question and hang on to it through this study. The question is this, "What needs to be healed now?". And I encourage you to direct this question to God. The truth is that there are countless things. What we are doing is asking God to reveal the one thing that he wants to work with us on right now. Trust him to bring that one thing to your mind as we study.

The thing that needs to be healed now may be something in our church or school, it may be your broken ribs. It may be an illness or a relationship. It may be healing for you or for someone else. It may have come to your mind instantly or it may not be clear for awhile. It may seem overly ambitious or relatively small. It doesn't matter so long as God is the one answering the question.

Ask God, "What needs to be healed now?". And when he brings that thing to your mind, bring that thing to him for healing.

Our study is centered on the story of the healing of two blind men in Matthew 9:27-31 but we are going to take in thoughts from all the healing stories in the book of Matthew.

If you are following with the weekly reading for this series (Matthew 8:1-9:38) you would have read 10 of the 17 healing stories in the book.

There are some common elements in these stories, and I have organized some of these on a healing chart you can find at pastorryanrogers.com. We will follow three repeated features: Initiation; Expression of Faith; Healing Act. And then we are going to ask about the reason for healing.

Initiation

Matthew 9:27 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

Who initiated this healing? Jesus passed by but the blind men followed, and the blind men cried out. Jesus was passive. The blind men took the active role. Sure, at a foundational level, Jesus has initiated all things. He is our creator. He has come to us as our savior. But in this story, the people in need of healing come to Jesus. If they hadn't cried out, it appears that Jesus would have continued to pass on by. Is this normal?

In the 17 healing stories in the book of Matthew I find 4 categories of initiations: Jesus, self, others, and adversaries. Which of these do you think happens most often?

In 9 of the 17 stories, we find other people initiating the healing encounter. Healing happens most often, in the book of Matthew, when people bring people to Jesus. More than we find people seeking their own healing or Jesus seeking out people, we find others initiating the healing. It pays to have some good friends!

There are some situations when we just can't come to Jesus on our own.

Two of the healings that were initiated by "others" were for paralytics (8:5-13, 9:1-8). Paralyzed people cannot come on their own. Maybe that is you. Maybe that is a friend of yours. When we are paralyzed, we need to be brought to Jesus by others. When your legs can't carry you to Jesus, your friends can. Maybe you are the one who needs to be carried and maybe you are the one who carries. Either way, together you can bring your need before Jesus.

Two of the "others" who initiated the healing were fathers. Parents have a special role in the healing of their children. One father had a son who was demon possessed. The other father had a daughter who was dead (9:18-26). The possessed and the dead cannot come to Jesus on their own (17:14-21). It is not as simple as asking God to heal you when you are not in a position that you can ask. This is when we need someone to go to Jesus for us. The blind man needs "some people" because he couldn't see the way to Jesus. The paralyzed man needs "some people" because he couldn't walk to Jesus.

If you are the one who cannot make a move toward healing on your own, call out to the person you trust the most to help bring you to Jesus.

If you are the one who is able, look for those people in your life who need you to bring them. Recognize that you are a vital part of their healing journey. You can't heal them. You can bring them to Jesus.

I was brought to Jesus by a friend this week. On Thursday morning I went to climb the Butte at 5:30am. We had temperatures above freezing during the day, but all of that water froze during the night. On a straight stretch of road, I started losing control at about 55 MPH. I spun around and crossed into the other lane before running straight into the guard rail with my front bumper. You can think a lot of thoughts in a short amount of time when that kind of thing happens. My thoughts were gratitude that there were no oncoming cars and that I was not driving into an icy river. Then my thoughts were that this was going to hurt both me and my car. I expected the front of my car to be completely crushed and an airbag to hit me in the face. None of that happened. It should have, considering the speed at which I hit the guardrail. I needed to get out of the road, so I drove off and parked at the Butte Trailhead. Then I inspected the damage. There was only a mark on the bumper. It drove fine. Nothing is smashed. Other than a morning shot of adrenaline, there was no physical effect on me. I got a text from a friend at 5am that said. I am praying for you. I hadn't seen the text until later in the day. But God heard the prayer. Later I told my friend what had happened. He asked when it happened. Because God prompted him to pray for me that morning. Specifically, his prayer was that God would not allow Satan to do anything to me to distract from ministry. That could have been a major distraction from ministry. I did not think to come to Jesus with that prayer that morning. But I had a friend bring me to Jesus. It was a preemptive healing. Jesus "healed" me by preventing me from getting hurt because a friend brought me to Jesus.

