

#2 Jesus Human and Divine

Part 5

What about the healings?

We move from the essentially “unprovable” issues of faith that claim God actually exists to the utterly provable assertions that Jesus proclaims a message so utterly different from human thinking that its source could well be God. Today, let’s look at his healings as one aspect of his message.

It’s a shame that when we hear of the various healings Jesus performed in his ministry, our reaction is to use our 21st century minds and dismiss them as fairy tales. On the other hand, we may accept them at face value, but we also proceed to ignore them because we ourselves cannot do the same. We think, “It’s great Jesus brought a child to life, but I can’t so what does this have to do with me?” No less a figure than Thomas Jefferson created his own version of the Gospels by taking a razor, literally cutting the gospels into pieces and pasting just Jesus’ teachings into his own special book. Jefferson ignored the healings and other miracle stories entirely because in his view, they were just fiction.

Yet both ignoring them either because they aren’t “scientific” or because we cannot perform such things ourselves misses the point of these stories. I cannot explain to you the physiological processes that occurred when Jesus healed. I wasn’t there. Moreover, the eyewitnesses who reported these events to the gospel writers did not have training in modern science that might have shown that whatever happened defied even current empirical explanations.

All they could say was that before Jesus arrived, such and such was the problem. Once Jesus arrived, everything changed for the better. Somehow, Jesus took a terrible situation and reversed it.

Yet one aspect of the healing stories we generally ignore is not the “what happened” but “who did it happen to?” In Jesus’ day, no one understood human biology. No one understood psychology. No one understood germ theory. Rather, they attributed all illness to the will of God. When you were sick, obviously you had displeased God in some way. Therefore, the only way to get better and be free of your disease or condition was to offer appropriate prayers and sacrifices under the guidance of a priest. A key function of religion in general, and religious teachers like Jesus in particular, was that they might possibly be able to somehow “get through” to God and make healing happen.

Jesus was hardly the only religious leader whom people thought had the power to heal. Roman historians reported that in Jesus’ day dozens of healers wandered around Israel.

The Temple in Jerusalem and the synagogues all over the land were where many went to pray for healing guided by the priests.

What makes Jesus different is often he healed the wrong people! By wrong, I don't mean people who weren't suffering, for they were. By wrong, I mean that Jesus healed those who in the view of most, were outside normal society and therefore didn't deserve it. Remember, the common view that all aspects of life were under God's control. If you were rich and powerful, God must like you. If you were poor and sick, God must hate you. And if you were somewhere in between, keep up with the prayers and sacrifices so things don't get worse.

But Jesus turns all that upside down. He healed foreigners and enemies, like Romans, Samaritans, and Phoenicians. He healed untouchable lepers. He healed a woman who bled nonstop for twelve years. He healed a man whom even in our day would have been sent permanently to a psychiatric hospital. Moreover, he upset the religious authorities by performing many of his healings on the Sabbath — supposedly violating God's commandment not to work that day.

My purpose is not to detail every healing but to help us understand that Jesus continually healed unexpected people at unexpected times in unexpected ways. By so doing, Jesus challenged human ideas about the way the world was supposed to be and that, at the very least, makes him worth listening to.

Next week: we continue with how Jesus' earthly ministry defied conventional ways of thinking — back then, and especially today.

Grace and Peace to You!

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Please join us for Sunday Worship at 10:30!

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