Of the remaining three categories, which do you suppose occurs second most often?

The person in need of healing self-initiated their healing in 5 of the 17. This is what we see with the blind men in chapter 9. They cry out and then cry louder. The Canaanite woman came crying (15:22). Take initiative. Be intentional. Bring your brokenness to Jesus.

There are two other categories of initiation in the stories of healing in Matthew: Jesus and adversaries. Again, which one do you suppose happens more. It's adversaries.

There are two healing stories in Matthew in which the healing is initiated by an adversary. In one story it is demon possessed men who met Jesus and the demons do the talking (8:28-34). They are the ones that suggested to be sent into the pigs. In the other, the people trying to trap Jesus are the ones who draw his attention to the man with the withered hand. Jesus is so good that he can heal when the encounter is initiated for the wrong reasons or by the wrong spirit.

There is only one story in which Jesus appears to initiate the healing. It is when Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15). The text tells us that Jesus saw her. It doesn't say anything

about her initiating it. The same story told in Mark says, “they told him about her” (Mark 1:30). So, it appears that Matthew simply left out the detail that this healing was actually initiated by his disciples. Even if we go with the Matthew version and assume that Jesus initiated the healing, we still find Satan initiating healings twice as often as Jesus. What is the deal?

At a fundamental level, Jesus does initiate. Yes, it is his power. Yes, he initiates by creating us. Yes, he initiates by loving us first. Yes, He initiated by making himself available, Yes, his spirit is moving in us to draw us to him and working in others to bring us to him. But, in these healing stories, Jesus chooses to pass by rather than approach. He chooses to be available rather than be assertive. We find Jesus is present but not pushy. He wants us to want it. He initiates in all the ways we cannot. Then, in the one way he will not, he looks to us to initiate. He will not force. He will not choose faith for us. He is a God who invites us to ask, seek and knock. He could give before we ask, but he wants us to want him. He wants us to be ready. When he came to the invalid in John 5 he asked the strangest question, “Do you want to be healed?”. The question was not about Jesus’ ability but the man’s desire. Jesus doesn’t hold back because he wants to see us continue in our suffering. He holds back to give us a chance to step forward in faith.

When you feel that God is not taking action in your life, it may be that he is calling you to action. His passing may be intended to get you to chase after him. His silence may be an invitation for you to cry out to him.

How is healing initiated? After Jesus has done all that we can’t do he looks to us to do what he will not do. Healing happens when people come or when they are brought to Jesus.

This leaves us with three questions to filter through the big question, “what needs to be healed now?”. If you have answered that question and you have in your mind what needs to be healed. Now ask, “How could I come to Jesus?”, “How could I bring others to Jesus?” or “How do I need to be brought to Jesus?” Do any of those apply to your answer...

Expression of Faith

Matthew 9:28-29

When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.”

Whenever we find the miracle of healing we also find faith.

One of the reasons that Jesus looks to us to initiate the healing is to give us the opportunity to express faith. Coming to Jesus and bringing others to Jesus is already an expression of faith. In 10 of the 17 stories there are additional and explicit expressions of faith.

A quick survey of those 7 stories that don’t explicitly express faith shows that there are reasons why the faith didn’t get recorded. Three of these are non-descript stories of Jesus healing the

multitudes. Matthew doesn't record their expressions of faith because he doesn't record any detail beyond the fact that there was a mass healing. Two of them are stories of demon possession. It is hard to express your faith audibly when you don't have control of your body. But God can detect faith beyond our words. It can even be argued that the demons themselves expressed faith in identifying Jesus as the Son of God. Another story is of the man with the shriveled hand. We don't have his words, but we see his faith in that he obeyed the command of Jesus to stretch forth his hand. That leaves us with only one story where we might expect to hear faith expressed and don't. This is the story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. The point is that faith is always involved in the miracle of healing.

Jesus notices our faith when we come to him. When the people brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus, he didn't just see their friend, he saw their faith. We read, "When Jesus saw their faith, he said..." (Matthew 9:2). Jesus sees our faith. Jesus told the centurion, "As you have believed so let it be done to you." (8:13)

We have already considered that most often it is "others" who bring people to Jesus. When we consider the expressions of faith we are reminded of the wonderful role that others play in healing. Jesus saw the faith of the friends and he healed the man. We don't have to have all the faith in ourselves. Jesus also sees the faith of our friends. The centurion had the faith, and the servant was healed (8:8). The father had faith, and the daughter was brought back to life (9:18). The father knelt before Jesus and the demon was cast out of his boy (17:14). Bring people to Jesus and then beg Jesus for people.

Jesus offers commentary on faith in his healing acts. He told the persistent Canaanite woman that her faith was "great" (15:28).

There are three ways that we find faith being expressed in these stories that can be helpful to us in expressing our faith.

1. Faith is expressed by affirming God's ability.
2. Faith is expressed by describing our situation.
3. Faith is expressed by asking of God.

In affirmation of God's ability, we hear the leper say, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." (8:2). We hear the centurion say, "Just say the word." (8:8). The father affirms God's ability when he says, "lay your hand on her, and she will live." (9:18). The woman with the issue of blood says, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." (9:22). And notice the question that Jesus asks the two blind men, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (9:28). Are you confident in God's ability? Let him know. We don't always know that it is God's will to answer our prayer, but we always know that he is able.

You have in your mind that thing that needs to be healed now. Tell God that you know he can do it. When we tell God we are reminding ourselves. This God we are praying to can do

anything! What do you believe could happen if Jesus would lay his hands on it, if we would say the word, if you could just touch him?

We also see faith expressed in these stories as they describe their situation to Jesus. They say things like, “my daughter is dead”, “My son is possessed”, or “my servant is paralyzed.” There is something healing in simply telling Jesus about our troubles. When we talk to him about the things we struggle with we show faith that he cares about our struggle. And we show confidence that he can do something about our struggle. Describe the thing on your heart for Jesus.

We also express our faith by asking him to act. Four times in Matthew we find the person approaching Jesus for healing with the request, “have mercy on me”. What a beautiful prayer. Ask God for mercy. Perhaps the most striking example of asking God is in the story of the persistent Canaanite woman (15:21-28). She has faith through the apparent rejection of Jesus. The disciples say to send her away. Jesus says he was sent only for the lost sheep of Israel and still she cries out “Lord, help me”. Ask Jesus for help. We show our faith in our request.

The Act of Healing

Notice how Jesus heals the blind men in Matthew 9:29.

Then he *touch*ed their eyes, *saying*, “According to your faith be it done to you.”

Now turn your attention to how Jesus heals. There are two ways that we find Jesus healing in these stories: by word and by touch.

Here is the breakdown of the 17 healing stories.

- Jesus heals by word only 8 times.
- Jesus heals by touch only 4 times.
- Jesus heals by both word and touch 2 times.
- In two of the stories it is not said how Jesus healed.

What is significant about the word and the touch? Both ways of healing are examples of power in Jesus producing healing in people. But how are they different and what do they mean to us?

Let’s start with the healing word. The story of the centurion helps us see the significance (8:5-13). The centurion says that he is a man of authority and when he says the word it happens. The healing word shows Jesus’ authority to heal. It is the authoritative word that spoke creation. It is the word that had authority over the winds and the waves. Jesus heals with a word each time he cast out a demon. When Jesus needs to heal with authority, he speaks a healing word. We also see the authority of Jesus in the results of healing. In nearly every story, after the act of healing it says something like, “and immediately” or “that very moment”. It was not a struggle for Jesus to heal.

What about the touch? There is something required for a touch that is not required for a word; presence. The healing touch shows the intimacy of Jesus. We all know that virtual is not the same as in-person. In the healing touch Jesus shows that he doesn't keep his distance from hurting people. There is something intimate about touch. If you are holding someone's hand right now, I am going to guess that you are close to that person. You probably did not meet them this morning. Jesus heals by taking us by the hand.

Jesus also was intentional to touch the untouchables. Dead bodies were considered unclean. The lepers were untouchable. It is interesting that Jesus didn't heal these people with a word but with a touch.

Touch is powerful when it is not the touch of Jesus. Human touch can be healing. How much more healing is the touch of Jesus?

We also see intimacy in Jesus' healings in that he healed in ways that echoes the persons' request. The leper says, "if you will, you can make me clean" (8:2). Jesus says, "I will. Be clean." (8:2). The centurion says, "Just say the word" (8:8), and "I tell this one go and he goes (8:9). So how does Jesus heal? With a word. And what is that word? Go (8:13). He uses the centurion's word as his healing word. The demons asked to be sent into the pigs and Jesus says, "go" (8:31-32). The father asks him to lay his hand on his daughter (9:18) and Jesus took her by the hand (9:25). The point is that Jesus customizes each healing to be just what we need. He does not have a healing formula. He has loving relationships with each person he has created. He knows our need and he heals in the way we need to be healed.

Jesus heals us with authority and intimacy.

The Reason for Healing

Our text doesn't actually tell us why Jesus heals but it gives us a curious clue about what is not his reason for healing.

Matthew 9:30-31 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it." But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

Apparently Jesus didn't heal to get popular. The gospel of Mark records Jesus talking like this a lot 9:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36-37; 8:26, 30; 9:9). It is known as the "Messianic Secret".

What is up with this? I can see why he commanded demons to be quiet. We don't want to learn about Jesus from his enemy. But beyond that, isn't any publicity good publicity? Paul said, "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice." (Philippians 1:18). We have often been encouraged to talk of Jesus as often as we can. One take away from the Messianic Secret is that it is not always best to talk about Jesus. When we would give a wrong picture of his character, it is best that we stay quiet. When he is broadcasted in the wrong spirit, it does more harm than good. When we witness for him without having a personal witness of him, we tell of a God that is a shadow of the true God.

But there is more to understand here. Mark adds something to the story of the cleansing of the leper.

Mark 1:44-45

And said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

The fame that Jesus got from healing limited his ability to do ministry.

Consider this interchange after Jesus fed the multitude.

John 6:25-26

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Jesus does not wish to be followed as a miracle worker but as a savior. He doesn't just want a bunch of people excited about what they can get out of him, he wants relationships. He doesn't want fans, he wants followers. He doesn't want shallow fame he wants deep faith. He doesn't want satisfied customers he wants personal relationships. He pushes back on the hype about what he can do for us to help us see more clearly what he can do in us.

The reason for healing is best seen in the story of the paralytic in Matthew 9:1-8. Here, Jesus first gives spiritual healing and then gives the physical healing. Listen to his reason for physical healing in Matthew 9:6.

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

The reason for physical healing is only to increase our faith in spiritual healing. Sure, he is moved with compassion, and he doesn't want to see people suffer. But he also knows that all of that is temporary. His real reason for physical healing is to call us to spiritual healing.

As you consider the healing of Jesus, don't consider the spiritual healing as less impressive than the physical. It is the main thing.

As I was eating lunch with my fellow pastors talking about healing, one of the pastors told a story. It is a great example of the miracle of spiritual healing being more needed than the miracle of physical healing. I encourage you to read that story at

<https://www.andrews.edu/sem/newsletter/facultystories/this-illness-is-for-the-glory-of-god.html>